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STEPS TO TRANSFORM A MULTICULTURAL SCHOOL INTO A PLURICULTURAL SETTING

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STEPS TO TRANSFORM A MULTICULTURAL SCHOOL INTO A PLURICULTURAL SETTING

ABSTRACT

The implementation of a European Document has different steps to pass. In this case, it is the implementation of the European Language Portfolio (ELP), it starts with culture normalization in a classroom of the 1st year in a rural school from Castilla-Leon. The multicultural setting is characterized by a 53% of immigration and minority ethnics.

It emphasizes the fundamental attitudes that must to have a school community (teachers, families and environment) to develop a pluricultural setting.

This cultural normalization is applying a project called “The Cultural Boxes” to build up a pluricultural environment by the knowledge of the different cultures that perform a classroom, before to centralize the view in the language process (it is the main objective of the ELP).

Through this project, the school starts to investigate about some pluricultural possibilities for their society and to include the ELP in their curriculum as a way to develop this transformation to a pluricultural setting, giving importance to the different cultures (and languages) that form part of the school.

KEY WORDS

Culture, ELP, Europe, European, implementation, multicultural, nation, nationality, pluricultural, plurilingual, Portfolio, racism, steps, tolerance, xenophobia

I. INTRODUCTION

To apply a European Learning Document, as the European Language Portfolio (ELP), in a school you have to follow some steps. One of these steps is to settle down the bases to create a pluricultural school and an intercultural learning.

These bases have many conditions to be developed properly. The cooperation of the teachers and the families, refreshing the perspective of the different cultures and their thoughts are essential.

This transformation is to try to create a better future for our children, a future with more tolerance. Problems as the racism, xenophobia, intolerance and unvalued to the different ethnics and cultures is a problem deeper and deeper in our society. In Spain, there were 5,663,525 of immigrants (12% of the population) in 2010, as the National Statistic Institute published.

But, these innovations are not only designed to accept the difference in others, but also to get an inner change. They are thought to develop a better opinion about our own cultures, and to understand that they are not worse or better than the culture of the others, but it is worthy of respect and of learning of it.

The following project shows a way to implement the ELP in a rural school with a 53% of pupils from foreign countries and minority ethnics in Castilla-Leon, Spain. This method performs a visual strategy to normalize the pluricultural environment in a class with 3 years old children; and not only to normalize it, but to understand the situation as an advantage to learn and have fun.

This implementation was applied by a training experience teacher from her 4th year of degree. So, it was subject to the characteristics of the classroom and the main teacher recommendations and the possibilities that she offered.

The time of this application was from March the 8th to May the 10th, so at the end of the school year.

II. OBJETIVES/AIMS OF THIS WORK

1. The aims of the CEFR and ELP

As we can identify in The Council of Europe guidelines of Language Policy in Europe: “*Common European Framework of Reference for Language: Learning, teaching, assessment- Language Policy Division*” (from now on CEFR or CEF) the main objectives that preserve the adoption of common action in the cultural field

The preamble to R(98)6 reaffirms the political objectives of its actions in the field of modern languages:

- To equip all Europeans for the challenges of intensified international mobility and closer co-operation not only in education, culture and science but also in trade and industry.
- To promote mutual understanding and tolerance, respect for identities and cultural diversity through more effective international communication.
- To maintain and further develop the richness and diversity of European cultural life through greater mutual knowledge of national and regional languages, including those less widely taught.
- To meet the needs of a multilingual and multicultural Europe by appreciably developing the ability of Europeans to communicate with each other across linguistic and cultural boundaries, which requires a sustained, lifelong effort to be encouraged, put on an organised footing and financed at all levels of education by the competent bodies.
- To avert the dangers that might result from the marginalisation of those lacking the skills necessary to communicate in an interactive Europe.

(Council of Europe 2001, p. 3).

They create the schedule to develop an intercultural society. This society has to grow from the Education, and it has being applied from the teachers.

