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**INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION SEEN THROUGH THE**  
**MUSICAL CREATIVE PROCESS**

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*Abstract*

The multiculturalism of Spanish society has led teachers to rethink their work, in order to develop an educational intervention as appropriate as possible to needs of all students present in Primary Education classrooms. All this in order to respond to what is established in the current legislation, which since the end of the 21st century has been insisting on the treatment of cultural diversity with an inclusive character. The music class of this educational stage can become the intercultural educational point par excellence, because the interpretive process, improvised or controlled through composition activities, can make possible the practice of intercultural communication. In these pages, some indications and justifications are offered to work on a musical tool that, although established in the legislation for Primary Education, is not as usual as it should be if the bibliographic search included in this document is taken into account: the composition. The activities presented were developed in educational centers in different cities of the country, as well as in other countries, all of them within the framework of action research proposals aimed at offering an improvement in the micro-society of the classroom and, by extension, the center and the citizen community. The response of the students to the activities included showed that the creative work of Music not only fostered musical intelligence and creative intelligence, but also the emotional intelligence that is so necessary to favor interpersonal and intercultural contact.

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## 1. Introduction

For several decades, education legislation has reflected a persistent stand on matters of recognising cultural diversity. Spain is a country that is characterised by considerable cultural diversity, to which the effects of immigration must be added, a reality that should not be neglected (Rodríguez, 2010).

In order to allow the members of this society to live together in harmony (beyond coexistence), the educational process must focus on an exchange (interculturality). Thus, working together becomes essential because it fosters positive interaction among parents, families and teachers (Pliego, 2011).

Perhaps the key to this shift of focus is to view the teacher as an educator rather than a transmitter of information (Leiva, 2010). This involves successfully solving what Cámara (2010) refers to as the adventure of intercultural harmony. With this idea as the starting point, in this work, music class is considered and argued to be the most adequate setting; thus, a series of musical activities was carried out with a group of students at risk of social exclusion during two summers. The research-action carried out showed how the group's musical activities favour the sense of belonging to a groups, not only to one's own culture, but at the same time to "the others".

## 2. Problem Statement

### 2.1. A space for intercultural work

In elementary education, the arts have been considered an ideal focal point for working on interculturality. The premise of learning to live together that is defended by Leiva (2010) becomes a reality in music class, where a cultural meeting point is offered for all students (with or without educational support) and where culture is shown to be something enjoyable.

Now then, what should the focus of the class be? What kind of work can be done with students aged 8 to 10 ("second cycle" in the Spanish education system)? And more importantly, what should our approach be so as not to neglect the cultural element? These are the questions that arose within the context of extra-curricular summer activities geared towards children at this age level who were at risk of social exclusion in a community in Alicante, Spain.

This group was comprised of 15 boys and girls from families with limited economic resources with Spanish, Moroccan, Argentinian and Romanian nationalities represented. The music course was developed over the course of two summers, but in this study, only the activities and observations from the second session are considered. This is because during the first session, the group was comprised of students from two groups – ages 6 to 8 and ages 8 to 10 ("first cycle" and "second cycle" in the Spanish education system, respectively) – and the approach used in creating the curriculum was completely different and was more focussed on musical games and performance than on composition.

In developing the different musical sessions, firstly the meeting of specific objectives that could be easily extrapolated were prioritised: respect for foreign musical characteristics, the conversion of both native musical elements and foreign ones into shared ones, and the appreciation for differences as an agent to enrich one's own musical work. Secondly, an interpretative practice was emphasised that would increase the awareness of common musical factors. Finally, the focal point was defined as composition work, as a mechanism for fostering dialogue and harmonious coexistence.

### 3. Research Questions

Intercultural education, with the objective of achieving harmonious cultural coexistence (among other principles and goals), may be carried out in music class for the following reasons:

1. Music is not the exclusive product of any one culture: the elements of musical language are common to all and much of the material is shared (although it is varied).

2. It is a group activity characterised by cooperation and collaboration: individuals need and depend on the work of others.

