Intercultural Education and the Teaching of English to Young Learners in Portugal: Developing Materials and Activities

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Abstract

Especially for the last two decades, vast international research and work has been done in the field of intercultural education, highlighting its major role in the context of a globalized, multicultural and interconnected world. Moreover, the role of intercultural education in language education has been discussed and studied and its importance in the development of interculturally competent citizens has been acknowledged.

Aware of this situation, intercultural education guidelines, specifically in Europe, have encouraged the implementation of educational policies in this regard. However, despite those guidelines and recommendations, there is still a lack of awareness and knowledge on the part of language teachers and other education stakeholders.

Therefore, this work intends to go through significant literature on the matter and raise awareness to the need of promoting intercultural communicative competence, and intercultural attitudes in particular. Furthermore, this work aims at exploring the mutual beneficial relationship between intercultural education and English language teaching to young learners in Portugal, taking advantage of their young age to build responsible adults and engaged citizens. Finally, this work seeks to make suggestions of materials and activities that can address intercultural education in the aforementioned context.

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Introduction

"The challenge of the new millennium is surely to find ways to achieve international – or better, intercommunity – cooperation wherein human diversity is acknowledged and the rights of all are respected."

Dalai Lama (1999: p.199)

This study addresses the importance of intercultural education within the English language teaching context, specifically to young learners in Portugal. Moreover, it intends to demonstrate how intercultural education can promote inclusive practices at school, while developing the awareness of principled citizenship in an increasingly heterogeneous society. In short, how relevant is intercultural education and how can it be approached with 10 to 12-year-old children in Portugal? And how can the intercultural dimension be integrated in L2 English teaching to these learners?

First of all, this work will present a review of the literature on intercultural education, its importance to language teaching and learning and the role of language teachers in approaching and implementing this dimension. Moreover, European research, projects and publications will also be a source of research and inspiration. Then, the study seeks to investigate the Portuguese context and analyse programmes and teaching materials and activities regarding intercultural education in ELT.

On the basis of this study, I intend to draw some conclusions and make suggestions that can provide some support for teachers and educators, regarding how the English national syllabus can be explored in this perspective. Besides improving my students' intercultural communicative competence, following Byram's model (intercultural knowledge and attitudes, skills of interpreting and relating), I intend to raise awareness of a much needed intercultural education from the early ages of learning English L2, a dimension that is still not very well-known amongst teachers and even education stakeholders.

Chapter 1 will introduce the research theme and discuss key concepts by revising the literature. It will go through the relationship between intercultural education and language teaching and learning and the advantages of embedding intercultural education policies into language teaching practices, in order to benefit teachers and students alike.

Chapter 2 will explore materials, activities and projects on intercultural education and present suggestions on how this domain can be approached and integrated in ELT to young learners. So, based on the latest theories and research, this chapter will show how different resources can benefit language teaching and learning while developing intercultural awareness and supporting students as future responsible and active citizens, grounded in democratic principles and values.

Chapter 3 will present conclusions and final considerations on this matter. The main goal of this chapter will be to raise awareness to the subject and urge the adoption of intercultural education policies in schools, in particular by English language teachers who work with young learners, since these are influential agents in implementing cultural activities in classrooms.

Chapter 1: Literature review

1.1. What is culture?

Culture is not a simple concept to define. Moreover, it depends on whether we understand it from an anthropological, political, economic or educational perspective, amongst others.

In the USA, the "Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, online" defines it "as shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs and understanding that are learned by socialization. Thus, it can be seen as the growth of a group identity fostered by social patterns unique to the group". On the other hand, Byram (2000: p.42) states that, despite its various interconnected elements, culture has to do with the way it is perceived, experienced and finally understood, in a multicultural society.

Regardless of the definition, it seems consensual that culture is a complex concept and has a unique characteristic: its dynamic, constantly changing and evolving nature. It also seems well established that culture does not emerge naturally, but it is socially constructed. An educational approach to culture in ELT should therefore avoid essentialist approaches and reductive views, and be based on democratic values (Council of Europe, 2017). A recent and important publication from the Council of Europe (2018a) provides guidance to language educators regarding a relevant definition of 'culture' from a L2 educational perspective (Council of Europe, 2018a: p.30)

"Culture" is a difficult term to define, largely because cultural groups are always internally heterogeneous and embrace a range of diverse practices and norms that are often disputed, change over time and are enacted by individuals in personalised ways. That said, any given culture may be construed as having three main aspects: the material resources that are used by members of the group (e.g. tools, foods, clothing), the socially shared resources of the group (e.g. the language, religion, rules of social conduct), and the subjective resources that are used by individual group members (e.g. the values, attitudes, beliefs and practices which group members commonly use as a frame of reference for making sense of and relating to the world). The culture of the group is a composite formed from all three aspects – it consists of a network of material, social and subjective resources. The total set of resources is distributed across the entire group, but each individual member of the group appropriates and uses only a subset of the total set of cultural resources potentially available to them.

In short, one may recall the well-known metaphor of the iceberg when trying to understand what culture is from an intercultural perspective: the top of the iceberg points to tangible and visible aspects of culture (for example, clothes, music, food, amongst others) whereas the largest part is hidden, invisible, corresponding to intangible and more subjective parameters. While the first manifestations are visible, and therefore, easier to identify and address, the internal part is much harder to reach, as it requires tackling values, attitudes, thoughts or assumptions, to name just a few, and the activation of skills of interpretation, analysis and reflection. Therefore, to understand culture is not only to comprehend what we can see, but also what lies underneath visible behaviour or cultural products. Being culturally aware is an important first step and contribution to build on intercultural communication and understanding others.

1.2. What is intercultural education?

As the phenomenon of a complex and diverse society develops and grows, the issue of how to promote effective communication and understanding amongst diverse citizens and across different cultures and societies becomes crucial. Aware that cultural interaction encompasses many different perspectives, based on different cultural backgrounds and languages, intercultural education needs to address these differences, promoting tolerance, acceptance and respect towards other members of today's multicultural societies as a base to promote dialogue.

According to the Council of Europe (2016: p.12), "intercultural education (…)

aims to develop open, reflective and critical attitudes in order to learn to take a positive view of, and derive benefit from, all forms of contact with otherness". Since we tend to look at the world from an ethnocentric perspective, that is to say, through our own cultural lenses, our first step towards understanding other cultures should be to become self-culturally aware. In turn, this awareness should allow us to decentre from our own cultural assumptions when contacting with cultural alterity. Byram (2000: p. 43) stresses that "understanding a foreign culture implies making use of and, thereby, exposing and reflecting one's own culture while studying the other".

Moreover, Byram (2000:p.12) states that effective communication with other cultures can only be achieved if learners understand that this interaction aims at personal and social development. That is to say, by experiencing different perspectives of the world, learners are enhancing their ability to take a critical position and to understand different views about the other cultures, but also about their own society.

As we know, society assigns schools the main duty of educating their children and teachers cannot forget their part in helping students connect with the world and develop critical thinking skills, understanding cultural diversity and improve communication competences that enable speakers to overcome difficulties in building relationships with culturally diverse social actors. As claimed by the Council of Europe (2016: p.12), "teaching in all subjects therefore has a combined responsibility to give learners the opportunity for new cultural experiences, prepare them for participatory citizenship and educate them in otherness" (p. 12), and it underlines the prime role of language teaching, particularly foreign languages, such as English. In fact, Parra and Arias (2009: p.1) highlight that foreign languages classes can address intercultural values and differences and allow the sharing of knowledge and experience, in the sense that they are a privileged environment for communication and intercultural exchange and dialogue.

1.3. The importance of intercultural education

Although the phenomenon of globalization has a significant meaning since the Silk Road, when commerce of products was made between Europe and Asia, as stated by Grant and Portera (2011:p.8), it was only in the XX century that this subject was fully addressed.

For decades, educational policies around the globe, and in particular regarding language teaching, were based on the assumption that students would, or should, only experience the mainstream culture(s) of the countries they were living in. Contact with other cultures was scarce and often led to misinterpretations, prejudice, categorisations or stereotypes about them.

The reinforcement of English language learning in the curriculum of a great number of educational systems, particularly in Europe, intended to promote more effective communication and dialogue across borders of different nature. Despite this praiseworthy objective, language teaching was usually narrowed down to two cultures: the one of the country students were living in and the one of some English-speaking countries, especially the UK and the USA. Moreover, the concept of 'culture' implied usually regarded trivial and superficial aspects of culture, frequently associated with the notion of one language, one culture, one literature.

However, in an increasingly global world, where the growing phenomenon of migration, for different reasons, either groups of people or isolated individuals seems to be the reality, countries worldwide face a rich but also challenging cultural and linguistic heterogeneity. As we all know, schools and education, in a broad sense, play a fundamental part in the development of a democratic society and intercultural education cannot be limited to superficial notions of culture associated with a few English speaking countries. That is to say, if English is now seen as an international language, as a means of communicating worldwide and not a way of imposing a specific culture, the aim is to understand a broader and more complex sense of culture and to promote respect for cultural diversity and dialogue across cultural borders.