One of the projects that preserve this intercultural society is the European Language Portfolio. It follows some specific references to the Council of Europe to create a multilingual school:

The ELP reflects the Council of Europe's concern with:

- 1.1. the deepening of mutual understanding among citizens in Europe;
- 1.2. respect for diversity of cultures and ways of life;
- 1.3. the protection and promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity;
- 1.4. the development of plurilingualism as a life-long process;
- 1.5. the development of the language learner;
- 1.6. the development of the capacity for independent language learning;
- 1.7. transparency and coherence in language learning programmes;
- 1.8. the clear description of language competence and qualifications in order to facilitate mobility.

(European Language Portfolio. Principles and Guidelines. p. 2)

Every point of both documents chases the same society: multicultural society and intercultural understanding and tolerance.

ELP is one of the educational projects that the APEE develops to this end. Comenius, Erasmus, Grundtvig, Leonardo Da Vinci, eTwinning, etc. are some permanent learning programs; Pestalozzi program of the Council of Europe, Europass, European Shared Treasure, Portfolio are some other initiatives and programs.

III. JUSTIFICATION

1. Teachers awareness

The teachers' awareness is one of the most important points to develop a project of intercultural education. They have to start to work hard if they want to apply any intercultural process of change.

They are part of a society that doesn't give them the prestige appropriate to their role, currently. Not only economic prestige, but they haven't got social prestige. This undervalue affects them to not perform far away from the compulsory curriculum.

But, if they have a proper awareness they can change the future, because they apply the tolerance, the live together, etc in the future: in the pupils.

2. Contexts:

a. Teachers

This school was unconscious of the ways to develop an intercultural education. They were being aware of their school is multicultural but they didn't apply any project to transform this multicultural school in a pluricultural school with intercultural characteristics.

They only developed some specific activities as the Peace Day. But, when I started to apply my project some of them were conscious that they can do many projects to create an intercultural school, one of them is the ELP.

Then the Direction of the school asked to the national representation of the ELP in Spain and a person in charge of the Regional Administration. They explained the advantages to introduce the ELP in the school.

b. School society

The school is placed in a rural area of a province where the agricultural and livestock sectors are very important. Therefore, there are many families that work in these sectors (agricultural sector mainly). It implies that the holiday period is different of the most common holiday period (between the months of June to August, as the holiday period in schools), because most of the crops are cereals. So, the families take their holidays in the

winter months, after Christmas and the first period of spring. It affects the learning of the immigrant pupils, because they go on holiday with their families.

To solve these absentees the Main Teacher of the school applies a control: the families have to inform of the period of absentee and, also, the students have to prepare some homework that the pupils do not to lose them learning rhythm.

This sector has a percentage of immigrant workers. Cesar Talegón Herrero and Laura Martín Ramos explained in their article “Mercado Laboral, Formación y Población Inmigrante en el Medio Rural de Castilla y León” in Castilla-Leon the immigrant workers in these sectors were 6.9%.

In this school there are a 53% of immigrant students and minority ethnics. Morocco is one of the immigrants’ countries. So, as the “International Religious Freedom Report 2004” (2005) of the USA State Department report confirmed, the 96.3% of the citizens of Morocco are Muslims. It implies some adaptations and cares for these pupils.

The canteen offers meals without pork and in Infant Education has a very important control with the breaks, because the children aren’t conscious what is made from pork. Also, in the birthday celebration ask that avoid the titbit with this to the families.

