IN FAVOUR OF 21ST CENTURY INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

SYSTEMATIC TEACHER-STUDENT ROLE-REVERSAL IN THE THEORETICAL TRAINING OF DANCE STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

In the present article I present some activities carried out with a multinational group of ballet artist and dancer and coach students in theoretical subjects, e.g. Hungarian Culture or Dance in Home Country. The students regularly shared their newly constructed knowledge with their peers and instructor through products created on various digital platforms. In line with novel intercultural teaching methodology, building trust by offering choices in topics or presentation forms was a key element. The long-term goals were to provide students with a sense of belonging to a universal human culture through practical experiences and extracurricular activities related to intercultural themes (e.g., traditional dances, music, cuisine, sights). The use of ICT tools, which are today indispensable, has provided opportunities for creativity. The present article is a best practice report on the experiences gained while teaching groups of students from senior grades, systematically reversing the roles of educator and student in class. The results of the student-instructor role reversal are: maximum student engagement, development of collaboration, research skills, critical thinking and creativity, and application of skills through cultural information exchange.

Keywords: intercultural education, ICT tools, digital literacy, creativity, research-based learning

1. INTRODUCTION – BACKGROUND

Internationalization has brought about a heightened interest in intercultural teaching methodology in higher education (Kawalilak & Lock, 2018). Role-reversal has been found beneficial in terms of maintaining student interest and boosting creativity (Díaz-Ojeda et al., 2023). The diversity of cultural influences is distinguished based on the degrees of reciprocity in the understanding and exchange of norms between the cultures in question. The aim in teaching could be to reach the highest level of understanding and facilitate as well as encourage respect for all cultures besides acknowledging and nurturing universal values. Because of these reasons,
first, methodological aspects, then the nature of role-reversal, next, the degrees of intercultural awareness, finally, the aim of the article and the projects described will be introduced.

In terms of methodologies, building confidence, immersion in other cultures, the relationship between ICT tools and creativity are all part of intercultural education. Building trust by offering choices in topics or presentation forms is a key element of novel intercultural teaching methodology (Bowman, 2022). First-hand experiences and extracurricular activities around topics with intercultural aspects (e.g. traditional dances, music, cuisine, attractions) will lead for students to become global citizens (Hernández, 2019) of “a common native land, ... Earth” (Nanni & Curci, 2005, p. 40, as cited in Pasquale, 2015). ICT tools do not only provide an opportunity for creativity but are essential in our “global digital culture” (Chiper, 2013, p. 1645).

The lowest degree of relationship between cultures is coined by the term multicultural, which is used when several cultural or ethnic groups live alongside one another without any noticeable effect on each other. Individuals might be unaware of or indifferent to the other culture. In case of cross-cultural communication, there is a one-directional effect of the dominant culture regarded as the norm on the other culture or cultures contrasted to it. This phenomenon is also referred to as the colonial approach ((c) Copyright skillsyouneed.com 2011-2024, n.d., Degrees of Intercultural Awareness). Transformations may only take place on an individual and not on a collective level. In an intercultural relationship, which is already a favourable situation in a classroom, there is a non-judgemental, deep understanding of and respect for all cultures as well as a mutual exchange of ideas and norms. However, art and dance both have the potential to further better intercultural communication to reach the highest (or deepest) level of understanding with the means of transculturality. Transcultural communication extends beyond cultural boundaries accentuating universal beliefs and concepts, resulting in a common culture ((c) Copyright skillsyouneed.com 2011-2024, n.d.; Kawalilak et al., 2019; Moieni, 2022; UNESCO, 2006) such as “universal human nature ... as prime identity” (Jurkova, 2021, p. 105). Although a dance choreography performed for an audience could carry transcultural messages, in a classroom environment, teaching dance students a theoretical subject, the educator might be content with the degree of interculturality promoting reciprocal appreciation among the cultures represented.

There is a diverse literature on the roles of teachers and learners. It is beyond the scope of this article to enumerate or even synthesize all. However, a short summary will shed light on the nature of these roles and how they have changed. The traditional learners are described retrospectively by Freire (1985) as “empty vessels to be filled by the educators’ deposits”, whereas “educators are the possessors of knowledge” (Freire, 1985, p. 100). Based on Morrison et al. (2021), the modern teacher’s roles are to encourage, nurture, and challenge the learners by providing opportunities of (guided) discovery built on previous knowledge. At the same time, the learners’ role is to be actively engaged, while leading and constructing their own learning (Morrison et al., 2021). In a nurturing environment it is the learner who creates his or her knowledge and may share this knowledge with the teacher and fellow students by communicating. Such research-based knowledge might even be new information to the teacher indicating that the traditional teacher-student roles have been reversed.
The aim of this article is to introduce five best practices which have been and could be used in the theoretical training of dance or non-dance students. The implementation has been introduced in a conference presentation (Tongori, 2023). Through the role reversal between teacher and student, besides promoting interculturality and knowledge construction by autonomous, research-based learning, the projects encouraged creativity and facilitated the development of digital literacy using ICT tools.