3. Music is a language: it communicates emotions and feelings that are common to all human beings.

These reasons speak to how – through music – the principles of intercultural education can be taught, since as has been stated, it fosters cross-cultural dialogue (Bernabé, 2014). Now then, as to composition, what can it add to the process of intercultural education? In other words, what does musical composition have to do with intercultural education?

It can be argued that there are various relationships and/or correlations. In the first place, when one composes, creative work is being done using known materials, which can even be combined with the materials of others if a certain end result is sought. In this sense, the musical elements used can be described as common, since much of the material is shared (musical language: scales, rhythms, etc.).

Secondly, composition is a creative act, and as such it carries with it improved creativity on behalf of the pupil. This implies that students will be more respectful when faced with “foreign” products and thus when faced with musical (cultural) diversity.

Finally, if the composition activities developed are characterised by a spirit of cooperation, the usefulness of the two aforementioned elements is enhanced. In other words, if work is done on the collective spirit, there will be more shared cultural elements. More important still, the result will be a shared musical (cultural) product, obtained through exchange and influence that is quite direct, which will encourage social change – the goal of intercultural education.

### 4. Purpose of the Study

Composition is a very useful tool in intercultural education (Bernabé, 2014). Even authors such as Ruiz (2007) have defined it as a cultural meeting point. Giráldez (2010) defends the fact that it is no longer considered a specialist activity, which supports the validity of the activities developed here. In addition, the research conducted by Rusinek (2005) and Oriol (2009), confirms the cooperative spirit involved in the activities that enabled an improvement in the social interaction among the students.

According to Vidal, Durán, & Vilar (2010), in music class, social objectives should be established, since any educational act results in cultivating socially competent citizens. Following the work of Andreu and Godall (2012), the learning of music is understood to foster the acquisition of key competencies in instilling the student’s sense of humanity. If that is the case, why is it the first to be affected by cuts in scheduling and increased theoretical requirements (Olarte, Montoya, Martín, & Mosquera, 2011)? Musical composition truly has a lot to offer within the realm of intercultural education as will be shown in the following synopsis.

## **5. Research Methods**

### **5.1. Participants, context and timing**

This group was comprised of 15 boys and girls from families with limited economic resources with Spanish, Moroccan, Argentinian and Romanian nationalities represented. All students lived in one of the two most disadvantaged neighborhoods in a community of Alicante (Spain). And, they attended the same school, so they already had their friendships and enmities.

The music course was developed over the course of two summers (two months in total, one month each summer), but in this study, only the activities and observations from the second summer are considered, because during the first summer, the group was comprised of students from two groups – ages 6 to 8 and ages 8 to 10 (“first cycle” and “second cycle” in the Spanish education system, respectively) – and the approach used in creating the curriculum was completely different and was more focussed on musical games and performance than on composition.

An action-research has been carried out, aimed at improving the sociocultural relationships of the participating students, considered at risk of social exclusion. In the following sections, each of the steps followed can be known.

Initially, some of the participants were unwilling to collaborate in mixed groups, others didn't want to be with younger participants... There were many inconveniences to get involved in group activities.; in addition, “shocks” were observed at meal times, due to the restrictions and customs of some of the participants. But, all this changed as the different musical activities were developed, as will be seen in the following sections.

### **5.2. Musical composition: brief theoretical approach**

There are numerous possibilities for the intercultural education of music in primary school. Vocal or instrumental performance implies respecting the performance of others, the fusion of one's own performance of a musical reality with the performance of another in order to achieve a collective (shared) performance, etc.

Musical improvisation implies collective and shared construction that requires the contributions of “the other”. That is, musical activity facilitates the integration of the group/class, respect for diversity within the group and the discovery of new forms of expression and communication (Conejo, 2012).

In primary school, improvisation is a resource that is used frequently. However, composition is given less importance as a resource (Hernández, Hernández, & Milán, 2010). Composition is often considered complicated, and it is argued that the musical elements that must be controlled are numerous, etc. However, the act of composing (or any other activity that is musical or otherwise) will always depend on the approach used and the tools at hand. Furthermore, the characteristics of the students receiving the instruction must always be considered.

