

TEACHING MULTICULTURALISM IN A PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM

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Provas destinadas à obtenção do grau de Mestre para a Qualificação para a
Docência em Educação Pré-Escolar e 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico
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Abstract

The following study is the Master Dissertation in Early Childhood and Primary Education at Instituto Superior de Educação e Ciências in Lisbon.

Education plays a powerful role in influencing a child's development and contributing to who they will one day become and according to Souto-Manning (2013) "multicultural education seeks to respect the humanity of every person, prioritizing the teachers' and children's personal, practical knowledge as foundational to promoting change in early childhood settings and beyond." (p.7). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to (1) provide increased understanding of multicultural education along with strategies for planning and implementing a multicultural curriculum for a preschool audience and (2) to demonstrate to educators the benefits of a Multicultural Exchange Project in Early Childhood Education. The Multicultural Exchange Project that will be presented in this study was accomplished within the Supervised Teaching Practice in Preschool Education. This Project represents the collaboration between two five-year-old classrooms from two different countries – Portugal and Malawi –. The preschoolers in both classrooms created and exchanged books to help their friends in the other country understand their city, country, language, traditions, music and food. There was also an exchange of other gifts, such as, a handmade puzzle of the Portuguese flag, recipes, photographs and presentation of videos of music and traditional dances. The two groups of children participated in two Skype sessions; since they spoke different languages it was necessary for the teachers to be translators. The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that openness and respect for differences between very different cultures can be effectively addressed through intentional multicultural instruction in the preschool classroom.

Keywords: Multicultural Education Strategies; Multicultural Exchange Project; Teaching Practice in Preschool Education;

Resumo

O presente estudo é a dissertação para a obtenção do grau de Mestre do Mestrado em Pré-Escolar e 1º Ciclo do Ensino Básico realizado no Instituto Superior de Educação e Ciências em Lisboa.

A educação desempenha um papel poderoso no desenvolvimento das crianças contribuindo para o seu futuro como cidadãos e de acordo com Souto-Manning (2013) "a educação multicultural procura respeitar a humanidade de cada pessoa, priorizando a humanidade pessoal dos professores e a das crianças, o conhecimento prático como fundamental para promover a mudança em ambientes de educação pré-escolar." (p.7). Neste âmbito, o objetivo deste estudo é: (1) proporcionar uma maior compreensão da educação multicultural, juntamente com estratégias de planeamento e implementação de um currículo multicultural, para um público de educação pré-escolar e (2) para demonstrar aos educadores os benefícios de um projeto de Intercâmbio Multicultural nos primeiros anos da Educação Pré-Escolar. O "Projeto Intercâmbio Multicultural" que será apresentado neste estudo foi realizado no âmbito da Prática de Ensino Supervisionado em Educação Pré-Escolar. Este projeto realizou-se com a colaboração de duas salas de pré-escolar de cinco anos de idade, de dois países diferentes: Portugal e Malawi. As crianças que frequentam o jardim-de-infância nas diferentes salas criaram e exploraram livros para ajudar os seus amigos do outro país a compreenderem a sua cidade, país, língua, tradições, música e comida. Houve também uma troca de outros instrumentos, tais como, um quebra-cabeças artesanal da bandeira portuguesa, receitas, fotografias e apresentações de vídeos de música e danças tradicionais. Os dois grupos de crianças também tiveram a oportunidade de realizar duas sessões de Skype; uma vez que falavam línguas diferentes, foi necessário que os professores fossem os seus tradutores. Os resultados deste estudo demonstraram claramente que a abertura e o respeito pelas diferenças entre culturas muito diversas pode efetivamente ter uma intencionalidade e um efeito educativo multicultural no ensino da educação pré-escolar.

Palavras-chave: Estratégias de Educação Multicultural; Projeto Intercâmbio Multicultural; Prática de Ensino em Educação Pré-Escolar.

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Introduction

Cultural diversity is a global reality with local impact in Portugal, demanding a closer review of the relationship between cultural values and multiculturalism and the value of multicultural education in Early Childhood Education programs. Concerned preschool educators should wrestle with the following questions: Why is multicultural education important for twenty-first century preschool education? How is multicultural understanding meaningfully integrated into early childhood education programs? What strategies and tools are effective when teaching multiculturalism in the preschool classroom?

If these questions resonate with you as a reflective preschool educator, this research study will provide increased understanding of multicultural education along with strategies for planning and implementing a multicultural curriculum for a preschool audience. Studies show that multicultural education should begin in the early years (Abdullah, 2009; Souto-Manning, 2013; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2011). Souto-Manning (2013), Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) conclude that children may begin displaying gender and racial preferences and may develop prejudices as early as pre-school age. According to Ramsey (1982) children learn attitudes that cause them to discriminate against others. Therefore, it is essential that schools and educators foster a multicultural education approach and encourage children to view others different from themselves as individuals with the same dignity and value as anyone else.

This research focuses on a case study between two schools on different continents, Europe and Africa, and more specifically, two countries, Portugal and Malawi. These two schools collaborated to create a Multicultural Exchange Project. The target groups for this study were two five-year-old preschool classes. This project was created to help preschool children build understanding, respect and acceptance of diversity in their multicultural worlds. This experience provided the preschoolers the opportunity to be in contact with and learn about a country different from their own. This study aims to demonstrate to educators the unexpected benefits a multicultural education curriculum can yield.

My personal background is a relevant motivation for this project, yielding the positive results explained in detail in Chapter Two. I was born and raised in an African country, Malawi, for almost 19 years. I attended an international school until graduating

from high school, and I was in contact with people from all around the world. I was raised to respect and acknowledge different cultures, religions, race identities, genders, ethnicities and social classes. As a future teacher, I hope to expand upon this personal knowledge and acceptance of cultural diversity by encouraging children to embrace a multicultural environment.

This research study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter addresses the importance of a multicultural approach in Preschool Education and provides theoretical information about what is needed to implement an effective multicultural education project in the preschool classroom. The second chapter discusses the teaching methodology used and is divided into three sections. The first section includes the introduction and description of the project that presents a justification for initial motivation and objectives along with the brief description of the schools, academic goals and the preschool classes that contributed to this study. The second section presents the school year planning for the Multicultural Exchange Project. The third section provides a description and explanation of the various activities completed throughout the year with the two preschool classes. The third chapter represents the results and conclusions of the study and the project.

Chapter One: Literature Review

One of the main motivating factors for this research study is based on Portugal's growing number of immigrants. According to the Intercultural Cities Programme (ICC, 2014) Lisbon, the capital city of Portugal, has a population of 547.733 people among which 8, 38% (45.915) are foreign-born. Within that percentage Brazilian, the largest minority group, make up 2, 27%, followed by Chinese (0, 68%), Cape Verdean (0, 65%) and Romanians (0, 65%) (p.4).

Preschool education is the first stage of basic education, according to the *Decreto-lei n°5/97 de 10 Fevereiro, artigo 2°*, and for this reason it is fundamental that children are taught to integrate into society as autonomous and free individuals. Based on the general principles and educational objectives of this law, the Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Education (1997) was organized to support and help educators in their practice by presenting general teaching objectives to aim for a higher quality of education. Some of these objectives include:

- a) To promote personal and social development of the child based in democratic life experiences in an educational perspective for citizenship;
- b) To promote the inclusion of children in different social groups, with respect for different cultures, encouraging a gradual awareness of their role as members of society;
- c) Contribute to equal opportunities in access to school and learning success;
- d) Stimulate the overall development of each child, respecting individual characteristics, promoting behavior to help significant and diversified learning;
- e) Developing expression and communication through the use of multiple languages as regards means of information, aesthetic awareness and understanding of the world;
- f) Arouse curiosity and critical thinking. (p.15)

The Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Education (1997) also acknowledge that we live in a time of regional conflicts and for this reason preschool curriculums should implement multicultural education. It is fundamental to “build greater equality of

opportunities between women and men, between individuals of different social classes and different ethnic groups” in order to value cultural diversity (p. 54-55). By doing so, preschool educators are helping transform the process of recognizing and accepting differences.

Research clearly demonstrates that the cultural intelligence of children is influenced significantly by the quality of preschool education they receive (Early, Maxwell & Burchinal, 2007; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). For this reason, the following section discusses relevant research which supports the value and importance of multicultural education. The two sections of this chapter discuss the following: the importance of multiculturalism in early childhood education; the research that provides rationale for the inclusion of a multicultural project in the curriculum; and the educational elements required to make such a project successful.

1.1 The importance of a Multicultural approach in Preschool Education

Souto-Manning (2013) demonstrates clearly that a multicultural approach in preschool education has positive effects for both teachers and students. We live in a society that is becoming progressively diverse, starting with the African Portuguese colonies and later the integration of the European Union. Therefore, it is fundamental that preschool educators recognize and acknowledge other cultures. According to Boles (2006), “by learning about other cultures it might open our eyes to the fact that what we may consider unusual or a form of misbehavior is considered a sign of respect in another culture” (p.5).

According to Silva (2012), multicultural education is the way to educate children to understand what seems “different” and is more present in our daily lives. With this in mind, the aim of this project is to promote respect for and acceptance of all cultural groups, religions, race identities, genders, ethnicities and social classes. Banks (2009) concludes that to accomplish global education it is necessary that school environment, teacher’s attitudes, curriculum, teaching strategies and materials are combined so that children will develop the knowledge and attitudes to understand and participate effectively in a highly interdependent and international society (p.14).

The challenge of accepting the culturally diverse community should be confronted not only in schools or classrooms with children from different cultures, different social background and traditions but also within every non-diverse school and

preschool classroom. Tiedt and Tiedt, cited by Samuels (1994), defend that “education shapes the way people think about other people. Therefore, based on population information relative to racial/ethnic composition, the pedagogical strategy to teach from a multicultural and antibias perspective is imperative” (p.6).