IV. GROUNDS/THEORIES

1. What is Pluricultural? Linguistic Policy

Also, in CERF document that I referred before, we can read the concepts of differences among Multilingual and multicultural and plurilingual and pluricultural associated to intercultural education

Plurilingualism differs from multilingualism, which is the knowledge of a number of languages, or the co-existence of different languages in a given society. Multilingualism may be attained by simply diversifying the languages on offer in a particular school or educational system, or by encouraging pupils to learn more than one foreign language, or reducing the dominant position of English in international communication. Beyond this, the plurilingual approach emphasizes the fact that as an individual person's experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact. In different situations, a person can call flexibly upon different parts of this competence to achieve effective communication with a particular interlocutor. For instance, partners may switch from one language or dialect to another, exploiting the ability of each to express themselves in one language and to understand the other; or a person may call upon the knowledge of a number of languages to make sense of a text, written or even spoken, in a previously 'unknown' language, recognizing words from a common international store in a new guise. Those with some knowledge, even slight, may use it to help those with none to communicate by mediating between individuals with no common language. In the absence of a mediator, such individuals may nevertheless achieve some degree of communication by bringing the whole of their linguistic equipment into play, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment experimenting with alternative forms of expression in different languages or dialects, exploiting paralinguistics (mime,

gesture, facial expression, etc.) and radically simplifying their use of language. (Council of Europe 2001, p. 4).

The meaning of pluriculturalism has an association with the term multilingualism:

Also, as we can discover this relation in the same report of the CERF

Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw. (Council of Europe 2001, p. 168).

This definition associates the pluricultural and plurilingualism with the intercultural interaction, including the experience of several cultures.

It is one of the gaps that some of the Spanish Education has: interaction with several cultures that is including in the different classes. The presence of different personal features, although by gender, social or cultural level, has to be used by the teacher to treat the diversity, making an environment of relationships dominated by the respect and the acceptance of the differences (BOE 2007)

But, what about of the different cultures that create a class?

In one hand, it often occurs that there is one interaction between cultures: English and Spanish cultures.

And, in the other hand, there are two kinds of citizens: immigrants and foreigners. If you are come from a country as France, USA, Canada or England you are a foreigner; but, if you are from Morocco, Romania, Turkey, South Africa, or China you are an immigrant. This is a condition performed from the status that each country has. If they are from the 1st world, they are foreigners and if they are from the 2nd or 3rd world, they are immigrants.

It is a big difference that we have to destroy. We have to transform the negative meaning of the word “immigrant”, and not to associate this negative thought to the people that comes from poor countries.

In the case of foreign children in our classrooms, we have to change this problem in an opportunity to learn. It isn't only for the pupils, but for the teachers too.

The teachers have a big role in this change. Everybody has prejudices about everything, more or less deep and positive or negative. But, teachers have to delete these prejudices out of their minds, and see their pupils with their own characteristics (strengths and weakness); and one of this strengths is to know about the different cultures.

We have to see a different culture (gender, county, language, traditions, family, meals, songs...) as an opportunity.

2. Citizenship. Tolerance At School

As the Cambridge Dictionary said, the tolerance is a “willingness to accept behaviour and beliefs that are different from your own, although you might not agree with or approve of them”.

This principle is one of the basic characteristics that the citizenship has. Europe is a melting pot of people, nationalities, and worlds: it is a melting pot of cultures. And one of the duties that the Education has is to teach in a real society. And our society is intercultural.

But, to be tolerant with the cultures that are among you, you have to know about them. Knowledge is the most important weapon to fight against intolerant things or actions that grow from the racism, xenophobia, etc.

From the school we have to offer this tool to our pupils. But we have to be conscious of our prejudices, to prevent damage from the ignorance.

Also, the school has a very narrow relationship with the most immediate society, shaped by the families. Therefore this environment based on the tolerance has to being supply from the participation of the families in the school context; the teachers have to be a way of dialogue and cooperation with all the families, giving them possibilities to have this cooperative attitude.

During my training experience I saw some attitudes without this tolerance perspective. Talking with these people I understood that these comments appear from this gap of knowledge. Throw this project, the knowledge clarifies some of the prejudices.

3. Self-Assessment. ELP

There is an important fact in the Education process: self-assessment. We want that our pupils can reflect about themselves, about their learning process. We want that our pupils will be conscious who they are.

To develop a proper academic self-assessment, our pupils must to have solid foundation about their own cultures and the cultures among them.

