SPANISHKID: A WEBSITE ON DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL LEARNING IN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

A high percentage of immigrant students¹ and the introduction of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are two relevant facts, which are widely present in most schools nowadays. The aim of this paper is to present the process of creation of a website (Spanishkid), which aims at developing intercultural learning for schools on the Internet. With this purpose, the paper gives a general view on the scarcity of educational materials on antiracism and, furthermore, explores the attractiveness of ICT—as well as its potential for the teaching-learning process—as to enhance multicultural attitudes in the surely challenging, but also enriching experience of teaching in diverse school settings.

Keywords: intercultural education, antiracism, website resources, Information and Communication Technologies.

1. Introduction

Our society is currently undergoing many changes and these, inevitably, affect the field of education. In today's Spanish high school classrooms, two striking aspects can be found. First, an increased ethnic diversity, with 1324001 foreigners nowadays legally living in Spain (3.24% of the total population, out of the 2001 census, the most current one) (see Anuario Estadístico de Extranjería, 2002²), and second, the not yet fully extended use of Information and Communication Technologies (Castells, 2000).

Spain has a recent history of immigration, namely after the 1980s, and consequently there is a growth of new socioeducational challenges (Rubal Rodríguez, X. & Pérez Domínguez, S., 1999; Santos Rego & Pérez Domínguez, 2001; Vez Jeremías, Fernández Tilve & Pérez Domínguez, 2002; Pérez Domínguez, 2004). Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of educational material adapted to this sociocultural reality. Moreover, it is also known that throughout Europe high levels of ignorance about minorities, fuelled by misinformation and myth, contribute to stereotypical and racist ideas amongst young people (Gaine, 2000). We believe that it is necessary to combat racism and xenophobia from different fronts, mainly from schools. Thus, in this paper we present one of the results of a Comenius 2 project ['EUROKID: Developing Intercultural and Anti-racist Learning for Schools on the Internet’ (86678-CP-2000-1-UK-COMENIUS-C2)], i.e. the creation of a website, called Spanishkid,

¹ Spanish Roma, certainly, are not immigrants but Spaniards. However, they are the less integrated ethnic minority group in the Spanish Society as a whole (social, cultural, educational and economically speaking).
² By continent, mainly from Europe (35.56%), America (28.75%), Africa (27.70%) and Asia (7.91%). From Oceania only a 0.08%. By nationality, mainly from Morocco (282432 persons), Ecuador (115301 persons), Britain (90091 persons), Colombia (71238 persons) and Germany (65823 persons). By Autonomous region, they are mainly living in Catalonia (328461 persons), Madrid (272692), Andalusia (163942), Valencia (138421), Canary Islands (92149) and the Balearic Islands (60779). Most are men (55.21%) and most 16 years old or less (82.61%)
which addresses intercultural and anti-racist education in Spain and aims at developing intercultural and antiracist learning for schools on the Internet.

In short, Spanishkid is a website (www.spanishkid.org) for high school students aiming at a pacific ethnocultural coexistence. As we said, this website is part of a transnational project called ‘Eurokid’ (www.eurokid.org), which in turn is based on the anti-racist website ‘Britkid’ (www.britkid.org). Britkid is a website about race and racism that was finalist in the ‘2000 Race in the Media Awards Competition’ of the Commission for Racial Equality, and which also received the Website of the Month Award in Internet Monthly Magazine, in June 1999.

Spanishkid was born inspired by Britkid, and after the perceived need to present and reflect upon the situations and adjustments of different communities in social, cultural, educational and economical contact in Spain. A web-based resource was considered as the best means to teach about racism and anti-racism, as well as about cultural differences and similarities. In the present paper, we focus on the objectives, content and research base of Spanishkid.

2. Objectives

The general purpose of Spanishkid was (and still is) to produce an educational and cultural resource useable in Spanish schools and to develop innovative pedagogical approaches at classroom level, promoting mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue between people from different sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds living in Spain. The project in general, and Spanishkid in particular, consequently addresses the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Spanish present society, such as the Roma (Pérez Domínguez, 1999), the position of refugees, anti-semitism, linguistic variety and the growth on non-christian religious minorities, and the challenges all this represents in the third millennium.

The research question of the project was as follows: how can Information and Communication Technologies be used to bring some intercultural dialogue into the classroom and into our students’ consciousness? And, thus, the specific objectives were the following: first, to develop an attractive website which addresses issues of conflict, difference and diversity in today’s Spain, and, second, to use the advantages of the Internet to make an engaging resource.

