

## PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE CONTEXT OF TRADITIONAL MUSIC

Ivana Paula Gortan-Carlin

*Faculty of Educational Sciences, Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Pula,  
Republic of Croatia*

Marina Diković\*

*Faculty of Educational Sciences, Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Pula,  
Republic of Croatia*

**Abstract:** Future preschool teachers have an important role in acquisition of the intercultural competence in early childhood education and care. Study programs in higher education could provide a lot of opportunities to promote intercultural communication. In this research we analyzed and compared a model of Dionyssiou (2017) and his three parameters – the *process of creation* (the moment when music is created and when a person understands it), the *music event* (sharing the tradition among the members of the community) and the *sense of place* (the moment when music becomes a symbol of tradition and identity). The aim of this research was to analyze the early and preschool education study programs in the context of intercultural communication. A total of 964 syllabuses from all Croatian faculties were analyzed. The implementation of intercultural communication is observed in terms of learning outcomes and topics. The results show that a special place for intercultural communication belongs to the music syllabuses (N = 72) whose content can motivate students to preserve traditional and intercultural culture. Regarding the model of Dionyssiou (2017) learning outcomes mostly belong to the *music event* (N = 53), and to a *sense of place* (N = 29), but there are the fewest learning outcomes that belong to the *process of creation* (N = 26). The implications of these findings can be explained by the suggestion that in the 21st century, intercultural communication should be addressed more in early childhood education and care to nurture traditional music.

**Keywords:** Croatian higher education, early childhood education and care, future preschool teachers, intercultural communication, music syllabuses.

### INTRODUCTION

Children learn and acquire competencies from their preschool teachers and the environment at the beginning of their education. Preschool teachers have

an important role in acquisition of the intercultural competence and have to be competent in the promotion and elevation of intercultural communication in early and preschool education. Study programs of early and preschool education at universities provide a lot of opportunities to promote intercultural communication. A special place belongs to music curriculums whose content can motivate students to preserve traditional culture.

Intercultural competence means “continuous development of understanding of the relationship between cultures, with the help of a study on the perceptions of the characteristic beliefs and behaviors of particular social groups within a society that emphasizes their particularity in relation to dominant culture, ethnicity, race, religion, body and/or mental ability, gender orientation with the aim of constructive action and solving issues that arise among cultures within one society” (Mlinarević & Tokić Zec, 2020: 1082, according to Hrvatić & Piršl, 2007: 402).

When we talk about a culture and the music of a society, we talk about national identity in music. In the middle of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, composers wanted to present the culture of their people with folklore elements in their compositions, especially in newly formed countries, thus creating a national style in music. Lissa (1977) claims that “the greatest achievement of a composer is if he/she joins the musical tradition of his own nation and with it enriches the traditions of the musical culture of humanity as a whole” (Lissa, 1977: 269). She asserts that this is the pleasure of a very small number of composers.

Today, folk music heritage is gaining importance in preserving identity amid globalization. In the early and preschool age, work on intercultural competencies includes the preservation of folk folklore heritage such as singing folk songs, listening to folk compositions, familiarization with instruments and their performance, dances of national music as well as world music.

According to the *National Framework Curriculum for Preschool Education and General Compulsory and Secondary Education* (MSE, 2011: 153), one of the educational goals of the art field is “acquiring basic knowledge and a positive attitude towards Croatian culture and the cultures of other nations, towards cultural and natural heritage and universal humanist values.” Dobrota and Topić (2018) state that by introducing children of early and preschool age with high-quality and diverse musical achievements of Croatian traditional music and world music, students and kindergarten children “observe how, compared to Western classical music, this is completely different phenomena that cannot be approached in an identical way (Dobrota & Topić, 2018: 200). This develops awareness of identity as a national concept and of a person’s own identity as a citizen of the world. In this way, students become acquainted with different

cultures and their music, develop values towards diversity, and develop their intercultural attitudes.