It is important to note the following: in order to take an intercultural approach in the music classroom, it is not necessary to use the traditional music of the different cultures present in the classroom as a basis for performance, since these pluricultural students are not normally familiar with folk music traditions (Arévalo, 2009); rather the approach should be geared towards other types of practices (Frega, 2009).

Included within these other practices is the use of composition proposed here, which worked very well with the group observed in the aforementioned summer course.

For the purpose of the musical composition activity, the students were organised into groups of three. It is important to note that careful attention was paid when forming the groups so that no single group was made up of only “native” or only “immigrant” children, rather the groups were to be pluricultural so that the main objective of intercultural education could be achieved (intercultural exchange and thus shared cultural construction). In this case, whether the student was in first or second year of the “second cycle” of the Spanish education system (comprising ages 8–10) was not a decisive factor when forming the working groups – priority was given to the creation of groups that were culturally diverse in nature.

### **5.3. Intercultural composition activities used in the sessions**

From the previous theoretical revision, a series of activities were proposed, detailed in the following paragraphs.

In the first activity, five bars containing musical motifs were passed out that needed to be filled in with colour: the stem and the note head were displayed that were to be filled in with the preferred colours of each student. This first step may be considered a bit simplistic and less “musical” but the intercultural aim was always present: the number of materials that could be used was limited thus forcing them to share, to respect turns when working, and to appreciate the artistic contributions of other group members. That is, the intention was to work on respecting the contribution of “the other”, an essential intercultural objective.

Using a cork sheet with a stave drawn on it (with the same line thickness and interval dimensions as the one on the sheets handed out to the students so that they would match when one was placed over the other), a 2/4 time signature was added to it and the sheets had to be placed on it according to an agreed upon order. However, there were other elements on the stave – scale degrees (Roman numerals indicating the number and name of the note within the scale) were placed below each bar to teach them the first basic rule to composing music (very basic of course).

The student needed to count the notes on the C Major scale (that they had learned in the music class from the previous school year) and find the musical motif whose chord coincided with this degree. That is, if in the first bar an “I” appeared, they had to count which notes there were in the chord in the first degree of the C major scale and place this sheet first (the notes “*Do-Mi-Sol*” with different note values).

First, the concepts of scale, chord and degree were explained. Secondly, the different sheets were handed out to colour the different motifs, while always paying attention the aforementioned rule of sharing colours (that were limited) and taking turns as the foundation for the intercultural competence that is so needed in today’s multicultural society. Finally, the students had to work in groups to decipher the degrees and notes of the triadic chord to place them and create a composition. Each group had five bars that were different from the rest of the groups and two additional ones in case they preferred other combinations.

Once the chords were performed and the sheets were sorted using bars, they needed to place each one of them on the cork sheet with drawing pins. This was always done based on consensus and by taking turns following a previously established order. Each of the sheets had a different bar with quarter notes and eighth notes, but with easy combinations.

After arranging their musical score, they proceeded to perform the composition accompanied by the piano. The activity was finalised by mixing the groups in order to perceive the variations. It was in this mixing that the richness of the results became evident, which the students could begin to appreciate because it provided them with new musical results that they could incorporate into their own cultural and musical repertoire. In this way, and with this enriching exchange, the students began to acquire intercultural competency (through music).

A second activity consisted of composing an improvised piece and forming it into a graphic notation. Groups were formed and each one had to improvise a piece by exclusively using body parts; and they had to show it to the rest of the class for them to perform it as well. Some clues were given (how to depict clapping by using two hands together with a star-shaped design behind it to denote sound). The goal was to develop the creativity of the students together as a group.

The fact that body percussion sounds were used is also significant on an intercultural level since it instils in the student a respect for other possibilities and differences in terms of bodies and body percussion elements. There is not a more personal way of producing music than using the body itself. In other words, the student is expressing what he or she feels or has accumulated and come to know. And if the student is encouraged to express this with the body and incorporate what the other is expressing, a better understanding of both otherness and oneself can be achieved. Without this knowledge, a respect for otherness (and by extension a cultural respect) cannot be guaranteed.