Aware of the importance of intercultural education, relevant international organisations, such as UNESCO or the European Union, have underlined how the intercultural dimension should take a central place in education. The publication from UNESCO "*Guidelines on Intercultural Education*" (2007: p.8) states that "Intercultural Education is a response to the challenge to provide quality education for all. It is framed within a Human Rights perspective as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)". The document also highlights the difference between Multicultural Education and Intercultural Education. While the objective of the first is to promote acceptance and tolerance between different cultures, "Intercultural Education aims to go

beyond passive coexistence, to achieve a developing and sustainable way of living together in multicultural societies through the creation of understanding of, respect for and dialogue between the different cultural groups" (p.18). Mateus et al. (2008: p.22), sustain that "UNESCO supports languages as a fundamental element for an intercultural education, as a way of encouraging the understanding between different population groups and as a way of assuring the fundamental rights of all the individuals", therefore highlighting its importance at the highest institutional level.

In fact, Portuguese educational policies seem to take this into account. Hurst (2014: p.24) refers to the document *Metas Curriculares de Inglês*, by the Portuguese Ministry of Education and Science, stating that the contents of English, as a global language in an increasingly diverse world, intends to promote awareness in young people, not only of their own identity, but also the identity of the other.

By providing cultural learning and focusing on different cultures, the authors of the aforementioned document aim to raise awareness of the need of intercultural awareness, a core element for an effective intercultural education. As Risager (2014:p.2) points out, "cultural learning is therefore mainly seen as developing the awareness of the learner about various socio-cultural perspectives and identities and their implication for (intercultural) communication, empathy, cooperation and conflict resolution" and understood as the first important stage in intercultural learning.

The Irish Department of Education and Science (2002: p.34), for example, asserts that young learners should be prepared not only to enjoy cultural diversity, but also to confront all kinds of prejudice and discrimination they can come across. Therefore, they can shape their personality and beliefs, contributing to educate intercultural competent human beings.

Moreover, the Council of Europe (2016: p.16) underlines the relationship between language learning and becoming interculturally competent, pointing out that

> the acquisition of language-related competences, knowledge, dispositions and attitudes also helps to build individual and collective cultural identities that are at once aware, diverse and open. These different components of plurilingual and intercultural education tend to foster inclusion and social cohesion; they are a preparation for democratic citizenship and contribute to the establishment of a knowledge society.

Ultimately, intercultural language learning should contribute to the learners'

personal growth and change and goes beyond the linguistic experience itself, as it promotes the learners' involvement and reflection. As many of the authors referred to above have claimed, language learning should go beyond mere functional linguistic skills and rather prepare students to operate as language and culture mediators in a complex world where linguistic proficiency alone will not necessarily ensure communication and dialogue.

1.4. The role of intercultural education in language teaching and learning

What is, then, the role of **intercultural education** in language teaching and learning, specifically English, as a global language, given its importance for communication in today's complex globalized world?

It is true that language plays a fundamental role in the promotion intercultural dialogue. However, this dialogue needs tools to be learned and practised, in order to be maintained and developed through life.

As argued by UNESCO (2007: p.13), language is at the core of **intercultural education**:

> "Linguistic competencies are fundamental for the empowerment of the individual in democratic and plural societies, as they condition school achievement, promote access to other cultures and encourage openness to cultural exchange".

Ek (1986: p. 20) recalls that a foreign language should not be perceived only as a mean of communication, but also an instrument that aims at the global education of a person, as a learner and as an individual, pointing out its value as a subject in itself and as a tool for learning. This is why foreign languages, naturally positioned in between cultures and aiming at building communication and relationships with culturally different others, seem to occupy a privileged place, although it seems quite clear that intercultural education is cross-curricular and therefore can be approached in every school subject.

Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002: p.10) furthermore claim that language teaching and learning that encompasses an intercultural dimension seeks to reach two main goals. On the one hand, it can benefit the linguistic competence of the learners themselves, as it should contribute to improve language performance. On the other

hand, it should allow for the development of intercultural competence, as a way of understanding and communicating across different languages and cultures. Porto's (2018) research and subsequent findings support the idea that intercultural citizenship education leads to language learning. According to the author, by using the foreign language with a 'genuine need', in a citizenship context, learners are actively engaged in the language. Therefore, they are improving their abilities in noticing linguistic forms, developing language awareness, reflection, metalinguistic awareness and vocabulary. Besides, they are learning to negotiate meaning and building new knowledge on what they already have (Porto, 2018: p.15).

So, it seems clear that foreign language teaching and learning are naturally posited between languages and between cultures. We therefore cannot ignore the fact that communication comprises and defies the learners' own culture by trying to put in contact, or bridging, speakers of different languages who will be social actors with culturally different backgrounds. In this perspective, cultural values have an important part to play in promoting the learning process, especially of foreign languages, as alleged by Parra and Arias (2009: p.2). These authors also assert that

> "Seeing ourselves as 'cultural beings' will help us to be equipped with the senses to notice when cultural differences play an important role in a situation of exchange of knowledge and practice." (ibid.)

However, it is important to clarify that intercultural competence goes beyond the mere exchange of information (as intended in communicative language teaching practices) and regards building and maintaining relationships. Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002: p. 10) highlight that, by developing intercultural competence, the learners become aware that they need to acknowledge the different attitudes and values of the interlocutors they are interacting with. So, this intercultural ability goes beyond the common knowledge of their visible identities, such as religion or traditions and should address the cultural identities of the speakers as complex, dynamic and plural.

Byram (2006:p. 12) underscores that, although no research has been undertaken to explore the relationship between language learning and the effect on social identities and, specifically, on the acquisition of a European identity, it is clear that language learning should not be confined to itself, but is necessarily linked to culture, heritage and history. In fact, this author states that identity is at the core of the Council of

Europe, which was set up to "promote awareness of a European identity based on shared values and cutting across different cultures" (ibid.). One recent outcome of this concern by the Council of Europe is the publication of the three volumes of the *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (2008) which can provide invaluable guidance to teachers of languages as to integrating the competences in the title that clearly relate to the intercultural domain, in ELT.

Beacco (2011: p.1) has criticised the fact that, based on the results of a survey conducted in ten countries, the cultural and intercultural dimensions of language teaching have been neglected, despite the historical realisation of the role that languages play in personal development. The author stresses that the cultural and intercultural dimensions need to be reinstated in foreign language teaching. In this sense, educational stakeholders should bear in mind that language teaching entails an adjustment, not only to today's society's demands, but also to the classroom context itself.

In this sense, European guidelines, such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Companion Volume* (2017) and the *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (RFCDC, 2018) argue for the inclusion of intercultural education and citizenship education policies, more than ever, due to the increasing contact (real or virtual) between people from all over the world.

Beacco (ibid.) also raises a very pertinent and central issue related to the integration of intercultural education in foreign language teaching (FLT). The author sustains that "language teaching tends to put cultural/intercultural education in the service of language learning" (p.1), setting aside the actual function of language learning, which is to develop the citizens' ability to communicate with the world around them and understand and respect its differences. In fact, as it was stated before in this paper, we come across generalisations about cultures and cultural approaches that are often undefined and unclear, not only in the curricula, but specifically in the language learning syllabus and in coursebooks.

First of all, authors such as Akker, Fasoglio and Mulder (2010) and Beacco (2011) point out that for the setting of intercultural education activities in the language syllabus, concepts used in the curricula should be defined beforehand. That is to say, when we face a myriad of terms and concepts, such as cultural, intercultural or pluricultural, we will face, in turn, a difficulty when trying to implement activities and

tasks into practice, as the guidelines from those documents can be unclear too. Regarding these terms, Byram (2009: p.6) argues that interculturality goes beyond the pluricultural dimension. If the later refers to the individuals' "capacity to identify with and participate in multiple cultures", the first concerns the "capacity to experience and analyse cultural otherness". Hence, being interculturally competent is to possess the knowledge about other cultures and the positive attitudes towards them but most of all, the ability to reflect upon one's own culture and the others'. By doing so, the learner is working on his/her personal development, as a social human being. Beacco (2011: p.2) and Byram (2009: p.6) reinforce this position by highlighting the need to redirect the individuals' ethnocentric attitudes to a stance that reflects awareness, respect, openness, tolerance and empathy towards otherness.

In short, language learning and teaching should aim at building critical intercultural competent human beings. In fact, many researchers have been working towards the adoption of new pedagogies that place intercultural education at the core of language teaching and learning. Aware of these researchers and authors' endeavours, the Council of Europe, in its crucial role for the development of language education policies in Europe, has been underpinning its publications on their theories and suggestions.

Among others, Byram's role has been particularly relevant in the promotion of education policies and teachers' guidance, regarding intercultural education. His model of intercultural communicative competence, published in 1997, as explained in the next subchapter, had a major impact and has been very influential ever since. Specifically designed for language educators and seen as highly appropriate for pedagogical purposes, it is widespread in the European context and became the ground for the majority of the current publications of the Council of Europe on intercultural competence.