To succeed in this, Begić and Šulentić Begić (2018) state that intercultural competence is developed and upgraded throughout life, but its foundations should first of all be built during studies. "This is possible if teaching at higher education institutions is designed to develop the intercultural competence of future teachers, who should develop the intercultural competence of their students both in urban areas and in rural areas, where interculturality is not so pronounced" (Begić & Šulentić Begić, 2018: 161). The same authors state (Begić & Šulentić Begić, 2017) that the development of an individual's intercultural competence has become a necessity because a modern school must keep up with the times and events that surround us.

*National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education* (MSE, 2014) is the starting point for the development of educational practice in kindergartens in the Republic of Croatia. The values on which this document is based are knowledge, identities, humanism and tolerance, responsibility, autonomy, and creativity. It is very important to know that music activities contribute to realizing all these values, completely identity and creativity. "Introducing children to the traditional music of Croatia and different world music helps them form their identity, but also understand and accept music of unfamiliar cultures (Mendeš & Dobrota, 2023: 650). Thus, children's intercultural attitudes are developed from the earliest days.

Bačlija Sušić & Fišer (2016) researched the possibilities of improving the educational process of early and preschool children by encouraging and enriching the musical experience with elements of traditional creativity. The obtained results indicated that children of early and preschool age (in the third and fourth years of life) show great interest in musical activities that include sound exploration of different traditional instruments as well as their use in musical performing. "Everyday enrichment of educational process with traditional music through rhymes, children's songs and singing games by using traditional instruments, encourages child's freedom and spontaneity, creative imagination and creativity and enrich their emotional experience of music" (Bačlija Sušić & Fišer, 2016: 125). They conclude that the kindergarten, as a preschool institution, has one of the fundamental missions in the development and preservation of awareness towards the musical traditional treasure of the child, the future cultural citizen. Therefore, it is very important to prepare future preschool teachers in this direction during their initial (higher) education (Boneta et al., 2013; Mrnjaus & Rončević, 2013; Bedeković & Šimić, 2017).

Zoe Dionyssiou (2017) presented a framework for promoting intercultural music education, referring to intercultural curriculum, concepts, and

methodologies. It provides an overview of the literature showing the shift from multicultural to intercultural methodologies and proposes a framework for intercultural education that seems appropriate in early childhood. The model is based on the literature in ethnomusicology and music education; it recognizes the importance of creativity, locality, and communication that exist in national communities and suggests ways for their implementation (Dionyssiou, 2017, p. 117). In this research, we take into consideration the three parameters – the process of creation, the music event, and the sense of place (Dionyssiou, 2017), opening the question of the framework for an intercultural music curriculum. The *process of creation* means the process and the moment when a piece of music is created and when it is agreed from person to person. The *music event* belongs to research in ethnomusicology and sociology of music which are in accord with the need to study music as a music event. Thus, the music event in most traditional societies is defined as a social activity, based on sharing the tradition among the members of the community, interacting with it, and evaluating it at the same time. The *sense of place* means the moment when music becomes a symbol on a national or ethnic level. The domain of national music compares the local and the global movements and it appears with folk music.

## METHOD

### **Research Aim**

The aim of this research was to analyze the early and preschool education study programs in the context of intercultural communication and to compare the results with a model of Dionyssiou (2017) and three parameters: the *process of creation*, the *music event* and the *sense of place*.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions derive from the research aim:

1. to investigate the extent to which syllabuses in all subjects of early and childhood education studies at Croatian faculties include the concept of intercultural communication,
2. to investigate the extent to which syllabuses in the field of music mostly include the concept of intercultural communication, and
3. to analyze and to compare all checked elements with three parameters presented by Dionyssiou (2017), i.e. the process of creation, the music event and the sense of place.