It is essential to acknowledge and understand the different cultures that exist in the world to be able to introduce and approach multicultural education in preschool classrooms. Teachers must prepare students to relate to the current situation in Portugal and in the world. According to Gorski (2001):

Multicultural education is a transformative movement in education that produces critically thinking, socially active members of society. It is not simply a change of curriculum or the addition of an activity. It is a movement that calls for new attitudes, new approaches, and a new dedication to laying the foundation for the transformation of society. (p.1)

If preschool children are introduced into a multicultural environment it is easier for them, according to Boles (2006), to accept “other perspectives and ways of doing things that are just as valuable as their own” (p.4). In other words, it is in teachers’ hands to create such an environment of acceptance. Children spend a significant amount of time at school and therefore it is critical that teachers are able to transmit values that will prepare these children for the future. According to Souta (1997), multicultural education contributes to the solution for the new cultural diversity problem that is arising.

Multiculturalism is present in all population and for that reason, it is necessary to approach this topic right from the beginning of early childhood education. The teachers’ lack of knowledge of multicultural educational principles presents a significant dilemma in early children programs. Ogletree and Larke (2010) present different studies on this subject and strongly conclude that children would be greatly benefitted if programs embraced different culture during their early years.

It is significant that “from a very young age, children may begin displaying gender and racial preferences and may develop prejudices” (Souto-Manning, 2013, p.1). According to Araujo and Strasser (2003) and Ramsey (2008), cited by Ogletree and Larke (2010), by the age of three or four, children begin the construction of gender and racial identity; consequently, “early childhood programs are the perfect place to start

multicultural education” (p.2). Because research has demonstrated that children from an early age can change their racial attitudes and develop kindness and compassion, there is an increased need to take action in preschool classrooms.

Banks, a recognized global expert in multicultural education, has developed the concept called “the five dimensions of multicultural education” (2004). Banks spoke with *NEA Today*’s Michelle Tucker (2013) about the concept called “the five dimensions of multicultural education,” to describe how programs and schools should confront multiculturalism. These five dimensions are: (1) content integration, (2) knowledge construction, (3) equity pedagogy, (4) prejudice reduction, and (5) empowering school culture and social structure. Various authors such as Ogletree and Larke (2010), Li (2013), and Morley (2006) verify Banks’ dimensions as the correct way to address multicultural education. Each of these dimensions is explained in detail with the intention to increase a better understanding of their existence in schools (Banks, 2013; Ogletree and Larke, 2010).

Content integration. In the first dimension all teachers can take part in creating awareness of different cultures by providing examples and information that supports key concepts, principles, generalization, and theories on the different cultures.

Knowledge construction. For this second dimension teachers help students understand how knowledge is influenced by racial, ethnic and social culture. When children are learning about transportation, for example, they may be influenced by their surroundings. On one hand, it is the teacher’s job to give the knowledge about transportations from different cultures and, on the other, to make the students aware how their knowledge got influenced.

Equity pedagogy. The third dimension focuses on how teachers can modify their methods and teaching styles so that students from diverse racial groups and both genders may improve their academic achievement. Ogletree and Larke state that this improvement can be made by “understanding teaching styles, learning styles and languages” (2010, p.6). Some strategies and teaching techniques that were presented in the interview were “cooperative groups, simulations, role-playing, and discovery” (Banks, 2013 p.2).

Prejudice reduction. The fourth dimension focuses on how the administration and teachers can work together to use methods to help preschool students develop more positive racial attitudes in order to decrease prejudice in the classroom.

Empowering school culture and social structure. The fifth dimension focuses on how school culture can be made more equitable. According to Banks schools have their own cultural structure which includes “sports participation, interactions among the staff and students, and disproportionality of achievement” (Ogletree and Larke, 2010, p. 6).

1.2 Research for a Multicultural Education Project

To successfully launch a multicultural education project it is essential to define the purpose and goals, adapting those goals and purposes to the children’s developmental stages and needs. Authors such as Derman-Sparks and Olson-Edwards (2010) as well as Derman-Sparks and A.B.C Task Force (1998) argue that by age five children can make the connection between different cultural identities and ethnic backgrounds between individuals or families.

The National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME, 2016), an organization founded in 1990 and committed to issues of equity, inclusion, diversity and justice in schooling, defends six goals in relation to Multicultural Education:

- To respect and appreciate cultural diversity.
- To promote the understanding of unique cultural and ethnic heritage.
- To promote the development of culturally responsible and responsive curricula.
- To facilitate acquisition of the attitudes, skills, and knowledge to function in various cultures.
- To eliminate racism and discrimination in society.
- To achieve social, political, economic, and educational equity.

These general goals influenced the multicultural exchange project featured in this study, so the children could strengthen their awareness of their increasingly diverse society by creating a safe and accepting learning environment.

The book *Multicultural Teaching in the Early Childhood Classroom* by Souto-Manning (2013) focuses on curriculum and teaching by exploring approaches, strategies, and tools that can be used in early childhood education based on multiculturalism. Souto-Manning (2013) states that adding “multicultural materials” does not necessarily imply that there will be “a change neither in teaching and learning, nor in the interactions and beliefs present in a classroom” (p.3). When selecting various tools and strategies, it is fundamental to study what authors propose for fostering a multicultural perspective. Therefore, the following research focuses in depth on some of the daily school routines and materials.

1.2.1 Multicultural Literature.

Children’s literature is usually part of every preschool classroom routine, and for that reason, it is necessary that teachers are careful with the selections they make. If a book lacks authenticity, it can provide misleading information about and insight into the culture. According to Mendoza and Reese there are two frequent problems that occur with educators when selecting multicultural literature: “One is the assumption that a single book about a group can adequately portray that group’s experience. Another mistaken belief is the idea that one can easily find a wide range of good-quality multicultural literature in libraries and bookstores” (Boles, 2006, p.16). The same author contends that multicultural literature can be considered a powerful tool to open students’ minds, and that it is not enough to casually choose a story about another culture and read it to the students (Boles, 2006). Other authors also support the importance of multicultural literature (Colby & Lyon, 2004), concluding that careful selection of reading material can stimulate an understanding of diversity and provide children with a sense of affirmation about themselves and their culture as well as to help them respect other cultures. Therefore, children’s books should present real information and reflect the different languages and cultures represented in the classroom and in society as a whole.

Rochman (1993, p.19) explains the overall purpose of multicultural literature. She states:

A good book can help to break down [barriers]. Books can make a difference in dispelling prejudice and building community: not with role models and literal recipes, not with noble messages about the human family, but with enthralling stories that make us imagine the lives of others. A good story lets you know people as individuals in all their particularity and conflict; and once you see someone as a person - flawed, complex, striving - then you've reached beyond stereotype. Stories, writing them, telling them, sharing them, transforming them, enrich us and connect us and help us know each other.

Boles (2006) and Kass (2007), affirm that one of the ways to help children engage with the increasing diverse society is by providing children the opportunity to reflect on literature so that they may learn about others who are different from themselves. Kass (2007) describes multicultural literature metaphorically as a mirror or window that offers opportunities for learners to engage with new ideas and grow in their understanding of others. Good multicultural literature also offers opportunities to show characters as unique individuals and as equals. It allows the reader to identify and connect with the characters. It should also accurately represent information about culture and provide details so that the reader may have an insider's perspective. Consequently, it was decided that culturally diverse books would be one of the main tools for the exchange project.

1.2.2 Multicultural Music.

Music is present in children's everyday life. It is an area where they can be involved and work naturally (Silva, 2012). Is it possible that there exists a "right" or "wrong" way to teach multicultural music? Wahl (2014) presents an excellent point of view when asking: "When a teacher approaches multicultural music, is the goal to teach the music or to teach about the music?" (p.3). The same author states that it is possible to look at culture through a different lens when exploring another country or group of people's music (Wahl, 2014, p.1). It can also reveal insights about culture's celebrations, values, history, sorrows and much more. According to Weidknecht (2009), multicultural music "is not simply the study of foreign music; it involves the study of foreign culture as a whole, and should be taught from this perspective" (p.3). Therefore, the cultural information we transmit through music is significant. Gay (2010) stated that culturally responsive teaching is "comprehensive, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory" (p. 32-37).

The use of multicultural music in the preschool classroom is supported by various authors such as Blair and Kondo (2008) and Damm (2006) who contend that music supports the understanding and acceptance of cultures from other parts of the world. Tarman and Tarman (2011) stated that “music is the universal language, so teachers should have various musical instruments and CDs in their classrooms. Singing and teaching songs in other languages reflect various cultural styles” (p.587).

Music plays an important role in Malawi’s cultures and traditions, according to Ntilosanje (2015); Malawi is a country with diverse cultural beliefs and practices and has over 80 traditional dances. Therefore, music would have to play an important role in this project.

1.2.3 Multicultural Art.

Art education can create a global environment in a classroom according to Clark, cited by Gong (2015):

As art teachers, we are in a particularly favorable position to contribute to the goals of global education. We can, very easily, bring art created in all parts of the world into our classrooms. By doing so, we communicate that art is international and not restricted to any particular culture or nation. (p.52)

Kindler (1994) and Lowenfeld (1987) state that children begin to develop intentional figures (such as scribbles) that grow into symbolic representations and eventually start to realize that marks (drawings) can communicate meaning. When young children begin to represent people, ideas, objects, or stories they draw from their personal experience (Olson, 2003), though according to Thompson (2003), these experiences can be influenced by community and media. Therefore, one of the challenges that may occur when selecting art activities is to make certain that the art project is developmentally appropriate.

Art is an effective medium to promote multiculturalism which should play an important role in the exchange project. Yaya and Yousif (2014) argue that multicultural art “is not only equipping students with knowledge, but it also has a powerful element to promote unity” (p. 17). The purpose of this experience was so that the two groups of children would have more appreciation for themselves and the people around them. Consequently, the goal was to provide opportunities for preschool children to develop new ways of recognizing their own world, culture and tradition in addition to growing

in their understanding of another country. When selecting the art strategies, techniques and activities it was significant to keep these goals and objectives in mind.

1.2.4 Summary / Results.

The purpose of this research was to gain a comprehensive understanding about what tools would best fit the multicultural exchange project. It is acknowledged that there are many ways to engage in multicultural education. Based on the children's developmental needs, their interests and the research, it was concluded that literature, music and art must be part of the Multicultural Exchange Project.

Chapter Two: Methodology

One of the main goals for the following chapter is to provide helpful insight into how a multicultural educational approach was implemented in a preschool class through the explanation and examples given about the exchange program between two schools on two different continents.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will present the circumstances and introduction of the project including where it took place, how the project was possible and who was involved. The second section describes the school year planning divided into three phases: phase one outlines the material used throughout the project; phase two describes how the exchange materials was used across the lessons; and phase three explains the methods selected to evaluate the project. The third section describes the experience of the exchange project from the perspective of what was observed and experienced in the preschool class in Portugal.