3. Content of the website

The website has three main parts: the characters, the serious issues pages and the teachers’ stuff. But, the content of the Spanish website is mainly based on the creation of nine characters who interact among each other about present multicultural issues. In order to create the website various factors have been considered. First, stereotyping has been avoided, second, the design of the Spanish website has been appropriate to the national and cultural imagery and representation (Brown, 2003), and third, language levels have been kept simple in order to encourage website accessibility.

3 Another participant country in the Eurokid project was Sweden, whose website is: www.swedkid.org
As the main target audience of the website are adolescents, the Spanish website includes nine teenagers representing the biggest minorities in Spain: a Basque, a Castilian, a Catalan, a Croat, a Gambian, a Galician, a Moroccan, a Peruvian and a Roma. The characters provide a picture of various young people, their friends, family, religion, music, school, etc., and the prejudice they meet in their everyday lives. Table 1 below shows the nine characters of Spanishkid.

Table 1. Nine characters created for the Spanish site.

4. Research base of the project

In order to create the content of the website (dialogues and the serious issues pages) different research tools were used. These are the following: questionnaires\(^4\) given to the majority ethnicity in Spanish high school classrooms; questionnaires given to the minority ethnicity in Spanish high school classrooms; and, questionnaires given to adult immigrants.

The first and second questionnaires were given to high school students (11-18 years old) in Tarragona and in Palma de Mallorca. The criterion for selecting these high schools was to ensure a proper administration and control of the questionnaires and supervision by the two Spanish researchers. A total of 500 questionnaires have been distributed and completed. For the interviews, a total of 34 people were interviewed. Interviews were either recorded or notes were taken while the interview was carried out, and these lasted between 20 minutes

\(^4\) We did not include them here for space reasons, but if anyone is interested in seeing the questionnaires’ model, please let us know.
and two hours approximately. The third means of research was the direct observation of high school students’ behaviour in their own schools.

The content of the questionnaires, interviews and classroom observation was analysed as follows. First, lists of all the different topics included in the questionnaires, interviews and classroom observation were drawn up and included under general categories. Second, examples of the most recurrent topics were compiled and these were processed in a frequency system list. These frequency lists provided a range of important issues presented by the respondents. Finally, the topics with the highest percentage of occurrence were included in the dialogues and in the main issues’ web page. Therefore, the content of the questionnaires and interviews has provided feedback, background information and quotations for the Spanish characters to be created, although the anonymity of the informants has been kept. The main aim of these tools has been to enrich the dialogues and content of the website. Some of these findings include the fact that high school children had to be withdrawn from classrooms for remedial teaching; boys and girls undergoing different experiences and exclusions; doubts as to whether to keep the mother tongue and the existence of unspoken racism in schools (Gaine et al., 2003; Gaine & Weiner, 2005). These findings present general similarities with the research data obtained in the Swedish context (Hällgren & Weiner, 2001; see also www.swedkid.org).

As stated above, some information obtained from the questionnaires was included in the website in the form of experiences and also in a direct way. The following example concerns a high school student from Morocco who had just arrived at a high school in Tarragona, Spain. Her way of making friends was getting the lowest grades, misbehaving in class and thus being admired by most of her classmates. This instance is shown in the website in the following dialogue:

"Who does well at school?"

**Edurne:** Grades again.

**Luci:** How many have you failed?

**Ivan:** None, of course, but have you heard about Yong Ha, that Korean girl? She's failed all of them! Except gym, the easy one.

**Edurne:** Ah, but she's so cool! She said something to the maths teacher last week that had us all really laughing. He couldn't do anything!
Ivan: So, that's funny, is it? To make the whole class laugh and be rude to a teacher? I don't get the joke.

Edurne: Don't be so serious.

Ivan: Don't be so serious? Do you think my parents brought me here so I could waste my time in school being rude to teachers? How come, that's cool?

Edurne: Well, it's what everyone else does....

Luci: Including Yong Ha. It seems... I don't understand it -her parents get really mad at her if she doesn't do well.

Edurne: I think she just wants to fit in.

Ivan: How do you mean?

Edurne: Well, I know when she first came here she was bullied a lot, people called her names, made fun of the way she talked. When she did well in class that made some people bully her even more. I reckon she stopped working so hard because she wanted to be liked by the others. She wanted to be like the rest of the class.

Table 2. Content of questionnaires, given to minority ethnicity in Spanish High School classrooms, included in the website (adapted to dialogue).

The experiences described by the interviewees were also used in the website dialogues. For instance, a Moroccan teacher, studying at the University of the Balearic Islands, and who routinely wears a chador, recounted having attended a town hall in order to seek some administrative information and having been asked if she knew how to read or write in her own language (interview, November 2001). This attitude of superiority towards immigrants appears in Spanishkid. The following example illustrates the case of a character wearing a chador and being assumed to have no education:
Ivan: Some people are going to get a shock... Rashida told me this, okay... You know I said her mother doesn't wear a hijab? Well, her aunt does. Her aunt came into school last week and she was sent to see the caretaker because they thought she was a cleaner. Big mistake! She's our new English teacher.