### ***Sample***

A total of 964 undergraduate (N = 658) and graduate (N = 306) syllabuses of early and childhood education studies from Croatian faculties were analyzed: in Pula (N = 220), Rijeka (N = 141), Zadar (N = 101), Split (N = 179), Zagreb (N = 83), Slavonski Brod (N = 94), and Osijek (N = 146). The sample included the syllabuses for full-time and part-time studies.

### ***Instrument***

A matrix was created which includes the following elements elements: course title, course objectives, course content, and learning outcomes. Also, the last three columns constitute the elements of the Dionyssiou (2017) model: the process of creation, the music event, and the sense of place.

### ***Procedure***

Syllabuses were found on the faculties' websites. They are clearly and explicitly published, and all their important information is available, such as a course name, objectives, learning outcomes, important topics, students' workload, their obligations, and literature. The implementation of intercultural communication is observed in terms of learning outcomes and topics. This means that when the syllabus elements were introduced in the matrix, they were analyzed, compared and marked regarding the elements of Dionyssiou's (2017) model. In other words, one or more model elements were recognized in the learning outcomes and topics. Even though we assumed that we would find the most elements in the syllabuses for music, we analyzed all syllabuses of early and pre-school education. The content of the matrix was done by entering keywords: - *tradition*; - *music*; - *heritage*; - *intercultural*; - *communication*; and - *culture*.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Intercultural Communication in Syllabuses of Early and Childhood Education Studies***

The first research question is to investigate the extent to which syllabuses in all subjects of early and childhood education studies at Croatian faculties include the concept of intercultural communication. Based on the results of the research, we can conclude that (*Table 1*) the elements of intercultural communication are present in the syllabuses of the Croatian universities. Concerning the elements that we observed in this research, in a total of 128 syllabuses there is a connection with intercultural communication. It can be concluded

that intercultural communication is represented approximately similarly in all studies in Croatia. This is proof that teachers are well aware of the important role of this topic in the preparation of future preschool educators, and in the growth and development of children as citizens who will promote innovative ways of living through their actions in the community.

A total of 72 syllabuses belong to the music courses, and there are 56 syllabuses of others courses in which we found elements of intercultural communication belonging. The chi-square indicates that the responses are distributed significantly differently (Table 1). The course titles were strongly associated with very different areas, from the Croatian language to pedagogy, kinesiology, etc. There are courses like: *Speaking and Writing Culture, Croatian Oral Literature, Visual Communication, Integrated Preschool Curriculum, Space, Time and Identity*, and very interesting courses like *New Media and Creative Practices in Preschool Education, Alternative Programs, Creating an Intercultural Curriculum, Intercultural Communication*, and *Early Education Curriculum Models*, etc.

Table 1. Inclusion of intercultural communication in the study programs of Croatian universities

The level of studies	Number of course areas (% of total courses)	Number of course objectives	Number of course content	Number of learning outcomes
undergraduate	101 (15.35)	21	40	232
graduate	27 (8.82)	9	12	58

$\chi^2 = 1.7512, df = 2, p < .01$

The examples of the course objectives correlated with the theme of intercultural communication are: *to adopt the rich oral heritage of their homeland and its role nurturing that heritage in preschool education, to adopt the necessary competencies for intercultural communication as a prerequisite for successful communication in early childhood education and preschool age, to develop the aesthetic sensibility of the individual by getting to know him and bringing him closer to his cultural, musical and native heritage.*

The course contents are very interesting when we analyze them from the point of view different cultures and traditions of the very small regions of Croatia. The topics are dealt with in concentric circles and a topic that is in the middle is closely related to the region where the university is located and after that, it develops into a broader topic that includes the region and the national level. The names of some topics are: *Intercultural pedagogy, School culture in*

*the context of intercultural and social competencies of preschool teachers, Identity in the intercultural context, Methods and forms of work in intercultural education of children in early and preschool age, and Traditional music and musical instruments.*

The learning outcomes are very well addressed. They are arranged according to the levels of Bloom's taxonomy; in the undergraduate studies, the learning outcomes target the first four levels (*to analyze professional activity in an intercultural and inclusive environment (respect for diversity; to analyze the fundamental elements of intercultural communication)* while in the graduate studies, the learning outcomes target the fourth, fifth, and sixth levels (*to plan one's own activity in an intercultural society in the direction of entrepreneurship and creativity, to create an integrated curriculum in the totality of all developmental areas (kinesiological, musical, artistic, language-communicative and research-cognitive) using activities and materials in accordance with modern development theories that interpret child development*).