2.1 Introduction and Background Information

As a student at Instituto Superior de Educação e Ciências (ISEC), I had the opportunity to do my first year's master's internship at *Colégio Sagrado Coração de Maria* with a five-year-old preschool class called the Violet Class. This group had 22 students, 11 boys and 11 girls. The children had a strong relationship between themselves and the adults in the classroom. They were independent, calm, curious and showed interest in learning new information.

This internship started at the beginning of November 2014. The idea for the Multicultural Exchange Project was suggested within the second week. The welcoming school environment provided an opportunity to share cultural backgrounds and experiences easily within the classroom. Subsequent to a conversation with the teacher about the school year theme for this age group at this school and a discussion about my personal background, the idea of a project aimed at expanding multicultural education was suggested.

The theme of every five-year-old preschool class at *Colégio Sagrado Coração de Maria* is based on Social Studies, and more specifically, the five continents. As previously mentioned, I was born and raised in Malawi, Africa, living there for almost 19 years. My mother still lives in Malawi and runs a preschool called *First Steps*

Playschool. She is also the teacher for Big Class. The age group for this class was four and five-year-old children. For this reason, it was possible to combine a project between the school in Portugal and the school in Malawi.

One of the main motivations for this project was to introduce the diverse features of this African country, Malawi, to the preschool students in Portugal, giving these students the opportunity to connect with a very different cultural reality from their own. The proposal of the Multicultural Exchange Project between the two classes and how this project would be implemented was presented to *First Steps Playschool* in Malawi after the conversation with the teacher at *Colégio Sagrado Coração de Maria*. This challenge was accepted with interest, and all partners looked forward to collaborating and learning from an intercontinental exchange project focused on multicultural understanding. Following this agreement, it was necessary to research important pedagogical elements to ensure a successful learning experience for the preschool students involved.

2.2 School year planning

The academic calendars for the schools in Portugal and Malawi are aligned so it was easy to create a planned project relevant to both classrooms. In accordance with the research findings on using literature, music and art to teach using a multicultural lens, the activities were carefully selected. Table 1 presents the planning of the phases and activities as well as the timeline for the project.

Table 1: Multicultural Educational Approach into the Curriculum

Phases / Activities	Timeline
Phase 1: Preparation of Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the classes • Book Exchange 	Mid November 2014 During the Christmas holiday 2014
Phase 2: Working with exchanged Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book Presentation • Bulletin Boards decoration • Malawian Literature • Malawian & African Music • Art Projects • Gift Exchange • Skype Call 	January 2015 January – June 2015 January - June 2015 January - June 2015 January - June 2015 April 2015 April – May 2015
Phase 3: Evaluation	End of June 2015

2.2.1 Phase 1: Preparation of Materials.

The first mission of this project was to make a presentation book that had to be created before the Christmas holiday so that this exchange could be made during my visit back to Malawi. Each group of children from Portugal and Malawi had to create a book that included an introduction of the group of children, information about the country and city they live in, and finally, details about the school and classroom they attend. It was important to concentrate on the cultures background, traditions, landscape and population when providing information about the country. In accordance with the research in 1.2, tools and strategies were selected for the project in the form of music, art and books. Each group also shared other materials and interests as the project progressed.

2.2.2 Phase 2: Working with Exchanged Materials.

After the Christmas holiday in Malawi with the books already exchanged, the month of January was dedicated to slowly working through the books that were sent to both groups of children. Throughout the school year and following the activities and themes, the classroom bulletin boards were decorated, starting with the presentation of the Malawian children and Malawi. The bulletin board displays helped children visualize and absorb cultural details from both countries, and the children were motivated to participate in the exchange project because their work was displayed.

The books chosen for the preschool class in Portugal helped children visualize and better understand African culture and traditions. During story-time the children were encouraged to compare, contrast and learn about the other culture. Music also played a part in helping the children to identify differences or similarities between Portugal and Malawi and to acknowledge the diversity in music and culture that exists between these two countries. Finally, during art class various techniques and strategies were used to help the children learn about Malawi. African features were introduced by reproducing images of the landscape, people and daily life through painting. Making an African mask out of clay also allowed the children to use their creativity and imagination in producing their own unique pieces of art.

In the classroom the children also worked on a puzzle of the African continent and countries. The objective of this activity was to enhance their visual memory and easily identify the African continent and countries known. Due to the significant

distance between Portugal and Malawi, it was not possible to organize a meeting in person between the two preschool classes. For this reason, we arranged a Skype call where the children could interact with one another through video.

2.2.3 Phase 3: Data Collection Methods.

According to what was intended for this research, several data collection methods were selected based on a qualitative approach. Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that qualitative data benefits the researcher because they have the opportunity to respond, interact and provide immediate feedback (p.19). Therefore, the preferred methods to evaluate the Multicultural Exchange Project were interviews, group discussions, observation, field notes and photographs.

2.2.3.1 Interviews.

The two teachers who played an important role in the Multicultural Exchange Project were asked to participate in an interview to help gather data on their point of view of the benefits of the project based on multicultural education. According to Roulston (2010) “qualitative interviews may be conducted individually or in groups; face-to-face, via telephone, or online via synchronous or asynchronous computer mediated interaction” (p.10). Subsequent to informal conversations and constant feedback throughout the project, the interview method selected for this study was online, through e-mail. According to James and Busher, cited by Fielding, Lee and Blank (2008), one of the advantages of e-mail interviews “is that there is no need for the exchange to be fast-paced. They stress that much of the value of e-mail interviews lies in the opportunity for respondents to think about their responses, “drafting and redrafting what they wanted to write” (p.273). The interviews were structured with five open-ended questions and were divided into three categories: category A- strategies; category B- benefits for the children and category C- teachers’ understanding of multicultural education. Selecting this method allowed the teachers to think and express themselves freely, because e-mail interviews are “suitable when snappy answers are not required” (James & Busher cited by Fielding, Lee & Blank, 2008, p.273).

2.2.3.2 Group Discussion.

This method was selected to explore the preschoolers’ thoughts and feelings through oral communication. According to Santos (2008), group discussion is an important research tool and is a technique that can be applied to collect information

when working in school settings. This technique was selected to gather data on what the children liked most about the Multicultural Exchange Project as well as to receive their feedback during or after the lessons and activities. According to Hiernaux, cited by Santos (2008), group discussion "creates conditions that favor better self-expression of the subjects according to their own logic" (p.6).

The group discussions played an important role in this project. They provided the preschoolers the opportunity to stimulate their thinking and to freely express themselves as well as listen and respect others. Additionally, the teachers in both countries were in constant contact and the new information transmitted would be shared with the two groups of children during these discussions. This information was then collected in the field notes to help further analyze the outcomes of this project.

2.2.3.3 Observation.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1994) observation is a method used by the researcher to collect relevant information concerning what is being investigated. Two methods were selected for this study: naturalistic observation and participant observation. Naturalistic observations allowed the researcher to record what was being observed, whereas participant observation (mainly used throughout the project) allowed the researcher to become part of the group.

Observation is an essential method used when collecting data. The investigator gains a rich and deep understanding of certain situations and behaviors or interactions of participants. The researcher in this study had the opportunity to participate in the project in the school in Portugal. Consequently, it was possible to observe the activities and events that took place as they happened. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) suggest participant observation as "a way of approaching the fieldwork experience, and gaining understanding of the most fundamental processes of social life" (p.3).

2.2.3.4 Field notes.

A fundamental approach for collecting data for this study was the use of field notes. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998) field notes consist of descriptive word pictures of the setting, actions, and conversations held in the field. Throughout the Multicultural Exchange Project, this technique was used by the researcher to register observations, events and situations that occurred. The field notes were further analyzed to answer the questions proposed in this study and aid in reflecting on the lesson plans.

2.2.3.5 Photographs.

This is a data collection technique that allows the observer to analyze activities or events that have already occurred. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1994) “a good photographer can isolate and freeze relations or behavior in a way that cannot be recreated orally” (p.143). The photographs that were taken allowed the researcher to observe and concentrate on the information and details provided, such as record the materials used by the children in the activities, the organization of the classroom, the step-by-step process of the children’s work and the end results.

2.3 Realization of the Multicultural Exchange Project

The following section explains in detail the activities of the project and the children's experience from the perspective of the Violet Class in Portugal and according to the planned timeline (see Table 1, p. 13). Throughout this project the objective was to give both groups of children a sense of solidarity and friendship through this experience.

2.3.1 Phase 1: Preparation of Materials.

2.3.1.1 *Introduction to the classes.*

When this project was presented to the group of children in the class from *Colégio Sagrado Coração de Maria* they were not aware of what it meant to exchange books, music, cultures, traditions and stories with another school "different" from theirs. This group of five-year-old children was enthused with the project concept and immediately accepted the challenge to learn from another class of children, culturally different and far away. Although the children did not fully comprehend the experience they were about to embark upon, when this group was asked to help name the project and with only the understanding that another school was involved from another continent, they gave the project the name, "Nós e o Malawi," meaning "Us and Malawi."

2.3.1.2 *Creating the presentation book.*

The presentation book was one of the main instruments for this project. It provided various information and materials used to help the students understand the country's location, cultures, traditions, history, people and environment. The Violet Class in Portugal discussed and shared ideas between the children and teachers, and we decided to create a book with colored cardboard paper. To hold it all together we punched holes and tied the book together with a strong piece of string. For a more presentable book, the children suggested drawing various images and printed out pictures so that the Malawian children could easily visualize what our country, city and school looked like.

First we started by presenting "who are we". This section provided a simple introduction about the group of 22 children in Violet Class and a list of their names. The second section described Portugal and a few interesting facts about the country such as where it is located, our language, monuments, music, traditions and food. The third

section provided information about our city, Lisbon, and about their school. Along with this book was sent a handmade puzzle of the Portuguese Flag.

2.3.2 Phase 2: Working with the Exchanged Materials.

2.3.2.1 Presentation Book.

After the Christmas holidays and with the exchange of the presentation books completed, in January the Violet Class in Portugal started with the presentation of the book that the Malawian children sent. Before entering in detail what was inside the book, we reminded the children where the country was located by placing a red paper heart on Portugal and one on Malawi on the world globe we had in the Violet Classroom, as shown in Image 1.