1.5. The role of language teachers in intercultural education

For many years, foreign language teaching and learning focused on the grammatical accuracy and this appeared as its main objective. Considering this, the materials and activities implemented in ELT were, quite often, unrealistic and lacking in purpose and content, not making much sense for the students. Therefore, the introduction of communicative language teaching (CLT) redesigned the curricula, as it

became clear that the language needed to be approached in authentic situations and contexts, as close to the real world as possible, boosting its communicative dimension.

Nevertheless, due to the development of communication technologies, migration and traveling, cultural, linguistic and social diversity became more apparent. Byram acknowledged that foreign language teaching has to aim at more than communicative competence and proposed his influential model for intercultural communicative competence (1997). This author (ibid.) strongly and eloquently argues for the need to focus on intercultural communicative competence, integrating the intercultural dimension in ELT, in order to develop intercultural competent citizens for our complex and challenging world.

According to Byram (1997), intercultural communicative competence encompasses five components or 'savoirs' (in his terms) and it is the combination of these components that will allow the language (understood as language-and-culture) to be fully apprehended. The learners need to acquire the 'knowledge' of how social groups and identities work, including their own. They are also required to possess 'skills of interpreting and relating'. That is to say, they have to construe the products from other cultures, analyse them and relate them to their own, as they develop their ability to put themselves on the others' perspective. Besides, they have to develop a 'critical cultural awareness', a critical evaluation, not only on the other's culture, but also on their own, once again. They also need to improve 'skills of discovery and interaction', as they communicate and interact with the others. Additionally, the intercultural speakers or mediators' competence must be founded in their attitudes and values. In this sense, they need to question their own attitudes and values, often taken for granted or even 'inherited' and take a decentred stance towards other cultures. It is important to note that these skills, or 'savoirs', are complementary and may overlap, at times. They do not imply an orderly progression or the presence of more than one skill or competence.

Therefore, the foreign language teachers' ability to teach intercultural communicative competence should be a crucial competence. But it is the ability to help the learners to deal with the intercultural experience that is often challenging and difficult, for teachers and learners alike. Regarding this, Sercu (2005: p. 2) states that

> "It requires people to revise their social identity, to reconsider the ideas they have held about out-groups, and to reconsider their position towards these out-groups since they have

now themselves become members of the out-group**".**

Sercu (2005:p.155) also asserts that foreign language teachers' knowledge cannot be confined to some characteristics of the foreign culture, even if the teachers are as familiar as they can be with it. In order to be able to lead their learners towards intercultural competence in the language, it is required that they are aware of their own culture and possess culture-general knowledge. Teachers should, instead, master skills of researching and prepare activities that guide learners to discover similarities and differences between cultures, in the classroom and beyond, while addressing stereotypes, categorisations and prejudices learners may have.

On this matter, Breka and Petravic (2015: p.29) refer to the "mutually intertwined competences related to the cognitive, affective and pragmatic dimension" teachers must possess to develop, in turn, their learners' intercultural competence, regardless of their age range. Besides the aforementioned aspects of intercultural competent teachers, these authors highlight that they need to be aware of their learners' culture and how their culture can be developed.

Moreover, it is crucial that teachers are prone to assess and improve their own intercultural competence and reflect on how they can support their learners to develop their own. For this to happen, teachers must be capable of choosing the adequate strategies and activities to be applied in the foreign language classroom and diversify them while integrating language and culture. Mitchell et al. (2015: p. 311) point out that combining a variety of activities makes the learning process motivating and allows the students to empathize with the target language and culture at the same time.

In the case of young learners (eg.10-11 years old), Shin (2006:p.2) also states that EFL teachers need to explore effective ways of teaching, in order to "take advantage of the flexibility of young minds and the malleability of young tongues to grow better speakers of English".

1.6. The national English syllabus on intercultural education for the 5th and 6th grades (10-11 years old)

According to Reay (2009:p.1), "individuals construct their identities in relation to

others, and, in particular to understandings of 'the other'". So, the author highlights the critical role of schooling in identity formation, not only at initial levels such as the ones this study considers, but throughout the whole process of formal education. The author also highlights that students create their own identity and understanding of what they experience following what is advocated, in terms of norms, practices and expectations, by schools and their stakeholders, whether these play consciously or not.

Therefore, the first step is to acknowledge the students' identity and the context in which this identity is expressed, as we should not dissociate them. With this in mind, the national English syllabus framework for the 2nd Cycle (5th and 6th grades) first defines what a language is, emphasizing the cultural aspect of its teaching:

> **"**Enquanto factor determinante da socialização e valorização pessoal, ela permite ao indivíduo desenvolver a consciência de si próprio e dos outros, traduzir atitudes e valores, aceder ao conhecimento e demonstrar capacidades**"**(Ministério da Educação, 1996: p.5).

This document, already from 1996, also refers to the importance of learning a foreign language, as an enabler of personality development, in particular the understanding and respect for diverse sociocultural realities. Besides, it underlines the role of the sociocultural dimension of the language that comprises individual and collective identities.

If we examine the purposes ("Finalidades") of this syllabus closely, we can conclude that they all draw on the dynamic and evolving nature of language, a common characteristic with intercultural education. As well as promoting the use of the English language, the programme stimulates the development of the student's personality and self-cultural awareness. On the one hand, it avails the expansion of the self, in terms of "self-confidence, sense of initiative, critical awareness, creativity, responsibility, autonomy" (p. 7). On the other hand, it attempts to promote specific values regarding communication and citizenship education:

> **"**Promover a educação para a comunicação enquanto fenómeno de interação, como forma de incrementar o respeito pelo(s) outro(s), o sentido de entreajuda e da cooperação, da solidariedade e da cidadania**"**(p.7).

Thus, this document states that English language learning aims at developing not only the student's own linguistic and cultural identity awareness, but also awareness of the other's background so as to promote dialogue, exchange and building relationships.

As Kramsch (1993: p.8) points out language must be regarded in its social dimension and therefore, culture is central to language teaching. In this sense, cultural awareness needs to be understood as promoting language proficiency and intercultural communication and as the result of reflection on language and communication with alterity.

However, although the chapter on the objectives ("Objectivos") reinforces what is advocated on the aforementioned chapter ("Finalidades"), highlighting the range of specific competences that should be developed alongside communicative competence, in a holistic perspective, the Anglo-American cultural universe is proposed as the only cultural referential to be explored by teachers, narrowing down the students' target culture universe. So, the syllabus does not consider other English-speaking societies, as valid English language universes, and it certainly does not consider the possibility of looking at the language as a means of interacting with people from non-speaking English countries, in the case of English as an international language.

As is well known, globalization has reinforced contact with British and the American cultural products, via the media and social communication networks. In fact, Portuguese students, as other students, are often exposed to those cultural products uncritically and may tend to accept what they see and hear, without questioning or understanding, which frequently leads to misinterpretations, stereotypes and reductive categorisations about those cultures. Therefore, even if the syllabus reduces the cultural contact in English to these two mainstream universes, this opportunity should be well used to stimulate a critical reading of the world, in order to develop competences that learners may activate when contacting with different cultures.

Clouet (2006: p.56) stresses the fact that the English language is now seen as 'de-nationalized', due to its role as an international language. Therefore, it becomes more urgent to realize how culture is always embedded in language use and language should not be treated as a neutral medium of communication.

That is to say that the English language classroom should offer the students the opportunity to be exposed to a variety of cultures, while being aware of their own, as a fundamental starting point to cross-cultural understanding and respect. Still, the syllabus insists on the comparison between the student's culture and what is referred to as 'target

cultures', the British and the American, throughout the whole document, suggesting a reductive notion of culture in the sense of national culture only. This notion of culture is clearly challenged by an intercultural perspective that considers, instead, the cultural formations that any individual may bring to communication and dialogue.

The syllabus recommends a learner-centred pedagogy, following a consensual position in ELT for many years by authors such as Nunan (1988) and, more recently, Nonkukhetkhong, Baldauf and Moni (2006), inter alia. These authors emphasize that contemporary English language pedagogies aim at involving the students in their own learning process, developing learners' communicative competence and promoting learning strategies and learner autonomy in language classrooms.

So, after defining the purposes and objectives for ELT and learning processes in the 2nd Cycle (10 to 11 year-old learners), reiterating the need to contribute for the student's development, not only in terms of cognitive competencies, but also in the affective, social and civic dimensions, this syllabus proposes methodological guidance accordingly, following current theories of teaching and learning on the matter. Hence, the document states that turning to learner-centred methodologies allows the students to become active and aware of their learning processes.

As Portugal is a Council of Europe member state and English is the language of international communication, also chosen as the most important within the European Union, it is imperative that we look at the common European education policies regarding ELT and their guidelines concerning intercultural education. Therefore, it is fundamental that we acknowledge how research and studies have been influential in the setting of common goals in language education and citizenship education and which initiatives have been undertaken in that sense. The aim is to understand how the English syllabus and English language learning and teaching in Portugal should take advantage of them, in order to develop and implement valid intercultural education approaches and strategies.