Maru: Assumptions... So Rashida's aunt could call the person who sent her to the caretaker stupid in at least three languages!

Table 3. Interview’s content included in the Spanish site.

Another example taken from the interviewees’ experiences is illustrated by the website character Burama, the Gambian boy, who everybody assumes to be an immigrant and therefore unable to speak English:
Isabel: Did you hear these tourists in the café? I guess they're speaking Dutch, or maybe German.

Maruxa: Hmm, I don't know really. I can hardly hear them. In any case, from the way they look they're obviously from the north of Europe - tall, blond, pale...

Isabel: They might be from North America. There's lots of people of different kinds there. Still, in that case they'll probably speak English.

Maruxa: No idea really. I wish I could speak and understand more than I do. We've been learning English for months but I can still only say some phrases and I can hardly understand when the teacher talks to me.

Isabel: What do you think, Burama? You didn't say anything. Have you any idea what language they were speaking?

Burama: Yes.

Maruxa & Isabel: Yes???

Burama: Yes.

Isabel: But you're from Gambia. I mean... well, I don't mean...

Maruxa: She means that we didn't know you could understand other languages. I suppose, well, er....

Isabel: Okay, well, I admit it. Sorry, I guess I thought that since your parents are from a poor country... I'm doing it again aren't I?

Burama: Well, sometimes assumptions are very dangerous. I heard that people from Galicia and Andalusia are poorly educated. I mean... I don't mean...

Isabel: Yes, okay we all assume things, we only know a certain side of someone I suppose, or we think we do.

Maruxa: So, Burama, are you going to help us out here? What language are they speaking?

Burama: They were speaking English, although I'm pretty sure English isn't their first language. I think they are from Sweden. In Sweden, English is a second language, just like in Gambia.
Isabel: Oh! I didn't know that. Did you Maruxa?

Maruxa: Nope. Learnt something new today and I'm not even in school.

Table 4. Content of questionnaires, given to adult immigrants, included in the website (adapted to the dialogue).

Ultimately, as stated above, another means of research was the direct observation of teenagers’ behaviour in their schools and one of the most outstanding facts observed were the different rates of integration of immigrant students in the high school depending on whether they were girls or boys, and on their nationality. Thus, from the information gathered from the observers it seemed that boys had an easier way of making new friends through playing sports and football in the playground during the main school break. By doing this, the new students were introduced to others in the school. On the contrary, immigrant girls found it much more difficult to make friends, since it was common for girls’ breaks to be spent sitting and chatting with established friends, making social interaction for newcomers more difficult, especially those not fluent in Catalan or Spanish. Consequently, this pattern of behaviour is also introduced in the Spanish website:

Urpi: Let me tell you, even if you speak Spanish some people will still reject you. So what's been happening with your sister?

Mohamed: Well, there's the name-calling, and they won't play with her, she's always on her own at playtimes.

Urpi: I think it's worse for girls sometimes. You boys are always playing football at break and the girls sit and talk. If no-one talks to you it's horrible. I used to want to run home and cry sometimes.

Isabel: I tried to talk to that new Moroccan girl the other day, but the trouble is she doesn't speak much Spanish. I suppose she felt people were rejecting her but it wasn't that, we just didn't have much we could say... It's just easier for me to talk to Maruxa.

Mohamed: Well I hope you never end up somewhere where people have to make an effort to include you in things.

Isabel: Me too, I know I don't really know what it's like, but Maruxa and I did decide we'd go and sit with that Moroccan girl and have lunch with her, even if we can't understand her much.

Table 5. Content of classroom observation included in the website.
The first drafts of dialogues written from the information collected from the interviews, questionnaires and classroom observation were tested in high school centres and shown to experts in multiculturalism.

5. Concluding remarks

We would like to conclude by saying that:

1. All the data collected from the interviews, questionnaires and classroom observation has been used to create dialogues on the most significant experiences, attitudes, behaviours and feelings immigrants living in Spain might experience. Therefore, a genuine reflection of Spanish multicultural society has been created, tackled and explored in the website (Gaine, Hägglren, Pérez & Salazar, 2005).

2. The creation of the website links three different areas: technology, antiracism and education. At the same time, Information and Communication Technologies were developed as a (hopefully) well-integrated pedagogical tool (Hägglren, 2006).