Image 1: Globe

It was determined that we would take our time with this presentation so that the children could examine specific details and absorb the cultural information from both countries without rushing the process.

For the preschoolers to have a better understanding of who sent the book, it was decided that we would start with the presentation of the Malawian children. The Violet Class was given a choice of getting to know the girls or the boys first. The majority, 15

out of the 22 students, chose the girls and that was where we started. This introduction was made through the drawings that the children from Big Class in Malawi had made which included their names and ages. Each of the Malawian names was read out loud, and the children were asked to repeat the names to help memorize them. Getting to know the names of other students in another country was a meaningful experience for the children and began to make the exchange project more real for these young participants. The next day, using the same procedure, we presented the group of boys.

The next step was getting to know Malawi. Along with the book that the Malawian children sent was a map of Lake Malawi. The children were asked to observe the map, and subsequently, we talked about the border countries, the flag, the people, monuments, nature and animals, Malawian lifestyle, cultures and traditions. Image 2 represents the material the Malawian children sent to use when presenting Malawi to their new Portuguese friends.



Image 2: Presentation of Malawi

It was during this presentation that the group of children in the Violet Class started to understand what represented the exchange of experiences and cultures. They were confronted with different colored children, different landscapes from Europe, wild

animals that inhabit the great savannah, as well as traditional stories and songs that introduced the African rhythm. Throughout this project there was also an exchange of gifts such as recipes and photographs, as well as the presentation of videos of music and traditional dances. The students also learned a few words in the native Malawian dialect, Chichewa, and they demonstrated genuine curiosity about this different language with sounds and pronunciations they had never heard before. From this point, everything became a little easier for the preschool students to engage in the purpose of the Multicultural Exchange Project.

2.3.2.2 Literature.

First Steps Playschool provided us with a collection of six books that presented Malawian stories. This set was written in English and also had words in Chichewa that were translated for story time. Some of the words in the original language were taught to the children in the Violet Class. The goal of reading these books was to stimulate curiosity by keeping the children interested in reading and familiarizing themselves with a different culture and a different way of life through the discovery of this country Malawi.

The story *Handa's Surprise* by Eileen Browne for which there is also a Portuguese translated version (*A Surpresa de Handa*) was used during story time. This book is about an African girl, Handa, who is on her way to visit a friend, Akeyo, with a basket filled with several varieties of fruit: banana, guava, orange, mango, pineapple, avocado, passion-fruit and tangerines. Along the way to her friend's village, Handa thinks about a fruit which is followed by an animal stealing that fruit without her noticing. The animals that appear in the story are a monkey, ostrich, zebra, elephant, giraffe, antelope and parrot. Since Handa is not aware of what is happening, she continues on her journey when at some point, a goat bumps into a tree and a bunch of tangerines falls into the basket. When she arrives at Akeyo's village and gives her the basket, Handa is amazed to see all the fruit has disappeared and there are only tangerines. In the end, Handa gets the biggest surprise.

A basket filled with the same fruit was taken to the Violet class to help tell the story. Each time the fruit would appear in the story we would take out the same fruit from the basket. At the end of the story we concentrated on learning about each fruit. We started by talking about the fruit that some of the children did not know; for

example, the passion-fruit and guava. Printed images of what these fruit look like on the inside and what the fruit trees looked like were taken to class to help with this presentation. Each fruit was put onto its corresponding image on the carpet for all the children to observe.

With this book we were able to study the African animals as well. We talked about where they live and what they like to eat. Another point we focused on was how the girl carried the basket on her head. The children learned that carrying heavy loads on one's head is a traditional practice in African culture. We also talked about the clothing that the two girls wore in the story. A traditional African cloth was taken to class for the young students to touch and see what the material was like.

Two excellent stories from the collection POKA POKANI, written and illustrated by a Portuguese lady, Margarida Botelho, provided insight into the difference between European and African cultures and the different ways people live in these two regions. The first book presented was *Eva/Eva*. The author explains on her webpage that this book tells two stories of two girls with the same name, both who are about 6-7 years old but were born and live in different places. One is a European girl from Portugal and the other an African girl from Mozambique. This book presents the daily life of the two girls, how they play, go to school, eat and listen to stories.

The second book is called *Yara/Iara*. This story concentrates on two girls: Yara who lives in the Amazon in Brazil and Iara who lives in Portugal. The author states that the two stories presented in one book capture the two cultures by comparing and reflecting that the girls are not so different from one another.

What is fascinating about this collection is that each book introduces two stories which start on opposite sides of the book and meet in the middle. One of the significant points about this collection is that the author had the opportunity to study and interact with the characters in their surroundings and country which makes the stories extremely realistic. I highly recommend this collection to be part of the multicultural literature classroom library. These books focused on some of the African clothing, cultures, traditions, lifestyle, sceneries, fruit and animals. Concentrating on these points also helped the children gain insight into a life that was different from their own.

2.3.2.3 Music.

Since a connection between the group of children in Portugal and Malawi already existed, our main objective for bringing Malawian music into the classroom was to develop interest and knowledge of this country's cultures and traditions. One of the CDs listened to during our project and exchange between the two schools came with a book called *Chisangalalo: Songs of Joy*. While playing the CD, the book included realistic images and the translation of the traditional Malawian stories being sung. The children were also encouraged to move and dance to the African rhythm.

The children from Portugal learned a song in Chichewa called "Palibe Ofana ndi Yesu". The song was sung once for the children, and then for them to have a better understanding of the meaning, the song was interpreted. After learning the meaning we tried to learn the song together. During our second Skype call the two groups of children sang the song together.

Another way Malawian music was introduced was through realistic videos that showed some of the tribes singing along with their traditional dances. Through this presentation, this group of preschool children reinforced their understanding about this country's history and background. One of the most known traditional dances is among the Chewa tribe, the *Gule Wamkulu* which means the Great Dance. While performing, the dancers wear masks that represent characters such as wild animals. This performance takes place during the harvest season in July. This insight had to be shown to the children in Portugal for them to visualize and have a better understanding of Malawian culture.

Fado, which means fate in Portuguese, is considered Portugal's main traditional music. In the book that the children from the Violet Class sent to Malawi was an introduction of Amélia Rodrigues who is known to be the "Queen of Fado". It was highly recommended to the children from the Big Class in Malawi to listen to some of her music, in order for the Malawian students to grow in their understanding of Portuguese culture.

2.3.2.4 Art.

Once a week the five-year-old children from Portugal would have art class. Throughout the school year various activities and techniques were established.

One of the techniques used extensively with the group from Portugal was painting by sight. Various images of Malawi were studied during this process. It was important to make the children aware that Malawi has modern cities as well as rural villages, and for that reason, pictures were provided of both. The images also tried to capture the population living their daily life in the city or the village such as people fishing or working. Other images were of the landscape of the mountains or lake, animals, food, and clothing. The children were encouraged to look at the images carefully in order to help them develop their observational skills. Each child chose the image they wanted to “recreate”. This process started with a display of all the printed images on a big table. Next, they circulated around the table and observed all the images. After checking with a teacher, the students picked one of the images. That same image was located where the child would work with a piece of A3 white paper placed in front of them and the image selected on top. The intention was to reproduce the scenery captured as accurately as possible.



Image 3: One of the children working

Painting by sight was also used when studying the different continents, concentrating on monuments, status, flags. The objective was for the children to gather and remember information for at least one monument and statue, memorizing where it is located, rather than the whole selection. Moreover, the goal was to focus on the

shape, color and style within each culture. The intention of narrowing the selection of the different continents, concentrating and working in detail with the African continent, and more specifically the country of Malawi, was based on research by Dragun (2004), who states: “by narrowing the focus to one cultural group, students can gain a better understanding of that culture” (p.9).

The children were given the challenge to paint their own Malawian flag. The image of the flag was placed on the black board where all the children could easily take a look if necessary. Some of the children were not able to divide the three lines equally and the sun rising was painted in different ways. However, the end result was interesting as shown in Image 4.



Image 4: Painting results of the Malawian flag

One of the art classes was dedicated to create African masks with clay. Two real African masks along with printed images of different masks were brought to class to help each child enhance their creativity.

2.3.2.5 Classroom work.

The children worked on a puzzle of the African continent and countries. We provided the African map on A4 paper with additional lines, dividing it into six parts to create a puzzle. The following tasks were divided in three steps. The first step was to

color Malawi and Madagascar (since they already knew those two countries due to previous conversations). The second step was to cut the continent into six pieces. The third step was to glue the pieces on another sheet of paper in the correct position. Three results are shown in Image 5.

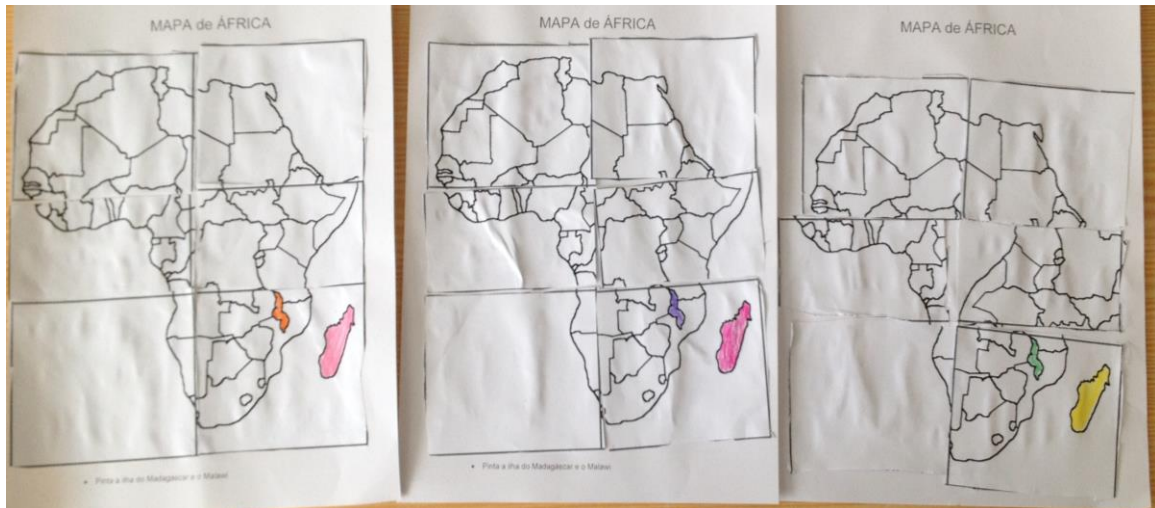


Image 5: African Puzzle

After reading the story *Handa's Surprise*, referred to in section 2.4.2.2 Literature, some of the fruit was placed on the tables in the Violet Class. The children had to draw one of the fruit and could pick by going to the table where it was placed. They were supposed to pay attention to draw the correct shape, colors and textures of their chosen fruit.