1.7. International educational guidelines on the intercultural dimension

As societies become increasingly multicultural, due to the citizens' unprecedented geographic spread, they also face the need to cope with their complex and varied backgrounds while acknowledging and valuing diversity. This poses a challenge to schools in the sense of embracing and integrating diversity visible at many levels. More than ever, education has a central role in ensuring that the future generations are founded in knowledge, but most of all, in competences, values and principles of equity, respect, tolerance and solidarity.

During the past two decades, the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) conducted a series of studies and established guidelines on education to inform educational policy makers and stakeholders. In fact, the UNESCO has become a reference for education in general and, specifically, regarding intercultural education. This organisation provides several documents that focus on the importance of intercultural learning to develop, in young people, not only the knowledge, understanding of and respect for other cultures, but also the need to raise awareness of their own identity and culture. Moreover, this international organisation is committed to raise awareness of the need for international participation and cooperation, in order to deal with and solve the current global issues.

In short, UNESCO proposes that intercultural understanding draws on four interconnected pillars, equally fundamental: 'learning to know', 'learning to be', 'learning to do' and 'learning to live together' (UNESCO, 2007: pp. 19-20). Leo (2010:p.12) points out that, unlike the most common sense that underpins the intercultural learning on the last pillar, all of them should be understood as relevant for the holistic formation of today's citizens. For this reason, these pillars should sustain every educational policy.

1.8. European guidelines and projects on intercultural education

The Council of Europe aims at upholding human rights, democratic values and the rule of law throughout the European Union. Therefore, it is clear that it seeks to enforce

international agreements, specifically educational policies that promote mutual understanding and foster principles and values of a constantly changing but, desirably, united Europe in its diversity. If not so, its future may be compromised.

The Council of Europe has an important role in European education, as it attempts to influence the way education is approached in member countries. Its main goal is to protect and promote human rights, democracy and rule of law and also to promote the societies' ability to involve their citizens in intercultural dialogue. Hence, its publications focus on the definition of Europe's common challenges, while suggesting solutions and the exchange of good practice, as it tries to address the learners' values and competences and ultimately, European citizenship.

Besides other actions, programmes and projects, the Council of Europe looks at educational policies, the way they address intercultural issues and how they should be implemented towards the successful development of intercultural competence. Therefore, this organisation is deeply committed to support and reinforce education policies and strategies that successfully integrate citizenship education and intercultural education.

The CEFR (2001) attempts to differentiate the various dimensions in which language proficiency is described, through the use of descriptors, and one of its revolutionary added value is to encourage European citizens to take responsibility for their future and to make decisions about their lives, starting by clarifying language levels and allowing a shared understanding of what they refer to in the European space. In the 2001 version of the CEFR, the concept of mediation was introduced in language teaching and learning. As explained by Coste and Cavalli (2015: p. 27),

> "Mediation can be defined as any procedure, arrangement or action designed in a given social context to reduce the distance between two (or more) poles of otherness between which there is tension".

In the document, mediation emerges as the fourth communicative language activity, a crucial complement to the other modes of communication (reception, interaction and production), which leads us to the concept of intercultural mediation, present in all the other modes. Within this scope, the notion of cultural mediator was proposed by authors such as Byram and Zarate (1997), highlighting its role as one of the objectives of language education.

In this sense, the Council of Europe has been pioneer in emphasizing the importance of schools and teachers as cultural mediators, providing "mediation between pupils and the knowledge, know-how, dispositions and attitudes (*savoir-être*) that they need or wish to acquire" (Coste and Cavalli, 2015: p.28). Therefore, this organisation underscores the role of learners as social agents and of teachers as main mediators in the process of reducing the gap between the students and otherness, helping to create a bridge to the world underpinned in communication.

However, Parra and Arias (2009: n.p.) point out that authors such as Byram (2000) criticize the CEFR, as they consider that intercultural competence is very incompletely approached within this document where even the assessment of the socio-cultural competence is missing, for example. As we have seen, it is of major importance that learners outline their cultural learning, while checking their progress in the language. So, although intercultural education and intercultural competences have been brought to light the definition of levels of intercultural competence or assessment has not been addressed by this reference document.

Taking these aspects in consideration, since the release of the CEFR, a number of other documents with improved guidelines and projects have been published by the Council of Europe to support teachers and other stakeholders in Europe, in order to implement and assess intercultural learning. Moreover, these publications are available online for free and therefore, they are accessible to all.

Based on the CEFR document, the European Language Portfolio (ELP) appeared to overcome the need of self-assessment and reflection on intercultural contacts. The Council of Europe (n.d.) sustains that, in this document, learners "can record and reflect on their language learning and intercultural experiences", as it supports and encourages "the development of learner autonomy, plurilingualism and intercultural awareness". Nevertheless, despite these statements, the ELP has also been critised, as it does not fully address intercultural reflection.

Having this goal in mind, in 2003, once again endorsed by the Council of Europe, Huber-Kriegler, Lázár and Strange elaborated the textbook "*Mirrors and Windows*". This publication is the outcome of a project conducted by teacher education experts and aims at integrating intercultural communication in language education in Europe by "providing teaching materials that focus on intercultural learning" (p. 5).

In 2008, the Council of Europe launched the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue* acknowledging that "In a multicultural Europe, education is not only a means of preparing for the labour market, supporting personal development and providing a broad knowledge base; schools are also important for the preparation of young people for life as active citizens" (p. 30). In this sense, this document attempts to clarify how intercultural dialogue may contribute to help European citizens live in cohesive social diversity. The "*White Paper*" seeks to provide a theoretical framework and guidance for those who are responsible for the promotion of intercultural dialogue in Europe. That is to say, it is addressed to policy makers, organisations, educators and other practitioners and strengthens the Council of Europe's purpose to reinforce the intercultural centrality of intercultural learning in education.

Another resource called *The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (2009) was developed by the CE to boost the individuals' reflection and learning from the intercultural encounters they may experience, face to face, or through visual media with people from different cultural backgrounds. Ultimately, these autobiographies aim at developing the individuals' intercultural competences.

Between 2014 and 2017, the Council of Europe initiated a project which took place in four different phases, as explained in *"Competences for Democratic Culture"* (Council of Europe, 2016).

Aware of the importance of these new guidelines on intercultural education policies, namely the discussion of controversial matters, materials and assessment, the Council of Europe published online the three-volume *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (RFCDC), in April 2018. It represents a milestone on intercultural education guidance and intends to bring more clarity, focus and structure to understandings of intercultural citizenship education amongst European state members' educational policies.

In fact, after defining a model of competences (in terms of values, attitudes, skills and knowledge and critical understanding) that can prepare learners for democratic citizenship and providing counseling on how these competences can be developed, the document outlines descriptors that set out learning targets and outcomes for each competence. North and Piccardo (2016: p.30) underscore the direct relevance to teachers, trainers and students of the descriptors for mediating communication,

contributing to their intercultural awareness and competence. In fact, according to the RFCDC (2018b: p. 7), "these descriptors are intended to help educators design learning situations that enable them to observe learners' behaviour in relation to a given competence". Finally, the document provides guidance on how these competences can be put into practice in different educational contexts, helping teachers and other educators to determine the best way to approach the intercultural dimension in a specific situation.

The RFCDC (2018c: p. 7) highlights that further chapters will be added in 'due course', pointing to future updates and improvements.

It is also worth mentioning that the Council of Europe, in its continuous effort to provide guidance to education policies within the European Union, and specifically in setting intercultural education policies, has been constantly launching new publications, grounded in the most recent studies by highly distinguished researchers and scholars.

Other European projects such as *Erasmus +*, *eTwinning* or *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL) can also become very useful tools in intercultural education, as long as they are adequately explored.

Although Portugal is not a member state of the *European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe,* that aims at implementing effective language teaching policies, and therefore cannot fully benefit from its activities and resources, language teachers and learners can still freely take advantage of its website for projects and publications.

1.9. Published materials for ELT to young learners in Portugal and the intercultural domain

No matter how controversial the use of coursebooks is, it is widely acknowledged that they are usually very important for teachers and students alike, as a pedagogical tool. Although authors such as Thornbury (2013) challenge educators to choose other materials over them, others praise their advantages.

So, a lot could be said about their useful and pertinence, discussing their benefits and disadvantages. In any case, published resources and materials produced by teachers,

can be valid resources as long as language and culture are approached in a meaningful and integrated manner allowing learners to consider the context, reflect on the content and analyse critically. As many researchers agree today, in language teaching it is important to assess materials, as they will highly influence the way teachers work.

The Portuguese public educational system relies on textbooks and so their use is taken for granted. They are designed by private book publishers according to a syllabus by the Ministry of Education. According to the requirements of this Ministry, they must be produced according to aims, principles and criteria of three documents: the English syllabus, *Metas Curriculares de Inglês* and *The Common European Framework of References for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, in order to be approved.

In the school year 2017-2018, there are eight textbooks available for the 5th grade and eleven for the 6th grade, most of them produced in Portugal. However, as we go through them, it seems quite clear that they do not meet the European guidelines with respect to intercultural aspects.