It is essential that the pupils know who they are (as individual, as a member of a group, etc.), before to understand what they know.

So, a previous step before the European Language Portfolio could be the project of “The cultural boxes”:

The ELP is a way to develop a self-assessment of the knowledge in several cultures, and “The cultural boxes” provides a light to view the characteristics that perform a culture. “The cultural boxes” has a colour code that, if the school apply ELP, will be the same colour-culture.

The ELP is “a personal document promoted by the Council of Europe, where the learners of a language- in the school or outside- can register their own language and cultural learning experiences and reflect about them”. (APEE)

The Council of Europe explains in its guide “Guide to compiling the ELP” how it is including the self-assessment in ELP

The Language Passport

The Language Passport provides an overview of the individual’s proficiency in different languages at a given point in time. It is expected that the learner will update the language passport at regular intervals, to reflect progress in language learning and the acquisition of new intercultural experiences.

All ELP Language Passports should include the Self-assessment Grid from the Common European Framework in its entirety as a basic point of reference. The one exception to this general rule are ELPs for very young learners, but in such cases the self-assessment grid should be made available to teachers, parents and other stakeholders in a guide or information note.

(...)

The overview, based on the Self-assessment Grid is defined in terms of the skills (Listening, Reading, Spoken Production, Spoken Interaction, Writing) and the common reference levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) in the Common European Framework of Reference. It allows the user to record information on partial and specific competences.

Also, in the Language Biography we can find some characteristics about it.

The Language Biography

The Language Biography facilitates the learner's involvement in planning, reflecting upon and assessing his or her learning process and progress.

The Language Biography contains goal-setting and self-assessment checklists that expand on the summary descriptors contained in the Self-assessment Grid.

(...)

The Language Biography also encourages the learner to state what he/she can do in each language and to include information on linguistic, cultural and learning experiences gained in and outside formal educational contexts. It is organized to promote plurilingualism, i.e. the development of proficiency in a number of languages.

(Council of Europe 2001, p. 4)

4. Offering a Positive Intercultural-Perspective

Another important point to introduce and develop a new knowledge of a culture is to give a positive view.

Nowadays, the media affords to us many undermine ideas about the most vulnerable groups. These ideas leak into the popular opinion and they harm to the members of those groups. This is the case of the members of the different cultures that are undervalued or rejected because a generalisation from one of this news or prejudices based on a previous experience.

It causes that we apply this ideas to our pupils, and, also, the pupils from other countries feel this difference as a negative characteristic, having a reject against their roots and origins.

We have to give a positive view and some points in common between the cultures. It is not only the differences that we have to show, we have to provide the common characteristic also; it is to explain that we are different but we are similar too.

We can reflect in the origin of some inventions that we use day by day. And, also, we can guide them to discover that it isn't anything new in relation to immigrant or emigrant; they can see that the intercultural periods appeared many years ago: Al-Andalus, African and American colonies, etc.

And these intercultural periods provided us many of our actual characteristics: drains, many meals, terms, buildings and architecture, sculpture and picture, etc.

V. METHOD SELECTED

1. Implementation of an European Document (ELP)

I followed these steps to implement a European Document (ELP) in a class of Infant Education.

First of all, I checked how many cultures I had in my classroom: four countries four cultures (I could choose the gipsy culture as another box). Spain, Morocco, Romania and England were the cultures that formed part of my class.

I covered four big boxes with four different colour papers: yellow, green, blue and red (they could be applying, if the class want to introduce the ELP-European Language Portfolio).

Each colour was going to represent one country and one culture. I had no time to vote to select each correspondence so I selected them (also, I prevented problems with disagreement).

Then I explained what these boxes were. They weren't simple boxes, they were similar to Christmas or birthday present; they were our culture presents. But these presents were empty because we had to fill them with culture things. The pupils were a bit disappointed when they discovered that they were empty boxes; I linked that will be very funny to know many things about our cultures.