Subsequent to the reading of the two books from the collection POKA POKANI, already referred in section 2.4.2.2 Literature, after studying in detail the cultural background, customs, traditions, race identities, ethnicities and social classes, it was decided to create two villages in the classroom: an African village based on the story *Eva/Eva* and a village from the Amazon based on the story *Yara/Iara*. In the African village the materials used to make the huts were sticks, bags, glue, and paint. To make the village boy or girl, the children used African cloth brought from Malawi along with coloring pencils and sack cloth.



Image 6: African village on the bulletin board

The children from *First Steps Playschool* in Malawi sent us individual pictures of each one of their students. It was decided that each child in the class from *Colégio Sagrado Coração de Maria* would pick one friend to draw. To begin, the whole class observed all the pictures as everyone sat around in a big circle on the mat. I showed one picture at a time along with repeating the name of each child.

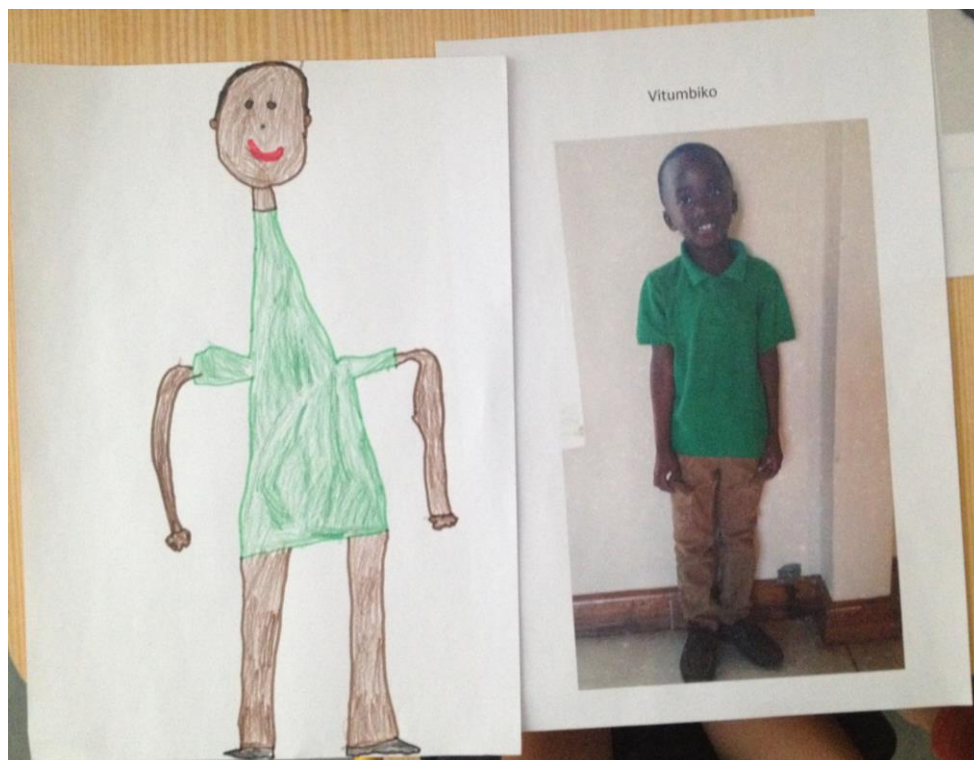


Image 7: Ending result of one of the drawings

At the end, all the photos were placed in the middle of the mat so that everyone could see. After this presentation, each child, according to the order that they were sitting in, chose one girl or boy. When all the photos were selected it was time to start

drawing. The children were divided between the four working tables that we had in the classroom. With markers they drew the outline of the body and clothes and then colored the drawing with colored pencils. Image 7 illustrates the end result of one of the drawings.

After each activity or project was completed, it was essential that the piece of art was exhibited in the classroom so that the children could see their work on display, and classroom visitors such as parents and other family members could participate in what was being learned. Children were encouraged to give visitors a tour and explanation of the exhibition. Each piece of art was placed on one of the bulletin boards in the classroom with a title and each individual work labeled. The goal for this approach was to help young children increase their multicultural understanding by gaining new perspectives and developing respect for cultural diversity.

2.3.2.6 Gift Sharing.

The class from Portugal sent a second book with a presentation of pictures and writing of what they had learned to the class in Malawi. The children also made chocolate salami at school and shared this recipe with the Malawian children. The recipe was sent at the end of the second book along with all the ingredients. This book was given to a lady who was going to visit Malawi in April. The Malawian children were very thankful and decided to send by email photos of them making the chocolate salami, as well as videos of them saying the ingredient names in Portuguese. These photos and videos were put in order on Video Maker and then projected for the children in Portugal to watch.

2.3.2.7 African Games.

The children from the Violet Class suggested getting to know some African games. This interest enhanced a deeper understanding about this continent, and therefore, two games were selected. The first game was football but using a ball made out of plastic bags, newspaper and rubber bands. To enrich this experience the children made one of these balls to play with. The group was gathered together on the carpet in the classroom in a big circle. In order for the children to better visualize what the ball looked like, I made one the night before to show them and brought along some realistic photos. There was an explanation for why some of the children in Malawi and other

African countries make their own balls and toys. Not all children have the opportunity and money to buy whatever they want, and for that reason they use recycled material and their imaginations. The children learned that there were other ways of making these handmade balls with different materials such as old clothes or blankets. As well, the students were interested to learn that some children in Malawi played football on a dirt field with no shoes.

The children in the Violet Class were enthusiastic about the idea of making their own handmade ball. One by one each child helped put together the newspaper and plastic bags, giving the ball a round shape. When the ball was finally completed, two students were chosen to test out the ball to see if it was strong enough to make it through our game that took place the next day.



Image 8: Student holding handmade football

Another African game we played is called “Nyama, Nyama” which means “Meat, Meat” in Chichewa. This game is similar to the game “Simon Says”. The children stand in a circle; there must be at least three players and one child stands in the middle. Next, the child in the middle will say the name of an animal. If it is an animal that is eaten, the children in the circle will have to jump up and down while saying “Nyama, Nyama”. If the animal called out is not usually eaten, then the children will have to stand still and not make a sound. If one accidentally shouts or jumps, they

change places with the child in the middle of the circle and begin again. The purpose of the game was for the students to familiarize themselves with some of the animals and food eaten in Malawi and in other African countries.

2.3.2.8 Skype.

We also had the wonderful opportunity to have two Skype sessions. Since the children from Portugal spoke Portuguese and the group of children in Malawi spoke either English or Chichewa, there was a need to have two translators. I translated from English to Portuguese for the students at *Colégio Sagrado Coração de Maria*, and the teacher from *First Steps Playschool* in Malawi translated from Portuguese to English.



Image 9: Skype Call

In the first session both groups of children were able to present themselves through video by saying their names and how old they were. The children also shared moments of singing, for example, the national anthem or songs they liked. The nannies from the school at *First Steps Playschool* also sang two traditional Chichewa songs for us. The second Skype session concluded the project, and the children were able to say goodbye through video. Together we sang a song in Chichewa, “Palibe Ofana ndi Yesu”, that the group of children in Portugal learned with me throughout the project.

Chapter Three: Results

The following chapter will present the data that was obtained. The evaluation of this project is based on three different sources. The first source was the information provided by the teachers' interviews. The interviews examined the teachers' opinions of the project along with their insight into multicultural relevance in the classroom. The second source was based on the children's participation through a discussion of what they liked most about the project. All the answers given by the children were written down in a notebook. With this information it was possible to discover what they were most interested in and evaluate the method or tool that was used to transmit information. The third source was obtained using a qualitative approach to analyze the tools, methods and techniques that were used throughout the project based on direct observation and daily reports.

3.1 Teachers' Interviews

The goal of the interviews was to obtain the teachers' perspective regarding their opinion on multicultural education and the Multicultural Exchange Project. The interview questions were open-ended so that the teachers had the opportunity to freely express themselves rather than limit their thoughts. Before analyzing the interviews, a brief introduction of the teachers will be presented.

The teacher from Portugal is female and born and raised in Portugal; she is 31 years old and has been teaching for 6 years (interview Appendix B). The teacher from Malawi is also female; she was born and raised in Malawi but her nationality is Portuguese. She is 45 years old and has been teaching for 17 years (interview Appendix C).

The interview questions were distributed into three categories: category A- strategies; category B- benefits for the children and category C- teachers' understanding of multicultural education.

3.1.1 Category A- Strategies.

One of the main aims of this study was to present the strategies used in the Multicultural Exchange Project. The teachers were asked in the interviews about the benefits of the tools (literature, music and art) that were implemented in this project. The educators expressed feelings of satisfaction regarding these tools.

The teacher from Portugal highlighted: “all the tools used were always very well planned and implemented”. It is essential that teachers plan their lessons to help organize and reach the goals and objectives more easily. The teacher from Portugal expressed feelings that the wide range of strategies helped give the children the opportunity to understand better the other reality.

Additionally, the teacher from Malawi expressed that the tools allowed the children “to explore some similarities and differences among the Malawian and Portuguese culture in an exciting learning way”. Although these tools (literature, music and art), according to the literature review, should be implemented in multicultural education, this study presents further experience results on other strategies and tools, such as the Skype calls and gift exchange, that should be applied in multicultural exchange projects.