On the one hand, the cultural information and the activities/ projects that are presented in these textbooks are limited to English speaking countries (almost exclusively England and the USA) and confined to commonplace knowledge. Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002: p. 15) draw attention to the fact that "there is a danger of culture being limited to the all-too-familiar stereotypical icons of the target culture", which is precisely what happens in these English textbooks for the 5th and 6th grades.

On the other hand, these books do not suggest self-cultural awareness tasks or activities. Apart from some suggested general comparisons between English speaking countries and Portugal, the other activities are scarce and they do not account for comparisons. Therefore, the learners' involvement and critical awareness of their own culture, as a starting point to understand the world, is compromised.

Moreover, in terms of citizenship education, the textbooks are quite poor, as they do not promote any subjects for discussion, missing the opportunity to bring situations that would promote the development of a critical stance. They do not propose tasks or activities in which students and teachers question their own opinions, views and beliefs and challenge their own prejudiced and biased positions on certain subjects. Besides, they do not promote the engagement with actual world issues and intercultural

responsibility necessary to become an active and committed citizen today.

In this regard, the UNESCO (2015: p. 10) state that criteria need to be established to guide publishers, as far as cultural content is concerned. So, they instigate them to "use culturally relevant examples", to "represent different gender, racial, and ethnic groups, as well as majority and minority cultural groups", to "represent without bias (avoiding stereotyping in language and illustrations)" and to "include issues of national and/or regional concern". However, Troncoso (2011: p 87) advocates that there is a lack of congruence between what is upheld by language theorists and what policy makers and some materials developers do. The author claims that, although we recognise and accept language and cultural diversity, there is a homogenization or standardization of the use of languages and, therefore, the definition of policies and the development of materials is organised accordingly. So, Troncoso (2011: p 87) highlights that when developing materials we need to consider the social and cultural context where the material will be used, the language perspective adopted and the different perspectives of language learning assumed.

Risager (2014) raises important questions that should be covered when assessing materials and resources in ELT on intercultural education: what do we consider to be cultural knowledge and whose view of culture is presented? Do the materials "allow the students to examine and negotiate their own cultural experiences"? (Risager, 2014: p.7). The author underscores that "all types of materials can be the subject of cultural analysis" (ibid.) and what seems to be important is that, whatever views of the world are expressed, it is the way the teacher and the learners perceive them that matter, which leads us to the role of critical interpretation and mediation.

Chapter 2: Developing materials and activities on intercultural education

2.1. ELT materials and resources on intercultural education

If we undertake a thorough analysis of the national English syllabus for the 5th and 6th grades, we realise that its focus is on the development of linguistic competences and communication skills and much less attention is given to the acquisition of intercultural competences. However, we should not dissociate communication from its cultural and social context, as one of its core intrinsic features and therefore, intercultural aspects need to be addressed.

In Portugal, as throughout the world, the students no longer live in a monolingual and monocultural environment. As Genc and Bada (2005:p. 75) point out, students may have a tendency to "become culture-bound individuals who tend to make premature and inappropriate value judgments about their as well as others' cultural characteristics". Hence, it becomes clear that cultural issues ought to be approached and explored, in order to develop learners' self-cultural awareness and the ability to understand, interact and cooperate with an increasingly multicultural world, since young ages.

As we have seen, a native language and culture are acquired together and they are mutually interactive. Moreover, Ho (2009: pp. 66-67) underscores that language and culture learning involves the understanding of not only one's own culture and the knowledge about other cultures, but also a reflection about them.

Besides, authors such as Byram and Planet (2000: p. 189) highlight that by properly comparing cultures and cultural values, the students learn to decentre, as they begin to understand otherness from a different and non-judgemental perspective. After all, intercultural education also aims at questioning and exploring the knowledge and beliefs that were built by the culture in which learners were brought up.

In this sense, activities such as role plays, brainstorming, debates or discussions, and cultural projects subject to a theme can be effective if we want the learners to engage themselves in culture learning, analysis and reflection. These activities can focus on relevant issues such as racism, gender issues or homophobia, for instance. It is also

important that those projects are presented in class and displayed at school, broadening the impact of these works.

Corbett (2010: p.2) emphasizes that these activities should focus first on the 'home culture', a principle the author argues to have been neglected until now. He advocates that learners can only explain their own culture to others once they "look anew at their own community's behaviour, practices and values" and therefore, they "need to develop skills in cultural observation, description, explanation and evaluation". So, in order to foster them, Corbett proposes a series of activities, following Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence. He goes through Byram's 'savoirs' and takes them as a basis for his suggestions.

First of all, Corbett (2010: p.3) states that intercultural language learners should explore, describe and compare social groups, but most importantly they should understand how individuals interact within their group and how individuals and groups communicate between them. Therefore, activities should focus on the dynamics of the individuals' multitude of identities in various contexts. Secondly, in order to expand learners' communicative repertoire, they should be exposed to different genres and their distinctive purposes. Thus, they should be encouraged to develop their skills to interpret the specificities of the language used in diverse communities, in the light of their cultural background. Thirdly, the author argues that intercultural language education should be found in the principle that all cultural values can be scrutinized and therefore, open to a critical discussion and negotiation. He also highlights the role of the intercultural classroom as a "safe space for engagement with differences in belief and ideology" (p. 5), promoting empathy, understanding and respect.

Moreover, Corbett (2010: p. 6) alleges that the observation, description and analysis of sign systems (verbal and non-verbal) of familiar settings can stimulate second language learning and promote the ability to interpret a wide range of linguistic and cultural practices. Finally, the author sustains that intercultural language education should promote a critical stance of the values and beliefs of others and encourage respect for otherness, starting by "'decentring' one's perspective of one's own culture", as Byram and Planet (2000) had stated. Therefore, activities should prompt the learners to question what is familiar and look at other ways of living.

Reid (2014: p.160) advocates that authentic materials can establish a connection between the classroom and the outside world and that they can be used to approach culture in foreign language lessons. Some examples of these authentic materials are

cartoons, music, commercials, casual conversations recordings, audio storytelling, online games or electronic chatting. When technology is used in an appropriate way, it can enhance social interaction skills, as it may stimulate real-life communication. Thus, it may also require the improvement of values such as cooperation, empathy, negotiation and acceptance.

Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002: p. 19) highlight that these values and attitudes, part of 'savoir apprendre/faire', or skills of discovery and interaction, are often forgotten when it comes to language learning classrooms. These authors claim that the focus is usually on knowledge and skills and therefore, the affective aspect of learners' development is, somehow, neglected or underrated.

Although religion is a sensitive theme for most communities, Corbett (2010: p. 10) incites its approach in ELT, sustaining that, despite the challenge it may represent for teachers and learners alike, this subject should be included in an intercultural language programme. Milot (2006: p.13) describes religion as a 'social, cultural and political phenomenon' and claims that

> "The diversity of beliefs and values and identity-related claims based on religious affiliations, and the increasingly sensitive nature of freedom of conscience and religion, concern all democratic societies that have an interest in forming citizens capable of reflection and democratic participation."

Therefore, the author advocates that approaching religion is fostering democratic citizenship. Thus, young learners could develop a project work about different religions in the world, focusing on the main differences between them. However, ultimately, they should draw conclusions about aspects religions have in common, in order to raise the learners' awareness to the fact that beliefs or non-beliefs are inherent to human beings, bearing in mind that individuals are unique and that they should be prioritized.

The religious dimension in intercultural education could also benefit from allowing the students to work together. Regarding this aspect, Milot (2006: p. 34) underscores the advantages of implementing co-operative learning, especially in schools and communities where religious diversity is significant and children with very different backgrounds live together, highlighting that this approach encourages critical thinking, tolerance and recognition of diversity while they unite efforts for a common goal. According to the author, it is a dynamic process that allows students to "learn to get to know each other and respect individual differences" (p. 34), fostering both

academic and social skills.

2.1.1. Visuals

Ho (2009: p. 69) claims that using authentic visual materials such as videos and pictures may increase the learners' critical awareness and promote reflection and language production, as long as they are carefully selected and activities well planned. The author stresses the importance of observing different cultural behaviours and comparing to their own, emphasizing that learners will "become aware of the ways in which their own cultural background influences their own behaviour, and develop a tolerance for behaviour patterns that are different from their own" (Ho, 2009: p.69).

However, Yuen (2011: p. 464) notes that nowadays the content on foreign culture in textbooks is approached in a very fragmented and stereotypical way. So, he urges teachers to go beyond common themes such as entertainment, travel or food. The author highlights that perspectives of foreign culture should inspire the learners to reflect upon intercultural aspects. Therefore, subjects such as religion, human rights or gender social equality can promote in-depth views and even research on these matters.

As an example, if students are shown diverse pictures of people dressed up in different costumes or art items associated to distinctive cultures, their horizons will be broaden and they will allow them not only to change their perception about those cultures, but also to promote the development of attitudes of respect towards others. These images can be explored in terms of religion too and stimulate acceptance in a more sensitive subject. As another example, young learners can also form positive and strong opinions about the fundamental subject of human rights, by exploring pictures of child labour (eg. in Vietnam), poor conditions at schools (eg. in Phillipines) or child marriage (eg. in India).