The second step I followed was sending a letter asking for families help. In that letter I explained what the culture day was and how they could help us. Unfortunately, and as my teacher and me predicted, we had a very short help: only, one family lend us something about Spanish culture.

With this basic problem, I had to investigate and learn about these cultures on my own. But, that duty had a very big disadvantage: I have to speak about cultures that I have no idea (out of stereotypes or a minimum knowledge about them). So the investigation was longer and difficult: I had to compare some inputs don't give wrong information.

We started with a review: we remember what we had in the boxes.

The second cultural day, we learnt about Spain, because, as I explained before, a family lent to us some books, a DVD, an apron (of a typical dress) and a pair of craft castanets. I helped the pupil to explain what her presents were. I asked her about the apron and the castanets, always with yes or no questions, because she is very shy (and she had to explain it in front of her classmates).

We started with a review: we remember what we had in the boxes.

One of the most visual characteristic is the alphabet. Each language has a characteristic alphabet: Spanish has the “ñ”, Romanian has a different accent: “^”, English hasn’t got any accent and Arabic hasn’t got the Latin alphabet, it is the Arabic abjad. They recognized the Latin letters, and they were surprised when I showed the Arabic words, and it increased their interest.

We started with a review: we remember what we had in the boxes.

I introduced this point with the “Welcome Poster”: it is a poster with the word “welcome” in the four languages. We put it on the classroom door, to show that everybody is welcome.

We started with a review: we remember what we had in the boxes.

At the third session, my teacher told me that a good activity could to be put the names of the countries in the different language; so, I wrote four posters for each box with the name of the countries in each different colour (depending on the language). We did a review about the alphabets and their differences.

We started with a review: we remember what we had in the boxes.

That week was the “Castilla y León Day”, so, to profit it, I decided to show them some typical suits of their countries. Also, my classmate decided to dress with a typical suit of the region (she danced and singed some folksongs).

That activity was very interesting and they loved it, because I created some photos of them with their typical suits. Including in this activity Teddy Bear dressed as a Beefeater, to include England Culture.

We started with a review: we remember what we had in the boxes.

In the 6th session I showed the flags of each country and I explained the meanings of the colours. I told them where they can find flags. To Spain and Romania, I adapted the explanation, avoiding the word “blood” and substituting for “friendship” (as the Morocco flag).

Spain: Yellow for the fields, red for the friendship. Coat of arms with the four coats of arms, there is one for each ancient coat of arms.

Morocco: Red for the friendship and a green pentagonal star that represent the Muslim props.

Romania: Red for the friendship, blue for the sky and yellow for the fields.

England: St George’s cross. I explained the Great Britain flag, too. I show them that each symbol in this flag is a country that is include in Great Britain.

We started with a review: we remember what we had in the boxes.

Other characteristic that I gave them were the national anthems. I explained that there are some national anthems that have lyrics, others only have music and some have both; but, every country has one. Also, I told them when can heard the national anthems. Combine this activity we listen to an audio with the national anthems.