When the teachers were asked to cite a specific situation where they found that the project was beneficial for promoting multicultural education, both teachers agreed that it was difficult selecting a specific situation. The teacher from Portugal defends:

There were several situations, from learning to sing a song in an African dialect, viewing actual photos of children of the same age in the school context, exporting materials and creating African masks, conversations with moments of sharing (individual presentations and singing songs) using Skype; we were able to discover Malawi in the world map and learn interesting things about the country (language, type of housing, clothing, food, customs and habits). (Appendix B, line 22-27)

The teacher from Malawi supports that the whole experience was very beneficial although highlighted “up to now and it has been a few months that we did the project, they still talk about the chocolate salami that the children from Portugal sent with the ingredients and the receipt” and because of this experience this teacher suggested that in future multicultural exchange projects more recipes should be exchanged since according to her “learning about different countries recipes is an exciting way for children to learn about other cultures”.

3.1.2 Category B- Benefits for the Children.

Both teachers agree that the Multicultural Exchange Project provided benefits for the children. The teacher from Portugal stated “it was a very enriching project for both groups” and the teacher from Malawi focused “this project provided teachers and

children from 2 different countries (Malawi and Portugal) an experience to share cultural values and social interaction”. The Multicultural Exchange Project also exceeded expectations as referred by the teacher from Portugal in her interview and according to the teacher from Malawi “it gave the children the opportunity to learn some Portuguese and Malawian words as well as compare and contrast the two countries’ values”.

Both of the teachers consider that the preschoolers responded positively to the Multicultural Exchange Project. The teacher from Portugal mentioned:

The children responded very well to the project and to all the activities that were planned and completed. The discovery of another country and another continent so different from ours provided the children with great moments of learning, sharing, respect and solidarity. (Appendix B, lines 15-18)

The teacher from Malawi confirmed that one of the benefits for the children was through the live experience and that the children presented curiosity and interest in learning about the other country:

The children loved the idea and most of all it was very exciting for them to learn from a live experience by seeing the schools that were from another country, by interacting with them and learning new material. They kept asking questions and were comparing what there is in Portugal to what we have in Malawi. (Appendix C, lines 21-24)

3.1.3 Category C- Teachers’ understanding of multicultural education.

This study focuses and defends that the Multicultural Exchange Project was well accomplished on increasing multicultural education. Both of the teachers agreed that this project had a positive effect.

The teachers were asked to express their feelings on their comfort level on teaching a different culture to the children. In this case, the teacher from Portugal, who had never been in contact or gained knowledge on the Malawian culture, expressed “I felt very supported by the intern’s participation with the group and me, since we were getting to know your country” were as the teacher from Malawi expressed comfort in teaching both cultures as stated “I did feel very comfortable because in this case for me it wasn’t a different culture since I am Portuguese”.

To teach another culture requires in-depth research as defended by both teachers. The teacher from Malawi explained:

If it was with another country I would have had to do a bit more research but I would still feel comfortable, since I think it is very important to teach children about other cultures, by engaging in different activities that represent the culture of other people. I consider that exploring multicultural education in preschool is important to help overcome ethnic and racial barriers. It also provides the group of children the opportunity to learn more about other cultures and help them improve socialization behavior. (Appendix C, lines 51-57)

The interviews demonstrate that the Multicultural Exchange Project had positive effects and significantly greater gains because of the multicultural focus. The answers given by the teachers indicate that the children were able to learn, understand and respect the differences and similarities of the two countries as well as develop social interactions with others from another culture. According to the teacher from Malawi “this project helped strengthen multicultural education and raise cultural awareness”.

To conclude, we consider that this project achieved its objectives and that multicultural education is an enriching education tool that will help prepare students for the future with the correct knowledge, values, attitudes and skills. According to the *Citizenship Education Guidelines* published by the Directorate-General for Education (2013) intercultural education promotes:

recognition and appreciation of diversity as an opportunity and source of learning for all, in respect for the multicultural nature of society today. The aim is to develop the ability to communicate and encourage social interaction, which creates identities and a sense of belonging to humankind. (p.5)

3.2 Discussion in the Classroom

It was important for the children to participate in this evaluation since they were our target group. For this reason, we collected feedback on what they liked most about the project. Most of the children gave two answers, and therefore, the percentage shown is based on the number of answers given and not the number of children. The answers given by the children are summarized and shown in the following two graphs.

The children from the Violet Class participated in a group discussion at the end of the project to discover what they liked most about this experience. Based on the graph shown in Image 10 it was shown that 35% of the children liked talking on Skype while seeing and hearing the children sing the Malawian national anthem; 25% liked seeing photos and watching videos of the Malawian children making the chocolate salami and speaking Portuguese; 15% liked all the photos that they sent throughout the

project. 10% per cent of the children liked drawing the portraits of the boys and girls from Malawi, and 15% describes other categories such as getting to know the other children because they were considered “different”, “a little different”, and “beautiful” as well as learning about Malawi.

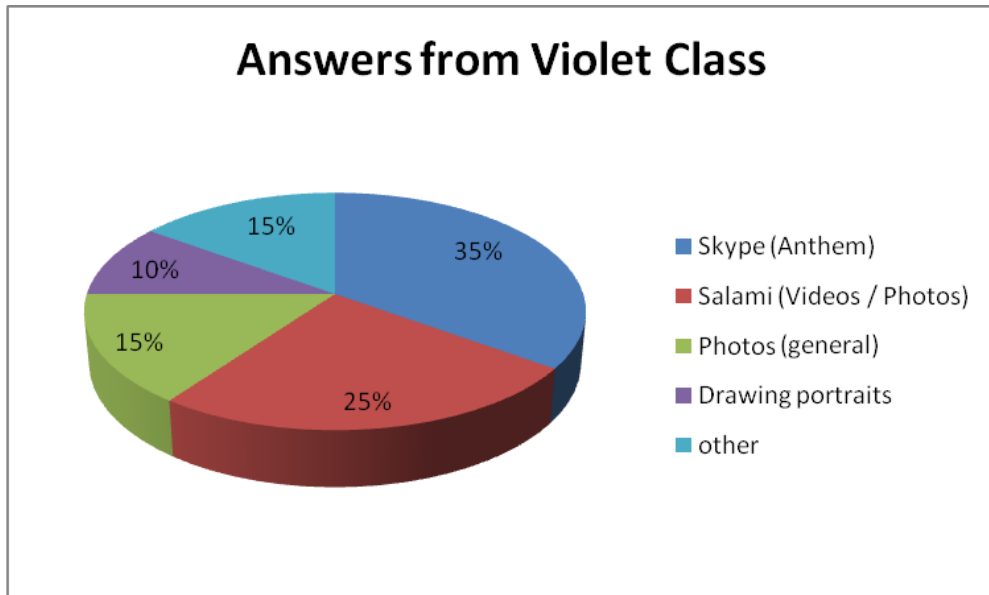


Image 10: Answers from Violet Class about what they liked the most

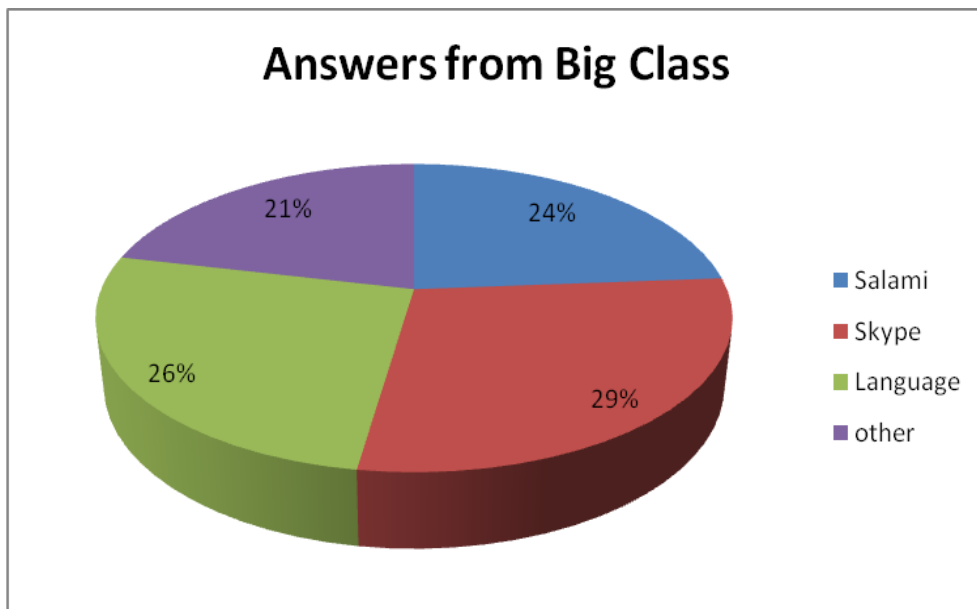


Image 11: Answers from Big Class about what they liked the most

Based on the graph shown in Image 11, 29% of the children from Big Class in Malawi liked talking on Skype because they could see the other group of children and had the opportunity to hear them sing in Portuguese and to sing for them. It was

interesting that 26% of the answers given were based on the language. The children said they liked learning Portuguese and hearing the foreign language. Twenty-four per cent of the children liked making chocolate salami and sending pictures of the whole process and 21% is classified as “other”. This percentage includes the answers about “meeting new friends”, drawing pictures to send and learning about Portugal, the flag and castles.

Although the research focused on tools such as literature, music and art, it was remarkable to discover that both groups of children’s main interest was Skype, the chocolate salami, photos, drawing portraits and language. A significant outcome, therefore, is that the preschoolers were captivated by what is not common to their daily lives and to the moments that were shared when interacting with the other group of children. The exchange project allowed the children to practice social interaction and relationship skills. They expressed enthusiasm and gave their full attention when interacting with each other through Skype. Children learn by being with others, and since this was not physically possible, having the opportunity to talk and see each other on Skype helped the children build a great connection and relationship. Through this process the children were also able to develop speaking and listening skills. It is essential to acknowledge and encourage the role of friendship in early childhood. Therefore, any preschool curriculum must address the children’s interests and reinforce their social-emotional development.

3.3 Observation and Daily Reports

The following data collection was carried out during the 2014/2015 school year. The information presented in this section was obtained using qualitative research methods such as direct observation and daily reports. These methods were used to provide the opportunity to document activities, classroom materials, children’s behavior, doubts and challenges. With this information it was possible to analyze the tools, strategies and methods used throughout the multicultural exchange project. It is important to highlight that the researcher’s data collection was based on close observation and engagement with the Violet Class in Portugal. This was found to be suitable for evaluating the multicultural exchange project due to the researcher’s participation with this preschool class.