As the students are presented and confronted with different stances, they are expected to reflect upon their own culture and values, so often taken for granted. In such a manner these activities may raise awareness of their preconceived ideas and stereotypes, not only about other cultures but also about the individuals they are working with.

As we have noted above, textbooks play an important role in the current educational practice. Therefore, teachers and other stakeholders in the teaching/ learning

process should be aware of their benefits and critical of shortcomings, as well. Moreover, teachers have to understand that they need to select or produce the best materials that aim at educating intercultural competent citizens. Hurst (2014: p.25), for example, claims that textbooks must address the critical issue of representation of the 'Other', the author (ibid.) states that, for years, the cultural representation issue in FL textbooks in Portugal has been superficially addressed, until recent years, when Portuguese policy makers realised how important it is to help learners look at the world and reflect on current world issues, following European guidelines and recommendations. So, textbooks can become a crucial teaching tool when approaching central and relevant issues and going beyond common, simplistic and reductive views on different cultures, allowing for the development of the learners' citizenship.

As most young learners can remain concentrated on one activity for short periods of time and they are full of energy (Shin, 2006: p.3), teachers should add visuals, realia and movement to the activities, in order to capture their attention and keep them engaged. Wang (1998: p.12) points out that interaction activities should be personalised, realistic and on appealing subjects. That is to say, students feel more interested and engaged when the topic somehow relates to them and to their reality.

2.1.2. Picturebooks, narratives and stories

Several authors (Bland, 2013; Matos & Lopes, 2016) suggest telling stories in the foreign language and using picturebooks, specifically, as they are captivating for young learners, combining visuals and written text. Many authors state that they are one of the best sources of foreign language input for these ages. Kaminski (2013: p. 31) emphasizes the importance of pictures:

> "The impact of the pictures on reaching an understanding of the plot is of great significance: they provide a scaffolding device that helps the children sustain interest. Rich language that would otherwise be incomprehensible can be decoded enabling the children to experience extended and complex discourse in the foreign language".

More recently, Mourão (2016) also praises the potential of picturebooks, as they contribute for the learner's holistic formation, by associating the virtues of pictures (what is shown) and what is written (what is told). The author claims that "picturebooks

can promote affective, sociocultural, aesthetic and cognitive development as well as develop language and literary skills" (2016: p.39). Moreover, these books can be an opportunity to approach more challenging topics and look at them from different perspectives. So, besides providing opportunities to promote the learners' understanding and language use, picturebooks also allow for negotiation and discussion between learners and prompt their thinking about deeper subjects.

Bland (2016: p.45) also argues that "picturebooks that authentically reflect cultural diversity can move even young readers towards flexibility of perspective" (2016: p.45). Therefore, the author encourages teachers to select examples of picturebooks that reflect diversity and practise intercultural understanding. Moreover, Bland underscores that they can promote the learners' knowledge and values which will, in turn, allow for participative citizenship and for the development of their critical thinking skills. As long as the plot is captivating and the pictures are appealing and supportive of the message the author intends to convey, the learners will soon engage with the characters and be empathetic with them. For this reason, it is crucial that teachers consider the way they draw attention to the characters' feelings, obstacles and challenges they face and that they enhance the respect and understanding they deserve. The ultimate goal should be to incite learners to take a stand on such paramount issues and encourage them to discuss them within their cultural environment which, in turn, would impact on broader contexts, as a positive snowball effect.

 Furthermore, teachers should take advantage of the young learners' developed ability to interpret visual stimuli, due to an active and constant use of visual media, such as computer games and television, since very young ages. Again, as students can emotionally engage with the story or topic and empathize with the characters, teachers can lead them to explore intercultural issues and tackle more complex subjects.

Unlike what people might think, a picturebook is not an illustrated story: images matter as much as the story itself. They actually tell the story too, which allows an interaction between the words and the pictures.

Bland also emphasizes the role of narratives, "an empowering gateway to new perspectives and intercultural awareness" (2013: p.295), as they can represent both familiar and unfamiliar cultural realities to the learners and she uses the 'mirrors and windows' metaphor: narratives can be 'educational journeys' that show the unknown world, as well as enlighten the students about themselves and prepare them for the future.

UNESCO (2015: p. 20) also notes that the use of stories can expose the learners to behaviours and positive attitudes towards others and contribute to the development of skills and values for good citizenship. So, stories that involve issues the learners can relate to, such as intolerance or gender inequality, can lead to the increase of critical awareness, respect, openness and understanding of the others.

As a preparation for reading, teachers should exploit the pictures in order to help the learners to interpret and understand the story they are about to delve into. That is to say, pictures can be a powerful means to stimulate building personal connections, captivate them and draw their attention to important subjects related with respect, tolerance or equity, amongst others. Besides raising their motivation, it is important to explore key ideas ~~words~~ and to take advantage of what the students already know, in terms of language and in terms of cultural knowledge.

Teachers can also become captivating storytellers and keep the learners active, by asking them questions about the plot or the characters. At the end, they can be given kinesthetic activities, in order to maximize opportunities to explore relevant content.

2.1.3. Songs

Among a myriad of proved advantages to foreign language teaching to young learners, such as motivation or the improvement of the four macro skills, songs can also play an important role in intercultural education. Petrus (2012: p. 127) claims that music can bring cultures closer to each other and enhances its social function, as it can stimulate a connection between people, while conveying values. That is to say, English teachers can take advantage of the cultural content of songs.

As an example, different versions of a song, from different countries, can be exploited and compared, highlighting how in some cases cultures share a principled foundation, despite their distinct characteristics.

To continue with the topic example of the refugee crisis, I suggest learners could listen to Aliens, by Coldplay. The band is well known and very popular amongst children these ages. This music highlights the plight suffered by refugees and we hear about the migrants being forced to move "in the dead of night", children crying and people in urgent need, "hovering without a home". Coldplay donated all profits from the song to the international NGO called Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS) which rescues migrants and refugees in peril at sea in the Mediterranean. Tasks and activities

could explore the metaphors in the lyrics and video clip, guiding learners through their discory of meanings available (eg what could these aliens stand for? Why are they represented as aliens? Who or what is after them? Why could refugees be like unearthed gems?).

2.1.4. Technology and the Internet

Another important fact to consider is the use of technology in ELT. Although technology can be challenging and bring along a significant number of risks and difficulties, it is known that it can represent a very useful educational tool as well. However, education stakeholders need to be updated and innovative, in order to explore digital tools in class and also, guide the learners' experiences with the world.

Uzun (2014:p. 2407) highlights that Internet allows people to get used to different cultures and languages and creates contexts where diverse people meet, interact and get involved in common objectives, such as projects or activities. Once again, the main goal is to develop intercultural competence through virtual contact with others.

Kramsch (1999: p.31) also underscores that computers make it possible to "to bring the language and culture as close and as authentically as possible to students in the classroom", again drawing attention to the intrinsic relationship between language and culture.

Moreover, the Internet and digital devices are appealing to young learners. Therefore, technology can be an ally to English language teaching, as it can provide almost unlimited resources to explore language and relevant matters regarding citizenship education. That is to say, by providing different social and cultural contexts, teachers are encouraging the students not only to be aware of the language and their own culture, but also boosting the intercultural communication at early ages.

Teachers and other educational stakeholders need to realise the importance of preparing their students, from early ages, to learn how to access and critically assess Internet texts. Douglas (2017) claims that "more young people than ever are using digital media as their main source of news, so they must be equipped with the skills to tell fact from fiction". According to the National Literacy Trust website (that works with schools and communities to empower disadvantaged children with literacy skills and therefore, ultimately aiming at enabling them to succeed in life), a significant

number of children do not have the critical literacy skills they need to face and succeed in a digital world. In fact, according to the most recent report (June 2018) of the "Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy Skills", run by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Literacy and the National Literacy Trust, as well as partners Facebook, First News and The Day, "only 2% of children have the critical literacy skills they need to tell if a news story is real or fake" and half of teachers (53.5%) believe that the national curriculum does not equip children with the literacy skills they need to identify fake news".

So, activities such as the ones proposed by the National Literacy Trust attempt to help children with their reading and writing abilities by developing their pleasure for these activities and supporting schools around the world. In fact, this website provides teachers and other educational practitioners with innovative and inspiring resources, such as programmes that allow the students to have access to the news, but importantly, to be able to understand/interpret and thus, be able to distinguish what is trustworthy or not and tell the difference between fake and real news. From an intercultural perspective, this is very important, because it allows students to question and doubt false information that can easily lead to and spread attitudes such as hatred or prejudice towards different races, religions or sexual orientation. Ultimately, citizenship needs to be based on facts and news from reliable sources.

As long as we provide learners with guidance, we can take the most of the technological world. Ilter (2015: p. 311) claims that technology can promote motivation and be a way to create real-world situations and pleasant learning environments, allowing learning with authentic materials.