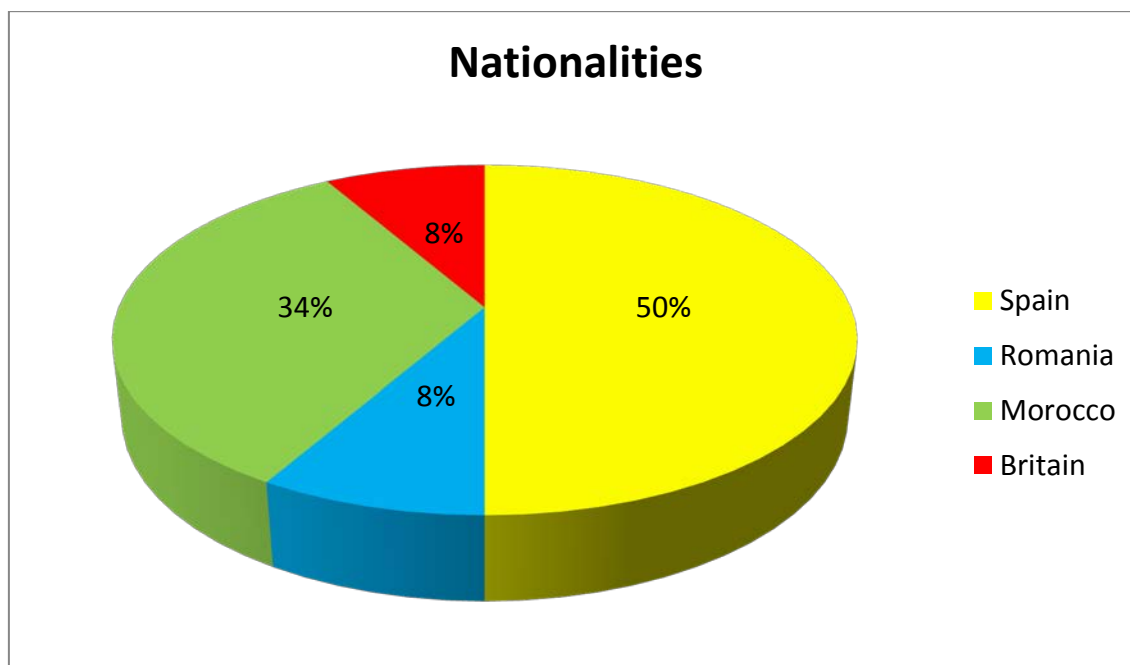
To finish my training experience and to finish my participations I gave them a photomontage with them dressing the typical suits. Also, we made a review of all the characteristics we learnt (common and different) checking the boxes.

Table 1: Implementation timeline

2. Setting analysis

My experience was in 3 years old classroom. It was my principal classroom during my training experience and where I applied the project of “The cultural boxes”.

The class is form by 11 students. There are four nationalities and into one of this there is a minority ethnic: it is the case of Spanish culture and two gipsy students.



Graphic 1 Nationality Percentages in the 3 years old class

Teddy Bear is the character that forms the British culture. He is an invented character that was included in my training experience for the English classes.

Being of use this character, I developed a personal situation similar to them. He came from a country far away from the school, and he couldn't speak or understand Spanish, and there are many things unusual for it.

I showed a typical situation of them and their families. They came from other country and everything is different to us: traditions, cultures, language ...

The ideal situation was that the families had an active participation during the project. I sent an informative letter to show them what we were going to do and asking for help. Only, one family gave us some elements from the Spanish culture. The main teacher advised me that the families didn't participate; the most of the cases of foreign families were the language barrier. The informative letter had a clear language and simple, but I think that if they usually have collaboration, they couldn't understand what we wanted from them.

3. Conclusions of the Research

Introduce this kind of project in a classroom with these pupils, and this diversity was hard. There were many obstacles to overcome.

First of all, I had to adjust my project in the time that the timetable has: after meeting times on Friday. I had to develop each session in 15 minutes, so we couldn't do any complementary activity to reinforce the new knowledge. Also, we could do some activities to take to their home: it is a way to catch the attention of the families. But I had to develop my project with a pre-established timetable and at the end of the year.

My training experience was from February 18th to May 10th, and I applied the project from March 8th to May 10th. It was a short period to develop properly my project. I only could do the first steps to build a pluricultural class with intercultural characteristics. We started to understand that every culture can live together if we live in tolerance.

I knew that I had a very short of time so, after verifying that I couldn't base the progress of the project in the families, I selected the most visual and attractive characteristics of each culture. One of the objectives was to catch the pupils' attention.

I think that this project was successful when I saw that every pupil accepted their nationalities and each one smiled when I spoke about it. Also, we had a pupil that didn't accept that has a double nationality; he didn't like say that he was Romanian. Day by day, we reminded him how lucky was. We told him that thanks for him we can learn many things about Romania. Finally, he was proud that to say: "the blue box is mine, because I am a Romanian". Each one smiled when we spoke about their countries, about their cultures.