2. EXPERIENCE THROUGH 5 MINI PROJECTS

The projects were executed by multinational groups of ballet artist as well as dancer and coach students in theoretical courses such as Hungarian Culture or Dance in Home Country in a higher education context. In our Hungarian Culture class for foreign university students, the cultural immersion did not only allow them to get to know Hungarian culture, but also created a common environment in which they were on equal ground, and created a sense of homeliness and belonging. By having such a common ground, they were provided with the supporting atmosphere to share their own cultural heritage through their products in a climate of mutual interest, appreciation and respect in their Dance in Home Country course as well.

The procedure included the steps of (1) pre-teaching & demonstrating basic knowledge and skills by the teacher; (2) students doing their own research using their own digital devices (preferably laptops or tablets but occasionally mobile phones were also allowed); (3) students preparing a product using various digital tools; (4) students sharing and communicating their product; (5) and finally, assessment of the products by the fellow students and the teacher.

The first step, pre-teaching by the teacher, meant introduction of the new topic and demonstrating the use of the digital platform or tools suggested and a sample product. As the 90-minute time frame per session was relatively short for doing the research, making decisions, and creating the product, the students were allowed to provisionally submit the unfinished product and complete and re-submit the final product later, through the learning management system regularly used but before the next session. In the next session, the students presented their product (a storyboard, a virtual museum, a padlet, a poster and a video) to the other students and the teacher, which was followed by evaluation of the products based on pre-agreed criterion-referenced assessment rubric evaluating on a 1–5 point scale the categories: content accuracy, content depth, organization and style. The students expressed no objection for their products to be published later for scientific or educational purposes.

2.1 Hungarian Folk Tales Storyboard

As it has been mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the first step in each mini project was pre-teaching some basic concepts relating to the new topic by the teacher. It involved introduction of the new topic and demonstrating the use of the digital platform or tools recommended, and a sample product.

The storyboard project aimed at bringing the ethnographic (e.g. folk architecture, costumes, customs, beliefs, traditions) and cultural knowledge of the Hungarian folk
tales (*Before You Continue to YouTube*, n.d.), which are an integral part of Hungarian culture, closer to young students through personal experience and individual choice. All this was done in a 21st century digital format which was entertaining, and highly promoted student engagement and creativity.

The students first learned – through eliciting background knowledge and a guided discovery by questions and answers supported by a slide show – about the definition, elements and structure of folk tales, which was not as obvious as it might sound for students from foreign, for example, Asian countries with a school curriculum different from the Hungarian one. Second, the online channel with the folk tale video series was introduced. Third, the storyboard creator application storyboardthat.com (Clever Prototypes (P.C.) Llc., n.d.) and its use as well as a sample product was demonstrated. This was followed by watching one folk tale together on a big screen, after which the students had a choice between using that folk tale or another one for creating their storyboard, which was presented (Figure 2) and evaluated in the next session. The then free version of the application allowed the students to have three tiles in their storyboard. As a result, they focussed on the exposition, the climax and the resolution of the story. Because of the tight time frame, and the meticulous work needed to create the characters with their costume, facial expressions and body posture, and the design of the setting in the storyboard application, the three tiles proved to be a sufficient number. As there is no longer free, only low-cost version of the storyboard creator mentioned above, new projects have been using the storyboard creator of Canva (*Free Online Storyboard Creator*, n.d.) with its pros and cons.

*Figure 1. Student C’s storyboard of the folk tale The Little Puli Dog*

It was apparent that the students had their own experience watching, interpreting and visualizing three prominent parts of the chosen folk tale in an original way. Even when the same story had been chosen, the students’ creativity resulted in different storyboard products.

### 2.2 Virtual Museum

To facilitate students’ first-hand exposure to Hungarian culture deeper than those of their everyday encounters using public transport or having lunch in the university cafeteria, walking tours, cooking projects or visits to museums and exhibitions could
be real life experiences benefitting students’ cultural immersion. Our second mini project took us to the Museum of Ethnography, which is close to the university, making the project feasible. There the students’ attention was drawn to exhibits relating to Hungarian culture.