2.1.5. Study visits, student exchange and school partnerships

In this sense, activities and projects such as study visits (whether they are within the country or abroad), student exchanges and school partnerships, as *Erasmus+* projects, can be powerful learning experiences teachers should take in consideration, as they embody the ultimate intercultural experience themselves, promoting '*savoir être*' (Byram, Gribkova and Starkey, ibid.), if the intercultural dimension is an intrinsic part of the project, preparing students to the cultural interaction. In fact, European organisations are responsible for a large number of initiatives in this regard, aiming at promoting intercultural understanding through education and educational exchanges.

Ruffino (2012: p. 81), however, warns that these mobility projects are often still seen as 'radical' and schools may not be aware of the benefits they can bring to intercultural education, in his words

> "an extended intercultural experience in another country is likely to lead to a new vision of the world, a new way of being: what the ancient Greeks called a "metanoia" – a conversion of the mind".

However, mobility projects must be thoroughly planned and implemented in three fundamental stages. First, they require a detailed preparation, which includes the selection of partners and participants and the establishment of common goals, specifically the intercultural component. The second step is the implementation of the mobility activities. Thirdly, the activities need a follow-up, comprising their assessment, the dissemination of the outcomes and the impact on students and institutions alike.

These projects allow learners to use English as the language for communication between people from different countries, and no other classroom activity, as similar to real-life as it may be, can immerse the students in a constant interaction as these visits and exchanges do. Besides, Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002: p. 20) refer to them as 'a holistic learning experience', due to the fact that it may activate all the competences of an intercultural education. That is to say, these experiences enable the learners to combine the development of intercultural skills, values and positive attitudes towards other cultures. If videos, songs or other materials can be indirect ways to experience different cultures, through actual intercultural interaction, learners are able to put their own culture into perspective and understand the others' more effectively.

Considering our context, some questions should be raised: are 5th and 6th graders too young to participate in projects like these? Which benefits can they take from these learning experiences? Are they old enough to understand their educational, personal and social dimensions? The answer to this last question is positive, as long as these dimensions are correctly prepared.

As was said before, 'the sooner the better' could be the motto. Not only can children experience a diverse reality in a different country and improve their communication and relational skills, but what they learn can, effectively, be the keystone to their formation as future citizens. In other words, it is important to create

opportunities to strive for a more intercultural world. Authors such as Teutsch (2012: p. 96), corroborate the positive impact of this type of approach when referring to a study conducted by the Austrian "Centrum für Schulentwicklung" (Centre for the School Development), claiming that this institution proved the positive impact of intercultural exchanges on students. The author alleges that they promote understanding, tolerance and openness to the world, stimulate foreign language learning and foster the development of wider perspectives.

Whichever activity or methodology chosen to promote intercultural education, it is imperative to carry out regular in-depth analyses and assessment of what was learned and what changes need to be undertaken, on the part of the students, teachers and other stakeholders alike, in order to contribute to that aforementioned fundamental awareness.

2.2. Suggestions for the inclusion of intercultural education in ELT to young learners

Corbett (n. d.) reminds us that the classroom focus changed from the use of language structures to the creation of communicative activities that require the 'authentic' negotiation of meaning and he urges educators to put theory into practice in the classroom. So, the suggestions I will present attempt to follow the guidelines of the documents released by the Council of Europe I explored before, which were mainly based on Byram's aforementioned goals for the acquisition of intercultural knowledge and skills in ELT. Therefore, I intend to contribute to build intercultural communicative competence in young learners and stimulate the teachers' interest and commitment to develop this important competence, by looking at the syllabus and suggesting intercultural relevant strategies and activities.

2.2.1. Picturebooks

I start by suggesting taking advantage of picturebooks.

In this sense, as claimed by Dolan (2014: p. 95) "picturebooks about refugees and asylum seekers address a range of universal emotions, including fear, grief and

confusion". For that reason, these stories allow the learners to put themselves in someone else's shoes and take a different perspective, while reflecting on their own. Therefore, they promote social inclusion, empathy and respect. They also encourage the students to value diversity, to explore both cultural identities and ultimately, to adopt a commitment to the world.

More than ever, the issue of the refugees' critical situation prompts us all to take special duties upon them and therefore, the theme of refugees should be addressed in education too. Dolan (2014: p. 108) claims that exploring the image of refugees in picturebooks from a more critical point of view allows teachers to promote intercultural education and develop critical literacies, besides developing language skills such as reading or writing.

So, before suggesting some picturebooks, it is important to clarify the stages teachers should follow, in order to make the most of these resources. In fact, exploring picturebooks should aim at making reading more communicative and at making the message the authors want to convey more effective.

Therefore, as a pre-reading activity, teachers can explore the pictures beforehand or prepare a multiple choice or matching questionnaire. These activities can be done collectively or in pairs, for instance, in order to understand what learners know about the topic and their positions on the refugees' situation and to try to clear up any possible preconceptions. By doing pre-reading activities, teachers are not only anticipating the topic, but also boosting the students' motivation and engaging them in the topic. It is also crucial that students learn and practise reading techniques, understanding that they do not need to understand every word in the book they are about to explore.

As a while-reading activity, students can be drawn attention to the pictures, as they are as important as the text itself in the case of picturebooks. If students were given a questionnaire at the beginning, it can also be explored now. Students can also sequence summarized paragraphs of the story, amongst other reading activities.

As a post-reading activity, teachers can organise a speaking activity related to the topic. As students are young, a simple task as identifying and discussing feelings, such as sadness or loneliness or about values or positive attitudes, such as respect, empathy or solidarity. Comparisons can also be made between what the characters felt in the

beginning of the story and what they felt afterwards. Written activities could also be proposed, for example, students could imagine what would happen after the story ended. Drawing skills could complement and compensate for any language difficulties in expressing everything they wished to while stimulating creativity.

It is worth noticing that approaching human rights or refugees issues can be complemented at different school subjects, such as Citizenship, a subject we now have find in these students curriculum.

One example of a book that addresses a meaningful and relevant topic to be explored is *The Island* by Armin Greder (2007). The students can engage with a relevant world issue and identify perspectives and opinions that they can connect with news and representations of refugees by the media. By building empathy with the male character's harmless and defenseless situation, learners can develop a more critical stance while analyzing the written text and images. Starting with the visual metaphor of the front cover the teacher can create activities that gradually guide learners to read the images. This promotes the development of visual literacy, so relevant in intercultural communication and in our world today. The strong physical contrast between the villagers and the lonely naked outsider is reinforced by the use of colour, reinforcing the villagers' fears, prejudices and cruelty against the stranger's vulnerability. The emotions that we imagine these characters feel are complemented by the visual drawings. This picturebook is indicated for readers aged 8-18. The language should be accessible for these learners of EFL presenting an opportunity to revise/introduce vocabulary and other language work while analysing written and visual language and supporting a discussion on relevant concepts and issues regarding citizenship education.

Moreover, this approach enables the learner, as reader, to participate in the meanings of the text by connecting prior personal experiences and knowledge to the topic of the text.

So, as for other suggestions, among others, *"The Colour of Home"* by Mary Hoffman and Karen Littlewood is a picturebook about a Somali boy who flees from war to England. The moving story focuses not only on his experience in a totally different country and on what he recalls from his home and family back in Somalia, but especially on his painful memories and on the reasons that forced him to restart in a new and unexpected environment. The book is appealing to young readers by portraying a

familiar context of a school, the beautiful drawings and the realistic story. It promotes awareness of life under conflict or war, exploring a critical issue and tackling on human rights, too.

"My Name is Sangoel" by Karen Lynn Williams, Khadra Mohammed and Catherine Stock also approaches the refugee issue. This picturebook tells the story of a Sudanese boy, his mother and his sister in the United States of America, after his father's death in war in his homeland of Sudan. It takes the readers through his quest for his lost identity and sense of belonging, his resilience and ability to adapt to a new reality.

Although the story line is different, the context in which the boys find themselves and the mixed feelings are similar.

"Three Names of Me" by Mary Cummings and Lin Wang is a story about a Chinese girl, who is adopted by an American family, and her search for identity. In the narrative, written in the first person, the main character tells us about her three names: Wang Bin, the name the caregivers gave her at the orphanage in China, Ada, the name she got from her American adoptive parents and the name her birth mother used to whisper in her ear and that she doesn't know how to say. Supported by her family, she delves into her life, exploring her past and dreaming about her future and she finally realises that each of her names are an important piece of who she is.

This picturebook, as the aforementioned ones, allows the readers/ learners to connect with the characters and relate to many of their feelings. It can also demonstrate that family structures can be diverse and therefore, the story can expand the students' cultural horizons and raise awareness to different realities.

"I Hate English" by Ellen Levine and Steve Björkman tells us a story about a young Chinese immigrant in New York. The picturebook portraits Mei Mei's, the main character, journey throughout her experience of cultural adjustment and her fear of losing her identity. Besides approaching the rights of minorities, it brings out the differences between cultures and creates the opportunity to discuss freedom of speech. The narrative highlights the role of her teacher in Mei Mei's relationship with English and her adaptation to the language, starting by reducing her fear of learning it. As in all the suggested picturebooks, the drawings play an important part on the message the

story attempts to give. They show the characters' attitudes and emotions. Finally, *"I Hate English"* reminds us of the pride we ought to feel about our own culture and that it is possible to embrace different languages and cultures.