The first tool evaluated is the literature. During story time the objective to promote the development of cultural awareness was accomplished. The group of

children showed interest in the books, the language, and information being shared with the class in Malawi. After each reading, the children in the Violet Class participated in a group discussion where they were asked to share their thoughts about what they learned and liked about the story. During this time the children could also ask questions about the story for either the teacher or another child to answer. The level of participation in these group discussions was high. The children's comments often referred to the skin color of the characters in the books as well as the houses and lifestyle.

The following three examples provide insight into the comments that the children made.

Example one: Together we read *Taking Care of Mother Malawi*, a story about a brother, Thoko, and sister, Tiwonge, who walked around their village and noticed how careless some people can be. There was trash on the floor; people were washing their clothes in the river, cutting down trees, and so forth. The children's attention and questions were, "The people are washing their clothes in the river; do they not have washing machines?" or "We have washing machines, why don't they?" We found it was important to explain to the children that not everyone who lives in Malawi washes their clothes in the river, but those who do, usually people living in the villages, do not have enough money to buy a washing machine. It was essential to bring awareness that there exist two realities in Malawi.

Example two: We also read the book *We will make Garden Stew*. The children compared similarities and differences between an African village and a Portuguese village. First, they commented about the way they cook: "They are cooking outside" and "In the Portuguese village our grandparents cook inside." Second, the children commented about the African huts: "The Malawian village has round huts, not like the Portuguese village." The children showed interest in the group discussion which led to a conversation about comparing the two countries' city life and village life. This book was read in the middle of the multicultural exchange project, and we found the children related more to their personal connection with Malawi and asked more questions about the other group of children. For example, "Do the children from Big Class live in huts?" or "Do the children from Big Class cook outside?"

Example three: *Eva/Eva* by Margarida Botelho was an excellent book for the children to compare similarities and differences of the European and African lifestyle.

Some of the comments were: “They like to play and go to school just like us”; “The African school doesn’t have any tables”; and “We sometimes sit in a circle for story time just like the African children.” This book helped the preschoolers understand cultural diversity through situations that they could identify with.

The result of the group discussions indicated that the children showed their sense of equity and acceptance through the introductions of multicultural literature. The children learned there are a variety of people and lifestyles around the world, and they were able to connect their own experiences to the characters and story events.

The second tool analyzed is music. The children showed interest in the music, and it allowed them to experience and feel another culture. The fact that the songs were in a different language encouraged the listeners to concentrate on the rhythm. We felt that the two groups of children responded positively and showed appreciation for the other country’s culture. During the Skype calls both groups of children showed respect for the moment of interaction being shared between the two classes.

The first time the CD *Chisangalalo: Songs of Joy* was played in the classroom, all the children except one showed interest in the African rhythm and started dancing. While all the children said that the music made them happy, the one child that rejected this type of music said it was because it was different and it was their first time hearing it. Throughout the school year, African music was played in the classroom and the child who had initially rejected the music started to become familiarized and began enjoying the rhythm.

The videos of the traditional Malawian music and dances helped the children interpret the meaning of the culture through what was being seen and heard. The children commented on how the Malawians were dancing. The music and dances included several instruments and told a story such as the beliefs of a tribe. By watching these videos, the children were able to understand the meaning of the dances through the movements and grow in their appreciation of the uniqueness of Malawian culture.

The third tool analyzed is art. Our objective was to provide activities that encouraged the children’s understanding of different ethnic backgrounds and customs by exploring their thoughts and ideas. The children noticed differences, and it was

important to take time to teach a culture that was different from theirs so that they could accept and understand those differences.

The images the children painted by sight contained great detail. They showed capacity to observe and pay attention to detail in the printed images. The preschoolers carefully tried to reproduce the colors in the printed images, and whenever there was a color missing from the paint table, they did not hesitate to describe the color they needed.

Using clay to make African masks was another aspect of visual art used. Africa has a significant variety of mask types that play an important role in its cultures. Some of the masks are used in tribal rituals and ceremonies. Different printed images and two real masks were taken to class to serve as an example, though the objective was to extend and stimulate the children's imagination by creating their own masks. Using clay also helped build fine motor skills, an additional benefit from this activity. The majority of the preschoolers, 19 out of 22, were able to start on their mask right away. The three children who needed a bit more assistance were encouraged to re-examine the images and the real mask to help them get ideas.

The preschoolers from the Violet Class drew portraits of the children from Big Class using the printed photos. This lesson allowed them to focus on drawing carefully from observation. The end result of the portraits showed that the preschoolers were able to gather detailed information about each child, such as facial features and colors. With this lesson the children also developed basic math skills for understanding the part to whole relationship and concentrating on the shapes.

The preschoolers involved in this multicultural exchange project retained and recalled new information with great detail. In the group discussions the participants demonstrated significant growth in developing trust and acceptance for learning, listening and sharing. In accordance with the research in the literature review and the evaluation of the three different sources in this section, it is possible to confidently conclude that the tools and methods used for this project positively affected the multicultural sensitivity of the students in both Portugal and Malawi.

Conclusion

This study focused on teaching multiculturalism in a preschool classroom. The main purpose of this research was to contribute to a greater understanding of how early childhood programs and teachers can help children to increase their cultural knowledge and awareness. More specifically, the aims of this study were to (1) provide increased understanding of multicultural education along with strategies for planning and implementing a multicultural curriculum for a preschool audience, and (2) to demonstrate to educators the benefits of a Multicultural Exchange Project in Early Childhood Education.

It is a challenge to transform curriculums to reflect our diverse society and the differences between citizens; however, it is not impossible. We cannot ignore our rapidly diversifying society, and as educators, we believe that multicultural education is the response to this diversity. When school curriculums and teachers foster multicultural education they are including the need for educating and learning about the many cultures that are shaping and transforming society. Banks (2016) believes that only when schools and teachers transform curriculums will they reach the goal of creating a multicultural curriculum. This study confirmed that multicultural education serves as a valuable teaching tool to facilitate and open children's mind to understand and accept differences among people. This approach also helped children acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to accept and develop social interactions with others different from them. Souto-Manning (2013) provides an excellent point: "Multicultural education focuses on challenging the idea of diverse individuals having deficits (as lacking something or needing to be fixed) or as being inferior" (p. 4).

The Multicultural Exchange Project presented in this study serves as an example for how multicultural learning can be integrated into the curriculum and gives insight into how preschoolers gain knowledge and skills of interaction to accommodate cultural diversity. This project exceeded our expectations. It exposed children to new understandings of a culture different from their own and, at the same time, to recognize some similarities. Through this experience the children learned to respect and acknowledge different cultures and backgrounds, helping to eliminate prejudice and racism. This project was able to accomplish most of the multicultural education goals defended by the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME, 2016).

This project also found that children can effectively learn about diversity through literature, music, art, games and interacting with other children. It is significant that educators respect each individual child with their unique backgrounds as well as help them learn to respect and accept diversity rather than reject differences. There is an increase in ethnic, racial and cultural interchange in our world; the correct way to respond to this situation is by fostering multicultural education beginning in the preschool classroom. By teaching and preparing children for the future, we believe the world will be a more peaceful place.

The two groups of children were keen to learn and interested in the project which made the exploration of the other country even more fruitful. The children participated in sharing ideas which created greater motivation to learn. The children from the Violet Class wanted to send the recipe of the chocolate salami and learn about some African games. The children from Big Class wanted to send videos of them speaking Portuguese and photographs of them making the chocolate salami as well as photographs of a normal school day. It is fundamental that educators adapt a flexible curriculum to include new suggestions that the preschoolers present, to show them that we (teachers) respect and value their ideas.

One challenge that was faced during the Multicultural Exchange Project was that throughout the school year we had planned to exchange one more book made by the children in both countries. Unfortunately, there was no one who would be traveling to both these countries. A future idea was to go to the post office with the group of children and send books. Another suggestion for future implementation was to include more recipe exchanges since it was a great success, as suggested by the teacher from Malawi.

As a future educator this study and project provided valuable understanding regarding the importance of teaching multicultural education. It also allowed me to reflect upon and evaluate my own knowledge, skills, attitudes and values and understand how these views can influence children. I strongly believe that teachers have the power to make the world a better place and it all starts in the classroom. Fostering multicultural education into the classroom allows teachers to create an environment that helps children learn, acknowledge and respect the differences and similarities that surround them.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study presented limitations that should be considered for future studies. The following three suggestions might further expand the knowledge base of multicultural education in early childhood programs.

Firstly, the Multicultural Exchange Project presented in this study provided the insight of one study case that received positive results. To extend the research, similar projects should be implemented into preschool curriculums to compare results and help motivate educators to implement such a project in the preschool curriculum. Secondly, further research must consider the possible limitations of implementing an exchange project into the curriculum. One of those limitations could be finding a partner school; therefore, one solution could be to present a list of schools interested in participating in such a project. Thirdly, further study is required to assess the particular benefits of having a foreign educator teach multicultural education in the classroom.

A Final Word

To conclude, education plays a powerful role in influencing a child's development and contributing to who they will one day become. Therefore, this project was extremely important in helping children learn to value and respect differences. I feel content with the outcomes of the Multicultural Exchange Project. This opportunity will not be forgotten because it was an invaluable experience that included a new continent that the children had heard about but in reality was unknown to them. Today the children know where the other country is located and will remember the friends who they never have to say goodbye to, but rather "Kalekale" (in Chichewa) and "até sempre" (in Portuguese), which they learned means "until forever." It is this researcher's hope that this project will serve as an inspiration to other preschool educators if given the opportunity to do an exchange project between schools. It is definitely enriching to any learner, and especially to the preschool learner, to be able to exchange life styles, cultures, traditions, books, and music with different children from another country.

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Legislation

Lei n.º 5/97 de 10 de Fevereiro. Lei-quadro da Educação Pré-Escolar - consagra o ordenamento jurídico da educação pré-escolar, na sequência da Lei de Bases do Sistema Educativo

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Interview Script

Portuguese version

Obrigada pela sua ajuda na minha investigação. Após o nosso trabalho em conjunto no projeto “Nós e o Malawi”, venho fazer-lhe esta entrevista a fim de perceber a sua opinião sobre o mesmo.