The major steps of the procedure introduced earlier – (1) pre-teaching; (2) students’ own research; (3) students preparing a digital product; (4) students presenting their product; (5) assessment of the products – were followed again. At the end of the preceding class, students agreed to visit and explore the museum in the next class, and were presented the online guide to the temporary exhibitions of the Museum of Ethnography as well as the one to the permanent exhibition ZOOM – A Change in Perspectives (Museum of Ethnography, n.d.). Then a video tutorial on how to create a virtual museum using PowerPoint slides (seamgreenNDM, 2014) was shown. Students then could try starting to create the background panels for the virtual museum. As a second step, the students – escorted by the teacher – visited the permanent exhibition of the museum taking photos of the exhibits of their choice (discovered while focusing on Hungarian cultural values) to be attached to their virtual museum created as group projects. The third step took place in the next session, when the groups of students worked on editing and finalising their virtual museum adding the photos, textual information, links, citation and animations. Presenting the virtual museums and assessment took place in the following class. As an example, Group A’s virtual museum could be seen (Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Group A’s virtual museum](image)

Note: The information slides (on the left) open when clicking on the pictures (on the right) in the virtual museum. References appear when clicking on the number.

Students of various nationalities collaborated on their project and presented their final product to the other multinational groups of students internalizing that part of the customs and traditions of their host country, which was represented
by the exhibits selected on their own. Through the project’s activities, individual contributions from a multinational perspective led to intercultural cooperation, characterised by both acceptance of each other’s diversity and interest in and respect for the host country’s culture. The teacher’s initial role of initiator and stimulator of interest was replaced by student discovery and knowledge creation, the result of which, the virtual museum created by the students, was eventually seen by the teacher as a recipient.

2.3 Padlet (Digital Billboard)

Another best practice to be presented is relating to the course *Dance in One’s Home Country*, which by its inherently student-driven nature is built on international students’ activity, as they explore and present topics related to the dances of their own culture. This will provide another opportunity to build intercultural relations, i.e. a deep understanding of and respect for all cultures and a mutual exchange of values and norms. The topic of this best practice was *symbolism in dance and costumes* and students were asked to give examples of symbols of movements in traditional dances and costumes of their country in a sharable online noticeboard format using the Padlet application.

The 5-step procedure was basically the same as before. At first, the teacher presented examples of symbolism in dance and costumes demonstrating the use of Padlet at the same time. The teacher’s digital noticeboard was not restricted to Hungarian examples only but had examples of symbolism in costumes (symbols of the Gymes fur vest) and dance (courting and flirtation in folk dance: the Hungarian csárdás) in a Hungarian cultural context as well. Then the students did their research into what symbolism there is in the traditional dance movements or costumes of their country, which they then communicated using Padlet to create digital noticeboards (Figure 3) as reminder of universal features across cultures, that is using symbols of dance movements and costume decorations.
From at least the second step on, no one-way – teacher to student – knowledge transfer could be seen, and by the end of the process, the roles were reversed. By seeing each other’s digital bulletin-board-supported presentations, which promoted a deeper understanding of certain aspects of each other’s dance culture and the recognition of possible common features, they came closer to realising transcultural communication across cultural boundaries, acknowledging the universal presence of distinctive traits and symbols.

2.4 Digital Poster

Artistic projects in an intercultural setting offer outstanding opportunities for educators and students alike to incorporate and develop creativity while conveying art and culture related messages. However, one must be aware that without the pedagogical tools, art itself will not provide the safe shared space for intercultural dialogue and empathy (Maine & Vrikki, 2020). In their Dance in Home Country course, students were asked to make a poster introducing a renowned choreographer they admire from their country. The posters were aimed at arousing interest in as well as gaining the recognition of fellow dance students, initiating a conversation among them on an art and dance related topic.
After the usual first step by the teacher giving the students a thematic example of how the theme could be presented in terms of content and how the AI supported technological tool Canva could be exploited, students went online individually to do their research using their laptops. After an initial phase of information search and decision making relying on their critical thinking skills leading to a reliable selection of data, they started creating their posters (Figure 4).

![Student D's poster introducing a prominent choreographer](image)

**Figure 4.** Student D’s poster introducing a prominent choreographer

### 2.5 Video

The final, most complex project to be presented in this article is the creation of a video on music in Hungary. The concept of music was understood in a broad sense and neither the teacher’s nor the students’ choices in music were restricted to classical music, serious or highbrow music in any sense. Similarly, the steps of the procedure introduced earlier were followed.

The teacher’s primary aim was to arouse interest, as a result, the pre-teaching phase started with a quiz in which students were invited to guess the names and then match photos of well-known and lesser-known (in an international context among the young) composers and musicians such as Franz Liszt, Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, Imre Kálmán, Franz Lehár and György Cziffra with their names. Then the
genres of operetta and ‘magyar nóta’ were introduced with video clips, for example, the Song of Sou Chong from the operetta The Land of Smiles, as they are part of the popular Hungarian culture. Then the teacher demonstrated the use of Flip video (Flip Is a Video Discussion and Sharing App, Free From Microsoft., n.d.) application and a demo material created for the class.