Bearing in mind the fact that teaching often requires working with students with special needs, *"At the Same Moment, Around the World"* by Clotilde Perrin seems an appropriate picturebook. As the author explains, through original and appealing pictures and simple words, the learners embark on a voyage throughout the world, accompanying the different time zones. This story tries to offer a general view of the world, while presenting a brief look of how children live in a representative country of each time zone. Although overgeneralisations may be made, the book succeeds at showing that the world can be seen from different perspectives and that people are similar in their essence, despite their context and ways of life. In order to draw the learners' attention even more, the exploration of "At the same moment, around the world" can be supported by the activities about this picturebook suggested by the "Literacy Central" website (such as crossword puzzles and memory games), taking into account the fact that special needs students' learning disabilities can be overcome by complementary resources.

2.2.2. Fairy Tales and Fables

Fairy tales also have great intercultural potential in ELT. Dema and Moeller (2012: p.85) draw attention to the importance of approaching traditional fairy tales in ELT. The authors claim that, on the one hand, they allow exploring the historical background information and on the other hand, learning values and morals in which they will underlie their opinions. Elia (n.d.) highlights their universal dimension, claiming that there are common recurrent patterns in many different cultures, not only in fairy tales but also in fables.

Velicki and Velicki (2011: n.p.) advocate that fairy tales are culture-bound and convey the cultural identity of a country, but it is also true that their symbolism knows no boundaries. In some cases, both fairy tales and fables may be explored to address human rights issues and bring to the discussion deeper subjects, while setting good

moral examples. These narratives allow learners, especially young learners, not only to get to know a variety of customs and cultures, but also to identify themselves with the characters, as they embody role models in their childhood. Therefore, students are able to base their attitudes and their character upon strong and positive principles, such as respect, tolerance, openness and understanding towards others and their cultural identity and diversity.

So, as mediators, the teachers and educators' role is to choose stories with interesting plots, to approach them through appealing activities and to promote the discussion of the students' stances towards difference. By comparing them to current situations, learners are developing their critical thinking and positive attitudes towards others. However, instead of approaching well-known European fairy tales or fables, not new to these students, I suggest the exploration of different versions of fables that take place in diverse settings. For example, "*The Korean Cinderella*" (Climo and Howell, 1993) or "*The Ghanaian Goldilocks*" (Pizzoli and Heller, 2014) to approach and discuss shared life values and principles in different cultures.

2.2.3. The Internet

As we know, ELT should use resources available from our digital world. Therefore, language teachers who work with young learners are now co-responsible for understanding what they are doing within the digital media and help them to take the most of it. In fact, teachers should take advantage of the students' interest and focus on multimedia resources and explore the web, while encouraging interaction in English.

With regard to the very current issue of fake news, Ward (2018: n.p.) draws attention to the students' lack of critical-reading skills. The author refers to the joint report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Literacy and the National Literacy Trust, highlighting that the document "points out that there are close links between an individual's literacy skills and their ability to be an active and informed citizen". Therefore, Ward (2018: n.p.) underscores the message of the director of the National Literacy Trust, Jonathan Douglas, warning that, in our current times, it is urgent to teach our students critical literacy skills and engage them actively with news, in order to

assure a democratic future and wellbeing of their generation. Due to the amount of unfiltered news that circulate everywhere in today's media, teachers must encourage their students to question sources, to cross-check what they read and to sharpen their focus, paying attention to details. Hertz (2016: n.p.) suggests looking into ads and sponsored content with young learners, as they can be easier to explore and more appealing for these ages.

Following the guidelines of the National Literacy Trust, learners can start by reading and analysing two pieces of news on refugees from the "Breaking News English" website about Germany and Austria's latest humanitarian initiatives and UN's reaction to them. Then they would compare the news about Ukraine and Calais (France) attitudes towards refugees from the website "stopfake.org" and they could discuss why the first ones are real and the last ones are not. Once students have become aware of the refugee problem, teachers could get them involved more actively by collaborating with NGO or other organisations, or even starting their own project. Learners could, for example, join the "Kindness calendar" proposed by the "British Red Cross" website and organise a wall newspaper, where real news on refugees could be shared with the school

Moeller and Nugent (2014: p.9) suggest creating an online blog exchange, involving students from different cultures, in which they are expected to ask questions ~~for~~ to each other. Thus, they are given the opportunity to understand other attitudes, beliefs and values, while acknowledging their own. Therefore, besides these advantages, activities such as this allow the possibility to transform their attitude towards others. However, this author highlights students need to question their preconceived ideas and attitudes, as a starting point to be involved in the intercultural competence process. Corbett (2010: p.11) also draws attention to the fact that, early on in an online collaboration, it is important to find appropriate e-partners and to establish ground rules in order to guide students, namely with the kind of language they ought to use.

2.2.4. Visual aids/ resources

It has become a regular feature of ELT to include videos or short films. However, most activities proposed tend to focus on linguistic competence only. These resources

are valuable for several reasons. Our students live in an age where the image reigns everywhere around us. However, they have not been made aware of how to read these images, what they are telling us, how we can read them critically, and how non-verbal communication is crucial in intercultural communication.

Even if the videos or short films are almost speechless, the pictures and the messages conveyed can be powerful and very effective if explored in relevant, meaningful activities. Therefore, I suggest the exploitation of "*The Notebook*" by Greg Gray and "*The Present*" by Jacob Frey. The first one addresses the theme of empathy and support, as it deals with a boy who realises the need his mother feels to accomplish her household chores. As for the second one, the short film is about a disabled boy who changes his attitude towards his new disabled dog. So, it also promotes empathy while addressing teenagers' behaviours, disability and respect. The concepts of the two short films are easy to grasp and, therefore, easily approachable.

With respect to the refugees topic, students could watch *"Malak and the boat"*, an ad about a young girl from Syria, who found a new home in Germany. Besides talking about her hard experience as a refugee, Malak talks about her school, her family and her games. So, students can easily relate to her life and empathize with her and the ad can motivate to discuss fundamental human rights, such as the right to education, to have a home or to live in peace.

English language teachers can also work with the students on different cultural aspects through the video *"If the World Were a Village"*. In fact, prejudice and intolerance are often built on ignorance. Thus, by showing what the world is like, teachers are promoting understanding and empathy.

2.2.5. Role play

The refugees issue could also be approached through ~~in~~ a role play and ~~could~~ involve all learners. Roleplays are a good task to activate different learning styles~~,~~ auditory, visual and kinesthetic capacities are mobilised simultaneously. Corbett (2010: p. 203) proposes to create situations in class that are relevant to discovering and

interacting with cultural alterity. In one example, students pretend they are in a multiethnic restaurant, an activity we could call "At the table with the world". After researching about the topic and preparing the acting, the learners would rehearse, in order to gain confidence about their performance. Children are expected to get involved with their characters and the meanings built during their research about the topic and, therefore, internalize the underlying meanings more effectively. Whitaker and Kenny (2016: p. 25511) also suggest that these 'make believe restaurants' explore and demonstrate the different rituals and customs associated to eating and, therefore, cultural aspects about some of the refugees cultures can be discussed and analysed, as a post-task activity.

Chapter 3: Conclusions and final considerations

Although the importance of incorporating intercultural education in language teaching and learning has been acknowledged for the past two decades and its development has been currently embedded in influential documents, such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* released by the Council of Europe or *Guidelines on Intercultural Education* by UNESCO, this area seems to be still quite unknown and underexplored by Portuguese teachers who work with young learners in EFL. Moreover, Portuguese policies in this regard are still approaching intercultural education very timidly, which is reflected in the English syllabus, from 1996. If EFL syllabuses are more detailed and clear, conceptually, providing clear guidance and taking into account that the intercultural dimension should be integrated in all the skills (and not of secondary importance), teaching pedagogies will follow them.

The new document "*Autonomia e Flexibilidade Curricular*" (Ministério da Educação, 2017) establishes innovative guidelines and promotes the implementation of a project that aims at developing the students' humanistic formation, in order for them to become democratic and active citizens, acknowledging the importance of education in a more than ever social and cultural diverse society.

The work of the teacher, as an educator, can find support and guidance in

reference documents produced and made available by the Council of Europe, such as the three volumes entitled *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (2018).

This work intended to raise awareness to this matter and to urge language teachers, and, specifically, English language educators, to play an active role in the process of embedding an intercultural dimension into their teaching, as a crucial contribution to educate understanding, tolerant, open-minded and respectful citizens. Furthermore, this work aimed at highlighting the fact that intercultural education can and should be approached with young learners. Lastly, it intended to illustrate how this could be done through the exploration of authentic and diversified materials. As important pedagogical considerations the learner should be actively involved in the tasks or activities, researching, analyzing the materials and reflecting critically on real world issues that are relevant today. These tools, reading the world around us through these documents using interpretation, analysis and reflection, are considered fundamental contributions in the education of active and engaged citizens, so much needed in our societies.

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