This project affected to the 3 years old children lives and the school teaching style.

VI. FURTHER LIVE OF RESEARCH

Through this research I could apply my knowledge learnt during my degree. I developed and put into practice some of them.

It was a hard work for me, because it is a very different project in compare to the challenges that we can pass during the 4 years of Infant Education. Also, there is another difficulty to apply my competences in other language, not in my mother tongue.

An intensive four-month period helps me to discover how I can do researches and where my limits are.

After this research I can understand better what I did during my training experience. Also, to know what kind of prejudices I have and start to solve them.

I discover how important knowledge is and the importance to know more and more about the cultures are around us. Know and live these cultures are essential: “El fascismo se cura leyendo y el racismo se cura viajando” Miguel de Unamuno explains how to delete the racism; but nowadays we can fight against this discrimination way from our nearest society: school, neighbourhoods, association, jobs, etc. He talked about adults; we can create an intercultural future teaching the pupils from the first year of school. It is essential to develop it as early as we can.

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RESOURCES

- Cambridge Dictionary

APPENDIX

CEIP "Héroes de la Independencia"

11 de marzo de 2013

NUESTRAS CULTURAS

Hola familias

Os mandamos esta carta para informaros de que vamos a iniciar una actividad nueva: EL DÍA DE LAS CULTURAS.

En ella acercaremos las culturas que tenemos en el aula para que los niños y niñas las conozcan. Por tanto, necesitamos vuestra COLABORACIÓN. Podéis darles a los niños para que traigan CUALQUIER COSA que tenga relación con la cultura la que pertenecen: LIBROS, CUENTOS, MÚSICA, IMÁGENES, etc.

Muchas gracias de antemano por vuestra ayuda.

Chart 1: Informative document to ask for the family participation during the Culture's Days



Picture 1: The Cultural Boxes



Picture 2: Welcome poster



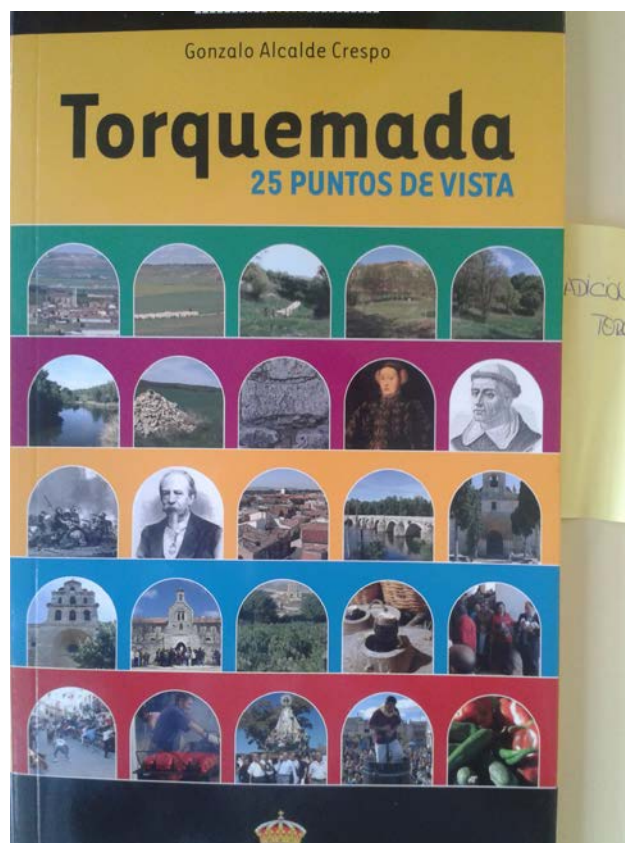
Picture 3: Labels with the name of the countries



Picture 4: Example of typical suit: England



Picture 5: Family collaboration: objects



Picture 6: Family collaboration: book (Example)