3. In the high schools where this material has been tested, teachers have shown their acceptance and willingness to use new material aimed at working on issues of difference, due, mainly, to the high percentage of ethnic diversity in the Spanish high school classrooms (Pérez Domínguez & Gaine, 2001).

4. All in all, modestly, we consider that this website is a useful classroom and teachers resource pack with texts and activities for practical anti-racist and multicultural teaching in Spanish high schools. Since the current Spain’s multicultural picture changes day after day, we would like to have the resources to update and to improve Spanishkid soon. Indeed, we are open to suggestions and to collaborative work!

5. And last, not least, we would very much like to give our THANKS to all those who made it possible this website: interviewed people, those who filled in/answered our (exhausting) questionnaires/interviews (immigrants and Spaniards). Thanks also to teachers, to students… and to the rest of the Eurokid project colleagues —who were ‘an enriching multicultural experience’ and an honour to work with too!

References


**Internet web pages**


Eurokid (2004): [www.eurokid.org](http://www.eurokid.org)

EVALUATION OF SPANISHKID
APPENDIX 1
(Questionnaires given to students).

What you think of Spaniskid?

1. Things about you:
   a) Your age ............
   b) Male/Female
   c) Ethnicity or culture .................................................................................................
   d) Religion .....................................................................................................................
   e) Place of birth (country, region, etc.) ........................................................................
   f) Where do you live? (country, region, etc.) .................................................................
   g) If you are a student, name and address of your school (optional) ..............................

2. From what you have seen of the website, please tell us...
   a) One thing you would change .......................................................................................
   b) One thing you like ........................................................................................................
   c) One thing you don’t like ............................................................................................... 
   d) One thing you’ll remember most ..................................................................................

3. The characters:
   a) Which character(s) did you look at and why? ............................................................
   b) What did you learn from this character(s)? ............................................................... 
   c) Is there one question you’d like to ask any of the characters? 
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d) Is there anything you liked or didn’t like about the characters’ pictures?

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4. Surfing’ through the website…
Do you have any ideas to make the website easier or clearer to use?

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5. The dialogues:

a) Which dialogue(s) did you look at?

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c) Which do you prefer, **these pages** (from the ‘Serious Issues’) or **other** kinds of pages (i.e. from the dialogues, presentation and data about each character, presentation of the relatives, etc.)? *(PLEASE RING THE APPROPRIATE).*

7. **Your ideas:**

a) How do you rate this website as a way of learning about racism, diversity & culture? *(PLEASE RING ONE)*
   - good
   - okay
   - not very good

b) Having used this website, does it make you want to look at other websites also with antiracist or multicultural stuff? *(PLEASE RING)*
   - yes
   - maybe
   - no

c) Has this website changed any of your attitudes or ideas?

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d) Do you have any other comments?

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**Thank you very much for your cooperation!**
APPENDIX 2

(Questionnaires given to teachers).

QUESTIONNAIRE TO TEACHERS

It would be most helpful for us to know your point of view as a teacher about Spanishkid.

1. Your personal data:

1. What subject(s) do you teach? ..............................................................
2. Your age ....
3. Male/Female
4. Ethnicity or culture  ....................................................................................
5. Religion ..............................................................................................
6. Place of birth (country, region, etc.) .........................................................
7. Where do you live nowadays? (country, region, etc.) .................................
8. Name and address of the school where you teach (optional) ..........................

2. The context in which the website was used:

9. What was the age of class? ........................................................................
10. In which area(s) of the curriculum was it used? .........................................
11. How long did the class spend there? ...........................................................
12. Have they used it before, outside the school? Yes No
13. How familiar are your students in working with computers for learning? A lot A bit None
14. Did they work as a class in small groups as individuals?
15. To what extent were they directed about what to ‘visit’ on the website?

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16. What was done in the classroom in terms of introduction, planning activities based on the
website, follow-up activity, etc?

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17. Did you or the class print any parts of the website? Yes No

3. Your reactions to the website. We’d really like any comments you have in relation to:

18. Ease of use for the pupils.

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19. Ease of use / attractiveness as a classroom resource for you.
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20. Usefulness to raise the topic of racism / diversity / respect for others.
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21. Effectiveness in teaching about antiracism.
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22. Effectiveness in language acquisition (either in first or second language).
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23. Impact on ethos of class about racism.
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25. Any pupils for whom it was less or more effective (e.g. minorities?, girls/boys?, different learning styles or rhythms...?).
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26. Did you find this web a good information resource for yourself?
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27. Do you consider that, generally speaking, the web / Internet is an advantage or a barrier to teach about ethnic/cultural diversity?
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28. Any additional comments will be welcomed.
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Thank you very much for your cooperation!