Idade: _____

Anos de serviço: _____

1. Qual é a sua opinião sobre o projeto de intercâmbio entre as duas salas?
2. Qual é a sua opinião sobre a forma como as crianças reagiram a este projeto de intercâmbio?
3. Indique uma situação em que este projeto tenha sido marcante na transmissão de conhecimentos sobre educação multicultural?
4. Como considera que as ferramentas utilizadas (literatura, música e arte) foram benéficas no projeto multicultural?
5. Sentiu-se confortável a transmitir aos seus alunos conhecimentos sobre uma cultura diferente? Porque?

English version

Thank you for willingly taking part in this project. After our work together on the exchange project, I request that these questions be answered in order to realize your opinion on it. I appreciate your help with my master's education and investigation.

Age: _____

Years teaching: _____

6. What is your opinion on the exchange project between the two classes?
7. What is your opinion on how the children reacted to this exchange project?
8. Can you cite a specific situation where you found this project beneficial for working multicultural education?

9. How were the used tools (literature, music and art) beneficial in the multicultural project?
10. Did you feel comfortable teaching a culture that is different than your own to students? Please explain reasons if you do or do not.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW: TEACHER FROM PORTUGAL

1 Obrigada pela sua ajuda na minha investigação. Após o nosso trabalho em conjunto no
2 projeto “Nós e o Malawi”, venho fazer-lhe esta entrevista a fim de perceber a sua
3 opinião sobre o mesmo.

4

5

6 Idade: _____31_____

7 Anos de serviço: _____6 anos_____

8 1. Qual é a sua opinião sobre o projeto de intercâmbio entre as duas salas?

9 Foi um projeto muito enriquecedor para ambos os grupos. Superou as nossas
10 expetativas, as crianças envolveram-se muito nas suas pesquisas, nas suas curiosidades
11 e usufruíram de todas as aprendizagens com muito entusiasmo.

12

13 2. Qual é a sua opinião sobre a forma como as crianças reagiram a este projeto de
14 intercâmbio?

15 As crianças reagiram muito bem ao projeto e as todas as atividades planeadas e
16 realizadas. A descoberta de outro país e de outro continente tão diferente do nosso
17 proporcionou às crianças grandes momentos de aprendizagem, partilha, respeito e
18 solidariedade.

19

20 3. Indique uma situação em que este projeto tenha sido marcante na transmissão de
21 conhecimentos sobre educação multicultural?

22 Foram várias as situações, desde, aprender a cantar uma canção num dialeto africano,
23 visualizar imagens reais de crianças da mesma idade no contexto escolar, exploração de
24 materiais e criação de máscaras africanas, conversas com partilhas (apresentações
25 individuais e cantar canções) através do skype, descobrir o Malawi no mapa mundo e
26 conhecer coisas interessantes sobre o país (língua, tipo de habitações, vestuário,
27 gastronomia, costumes e hábitos).

28 4. Como considera que as ferramentas utilizadas (literatura, música e arte) foram
29 benéficas no projeto multicultural?

30 Todas as ferramentas utilizadas foram sempre muito bem planificadas e aplicadas,
31 existiu sempre uma grande diversidade de estratégias e através das mesmas foi dado às
32 crianças a oportunidade de se aproximarem mais e melhor de outra realidade.

33

34

35 5. Sentiu-se confortável a transmitir aos seus alunos conhecimentos sobre uma cultura
36 diferente? Porque?

37 Sim, mas exigiu muita pesquisa. Senti-me muito apoiada pela prestação da estagiária
38 junto do grupo e de mim, visto que, estávamos a conhecer o seu país.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW: THEACHER FROM MALAWI

1 Thank you for willingly taking part in this project. After our work together on the
2 exchange project, I request that these questions be answered in order to realize your
3 opinion on it. I appreciate your help with my master's education and investigation.

4
5
6
7 Age: 45

8 Years teaching: 17

9 11. What is your opinion on the exchange project between the two classes?

10 My opinion was it was an excellent idea that come from Inês, this project provided
11 teachers and children from 2 different countries (Malawi and Portugal) an experience to
12 share cultural values and social interaction. I loved it since I am Portuguese but I was
13 born in Malawi and in our curriculum we don't learn about Portugal, this project gave
14 me the opportunity to talk about Portugal. This project helped strengthen multicultural
15 education and raise cultural awareness; it gave the children the opportunity to learn
16 some Portuguese and Malawian words as well as compare and contrast the two
17 countries values. All the activities and teaching materials motivated the children's
18 learning.

19
20 12. What is your opinion on how the children reacted to this exchange project?

21 It was very good. The children loved the idea and most of all it was very exciting for
22 them to learn from a live experience by seeing the schools that were from another
23 country, by interacting with them and learning new material. They kept asking
24 questions and were comparing what there is in Portugal to what we have in Malawi.

25
26 13. Can you cite a specific situation where you found this project beneficial for working
27 multicultural education?

28 I found that everything was very beneficial in this project, since my children enjoyed
29 everything. Though I have to say that up to now and it has been a few months that we
30 did the project, they still talk about the chocolate salami that the children from Portugal
31 sent with the ingredients and the receipt. They had so much fun doing it and it is
32 something that they had never tasted, so they enjoyed doing it and eating it. The recipe

33 of the Chocolate Salami was a great success and I would recommend that in a future
34 exchange project that more recipes should be shared. Learning about different countries
35 recipes is an exciting way for children to learn about other cultures.

36

37 14. How were the used tools (literature, music and art) beneficial in the multicultural
38 project?

39

40 Multicultural education helps children to understand and respect different cultures.
41 Through the tools (literature, music and art) we were able to explore some similarities
42 and differences among the Malawian and Portuguese culture in an exciting learning
43 way. Having the opportunity to work with a multicultural project helped the children
44 learn and compare by seeing and doing.

45

46

47 15. Did you feel comfortable teaching a culture that is different than your own to
48 students? Please explain reasons if you do or do not.

49

50 Yes, I did feel very comfortable because in this case for me it wasn't a different culture
51 since I am Portuguese. If it was with another country I would have had to do a bit more
52 research but I would still feel comfortable, since I think it is very important to teach
53 children about other cultures, by engaging in, different activities that represent the
54 culture of other people. I consider that exploring multicultural education in preschool is
55 important to help overcome ethnic and racial barriers. It also provides the group of
56 children the opportunity to learn more about other cultures and help them improve
57 socialization behavior.

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Interview Analysis

Categories	Answers
Strategies	<p>Appendix B, lines 22-27: There were several situations, from learning to sing a song in an African dialect, viewing actual photos of children of the same age in the school context, exporting materials and creating African masks, conversations with moments of sharing (individual presentations and singing songs) using Skype we were able to discover Malawi in the world map and learn interesting things about the country (language, type of housing, clothing, food, customs and habits).</p> <p>Appendix C, lines 29-31: Up to now and it has been a few months that we did the project, they still talk about the chocolate salami that the children from Portugal sent with the ingredients and the receipt.</p> <p>Appendix B, line 30-32: All the tools used were always very well planned and implemented, there was always a wide range of strategies and through them was given to the children the opportunity to get closer and best of another reality.</p> <p>Appendix C, lines 41-44: Through the tools (literature, music and art) we were able to explore some similarities and differences among the Malawian and Portuguese culture in an exciting learning way. Having the opportunity to work with a multicultural project helped the children learn and compare by seeing and doing.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Benefits for the children</p>	<p>Appendix B, line 9: It was a very enriching project for both groups.</p> <p>Appendix C, lines 10-12: This project provided teachers and children from 2 different countries (Malawi and Portugal) an experience to share cultural values and social interaction.</p> <p>Appendix B, lines 10-11: The children involved a lot in their research in their curiosities and enjoyed all learning with enthusiasm.</p> <p>Appendix C, lines 14-17: This project helped strengthen multicultural education and raise cultural awareness; it gave the children the opportunity to learn some Portuguese and Malawian words as well as compare and contrast the two countries values.</p> <p>Appendix B, lines 16-18: The discovery of another country and another continent so different from ours provided the children with great moments of learning, sharing, respect and solidarity.</p> <p>Appendix C, lines 21-23: The children loved the idea and most of all it was very exciting for them to learn from a live experience by seeing the schools that were from another country, by interacting with them and learning new material.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Teacher's understanding of multicultural education</p>	<p>Appendix B, lines 39: It required a lot of research.</p>

	<p>Appendix B, lines 37-38: I felt very supported by the intern's participation with the group and me, since we were getting to know your country.</p> <p>Appendix C, lines 54-57: I consider that exploring multicultural education in preschool is important to help overcome ethnic and racial barriers. It also provides the group of children the opportunity to learn more about other cultures and help them improve socialization behavior.</p>
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APPENDIX E

SCHOOL AUTHORIZATION DOCUMENTS



Instituto Superior de
Educação e Ciências

DECLARAÇÃO e PEDIDO DE AUTORIZAÇÃO

Eu, Inês Mendes Erse Alves, aluna do Instituto Superior de Educação e Ciências (ISEC) a frequentar o Mestrado de Qualificação para a Docência em Educação Pré-escolar e Ensino do 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico, encontrando-me a defender o projeto “Nós e o Malawi”, que no ano letivo 2014/2015 desenvolvi no vosso colégio em tempo de estágio. Venho por este meio pedir a vossa autorização, para poder utilizar o nome do colégio na parte do desenvolvimento, em que descrevo as experiências realizadas no contexto de sala durante a implementação do projeto.

Agradeço, desde já, a atenção e disponibilidade dispensada,

Cumprimentos,

Inês Erse Alves

AUTORIZAÇÃO

Eu, _____,

(Nome completo do responsável legal da instituição)

(cargo na instituição),

autorizo o uso de nome e imagem da Instituição

(nome da instituição)

localizada em _____.

(morada da instituição)

Para efeitos de utilização no desenvolvimento da defesa do projeto “Nós e o Malawi” que será apresentado pela aluna Inês Mendes Erse Alves no Instituto Superior de Educação e Ciências (ISEC), onde frequenta o Mestrado de Qualificação para a Docência em Educação Pré-escolar e Ensino do 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico.

_____, ____/____/____

(local)

(assinatura do representante da instituição)