Another activity carried out focussed on the creation of scores using musical puzzles. What is of interest in this activity is that cards with fragments of bars corresponding to songs from different parts of the world were used. In this way the students were “forced” to use musical material that was culturally foreign to them. As such, when they created their own score they were meeting one of the objectives of intercultural education: shared cultural construction.

This activity was developed in the following way: each of the different groups had six cards, each with a bar pertaining to a different song (but with the same number of beats), originating from a different country.

After listening to each of the cards, which involved performance on the piano, the students had to organise them according to their preference. To do so, they had to act democratically, that is they had to vote on the order, to demonstrate that they were all in agreement.

The final musical stage consisted of performance of the different melodies created with accompanying piano. But the activity could not be concluded without reflection, which was brief and simple given the students’ level, on the characteristics of the sound achieved by combining different musical-cultural possibilities.

A fourth activity carried out consisted of creating accompanying music for certain pieces performed on the piano that came from China, Argentina and Morocco. These accompaniments that were prepared in groups had to be expressed on a large stave drawn on continuous stationery. What was interesting about the stave was that it had five thick lines that had to be coloured by everyone, each with their preferred colour (and style). Once coloured, they had to write their rhythmic proposals to accompany the score, but all of them had to write them within the same stave, by taking turns according to the results of a drawing.

This represented a way of learning to respect turns, the contributions made by classmates, and to listen to the music that resulted from the “new” combinations derived from “the other” and oneself.

The aim of this group activity was for the student to understand that their collective production could be integrated into other productions because it implied the shared use of characteristic elements of the musical language. The result was not as “striking” or unusual as they had initially thought.

In music class, without cultural reflection or musical-cultural exchange, an intercultural process cannot take place. Merely creating awareness of other types of music is not enough (nor should it be) to guarantee a certain degree of respect and peaceful coexistence (multicultural perspective). This is because a cultural exchange is needed in order to achieve the intercultural harmony that is made possible through activities such as the ones proposed.

## **6. Findings**

The participating students showed much more collaboration in the different activities and among the groups there was more interaction. Fights in the dining room decreased because they no longer gave much importance to the differences. However, the relationship between Moroccan boys-girls still cost a little. Next, detail the main findings after completing the experience.

Firstly, if we pay mind to the large number of bibliographic references available, the use of music from other parts of the world to teach respect for cultural diversity can be considered a wise decision. Although from a perspective focussed on the theoretical study of the history of music, this education will be multicultural in nature, since it merely facilitates the gaining of cultural knowledge. But what about respect?

Secondly, the performance of a musical piece opens up a whole world of possibilities for the instructor to achieve intercultural objectives. On the one hand, the group dynamic of the performance enables one to learn respect for taking turns and for the contributions of others. Cooperative learning is more than an option for primary education since musical activity is by nature cooperative and collaborative, thus promoting cultural exchange (which is essential for achieving interculturality).

On the other hand, a technically correct performance implies that the performer has understood how the piece was composed, the elements that make it unique and the goal of its structure and organisation. In addition, their socialisation and working skills are strengthened (Temprado, 2009). However, if music is learned in a way that is more creative, an entire system of values pertaining to positive changes and innovation can be incorporated (Díez, 2009).

Thirdly, musical improvisation enables respect for the other to be the starting point for work, since it implies a totally free approach to music and through that improvisation, each student will manifest cultural influences.

Finally, composition is used that can provide important elements for laying down an intercultural foundation in music class. We must begin to view interculturality as something within reach, as long as an adequate adaptation to the characteristics of the students is made so that the activity resonates with them.

## 7. Conclusion

The composition of short, simple musical pieces fosters direct knowledge of the components of musical language. This type of activity developed was shown to stimulate the creativity of the students who participated in the summer music sessions. Through collective composition activities, a collective cultural construction can begin, as was seen in the participating students that experimented with rhythms and melodies collectively as part of a whole with each one contributing in a beneficial way.

Composition implies a more creative and culturally interactive approach to music for a primary school student, as has happened thanks to the proposals presented in this document. Thus the cooperative composition activities carried out can only be said to have fostered understanding, respect, interaction, dialogue and thus the reconstruction of the cultural reality they experience around them. Please replace this text with context of your paper.

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