Then the students carried out their online research to find any musician or band who is related to Hungary and whom they were interested in or could relate to. They made a 2-5-minute video introducing the musician and his or her music. Students’ choices included for instance, Ajsa Luna, Pista Dankó and the Hungarian Jolly (J.S Media, 2013) contrasted with his Japanese counterpart singing the same song, Party King, in Japanese but presented in a much more modest, anime video clip (avex, 2022).

![Figure 5. Screenshots of Student E’s video contrasting the Hungarian and the Japanese video clips of the same song](image)

### 3. RESULTS – PRODUCTS

Senior international dance university students created individual and group products within the framework of mini projects. Five of these projects have been introduced and illustrated in this article with the aim of drawing attention on the necessity of facilitating and encouraging intercultural dialogue to prepare students for living an empathic and ethical life in a world of diversity, appreciating the values of other cultures than theirs. By this, tolerance and mutual respect could be built to benefit the society. The projects were implemented based on the notion that novel methodological approaches, such as teacher-student role reversal, research-based knowledge construction and intercultural communication through ICT tools as well as oral communication and collaboration would contribute to the success of the individual learners’s learning processes and empathy. The objectives set have been achieved, both in terms of the products (demonstrated by the sample student products presented) and the goals they aimed to achieve.

The types of digital products ranged from a digital storyboard, a virtual museum, a digital bill-board, a digital poster and videos on the topics of Hungarian folk tales; exhibits of the Museum of Ethnography; symbolism in dance and costumes; and Hungarian music. Regarding the level of difficulty, there was a tendency of moving from the least to the most complex product. The storyboard was the reconstruction of a multimedia experience in a two-dimensional format; the virtual museum was not simply the reconstruction of a real-life experience but involved taking photos,
selection and collaboration as well; the digital noticeboard required online research and structural design; the poster required additional artistic skills; and finally, creating a video needed the acquisition of video and audio editing skills to create a multimedia product. Both implementation and evaluation of the products was completed with the satisfaction of the participants based on the pre-agreed criteria. With these projects the participants also contributed to the development of such 21st century skills for dance (Scheff et al., 2014; Lanszki et al., 2023) as critical thinking and problem-solving, communication, collaboration, creativity, innovation, information, media and ICT literacy, flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, leadership and responsibility.

4. IMPLICATIONS

On the positive side, although there were a few individuals who were on a lower end of technological competency or ICT literacy, most dance university students were fairly fast at familiarising themselves with new technological tools and were able to find relevant information to share with others. During the class the teacher was much less in the centre – except for the initial phase of pre-teaching. As a result, more attention could be paid to students’ needs and differentiated development as well as personalised instruction. Also, students were engaged and on task without much distraction. The possibility of making their own choices gave them the sense of authority and control over their own learning process leading to autonomous learning and knowledge construction.

However, on the negative side, some students were not equipped with a laptop or tablet of their own and insisted on using their mobile phones even though the technical parameters and size were not favourable for some applications. The requirements towards the teacher were rather high in terms of offering quick and valid solutions to the issues that students faced. Readiness to help with one type of device did not always prove to be sufficient. Consequently, the preparation time on behalf of the teacher was several times greater than without such high level of student involvement relying on technology. In addition, a high level of flexibility, understanding and problem-solving ability was necessary to overcome all the possible difficulties from poor wi-fi connection to a lack of appropriate devices, hosting conditions or memory capacity and mobile data issues in addition to the ever-changing conditions of software use over time.

5. SUMMARY

Five mini projects as best practices facilitating intercultural communication with reversed roles between student and teacher have been presented. It has been discussed that the benefits of creating a common ground for students – with equal opportunities but differentiated scaffolding based on student need – outweigh the drawbacks relating to minor technology-related issues. Regarding the methodological background (course structure and organization), in line with the literature, by allowing students to make their own choices, lead their knowledge construction,
and make their own decisions in a digital environment creatively designing culture-related products, while having the level of teacher presence and support necessary for individual learner success (facilitating equity rather than equality), a high level of motivation and student engagement was achieved, resulting in better learning outcomes and student satisfaction (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016).

By encouraging respect, helping students comprehend inequality and build intercultural communication skills, intercultural education aims to equip students to live in a diverse society. With the assistance of communities, such as the community of a group of international students, and institutions and universities where the dialogue of multinational groups of students takes place, intercultural education entails the development of skill sets, and the cultivation of values both individually and collectively (Gube, 2023).

References


Flip is a video discussion and sharing app, free from Microsoft. (n.d.). https://info.flip.com/en-us.html


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