### ***Intercultural communication in music syllabuses of early and childhood education studies***

The second research question was to investigate the extent to which syllabuses in the field of music mostly include the concept of intercultural communication. The results show that a special place for intercultural communication belongs to the music syllabuses (N = 72).

In the analyzed syllabuses of early and preschool education, we come across:

a) The music courses in which students get to know world art music or an overview of musical stylistic periods (art music of the European continent) such as *Musical Culture, Playing Musical Instruments, Listening the Music, Choral singing, and Choir*. These courses contain basic musical knowledge and musical skills that students need for future music practice and music teaching.

b) The music courses in which students get to know local, regional, and national music, such as *Folklore Music, Folklore Musical Heritage and Children of Early and Preschool Age, Folklore for Children with a Practical Course, Croatian Musical Heritage, Music with a Practical Course, Choral Singing, and Choir*. These are the courses that raise awareness of heritage and regional identity in order for students to recognize and differentiate intercultural content.

c) The music courses that integrate music and other content, and that teach interdisciplinary practical work with children, such as *Music in Early and Preschool Education, Music in the Integrated Curriculum, and Structure and Form of Music in Children's Perception*.

d) The courses in which interculturality is expressed by permeating musical diversity and diversity in an integrated curriculum, such as *Heritage, Puppetry and Stage Culture*, and *Art Programs*.

Considering the complexity and pervasiveness of the content, some courses are included under both, points a) and b). Given that syllabuses of the same areas of all study programs for early and preschool education in the Republic of Croatia were observed, we can conclude that course professors create learning outcomes in the local, regional, national, and global context. Thus, for example, in *Choral Singing* or *Music Practicum*, sometimes only artistic music is performed, sometimes only folk music, and sometimes both are used.

The value that the music syllabuses contain intercultural communication can be recognized in the implicit statement of the author Hernandez (1989 in Drandić, 2013: 84) who, among other things, emphasizes that "in order to acquire intercultural competencies, teachers need to understand their own culture and their own cultural identity; get to know different cultural communities; understand and respect cultural differences; understand the benefits and necessity of learning about cultural differences; learn to adapt curricula, strategies and activities implemented in the educational process with different cultures in such a way as to improve the learning of all; understand and use acquired skills, knowledge and abilities in the teaching process; know the appropriate resources and know how to use them (literature, magazines, Internet, music, art...) with the aim of improve teaching, learning and teaching; explore new ideas, strategies, techniques, and different approaches to education in a multicultural environment."

Based on these results, it can be concluded that the content regarding intercultural communication in music syllabuses can motivate students to preserve traditional and intercultural culture. Many papers have been written that confirm the value of using traditional or folklore music for the development and perception of interculturality (Cf. Bačlija Sušić & Fišer, 2016; Dobrota & Topić, 2018; Begić & Šulentić Begić, 2018; Mendeš & Dobrota, 2023).

### ***Analysis and comparison of results according to the elements of Dionysius' model***

The third research question was to analyze and compare all checked elements in the Croatian syllabuses based on three parameters of Dionysiou's model (2017): the process of creation, the music event, and the sense of place. Regarding the elements of the model, the learning outcomes mostly belong to the *music event* (N = 53) and the *sense of place* (N = 29). The fewest learning outcomes belong to the *process of creation* (N = 26).



The reasons why the learning outcomes mostly belong to the *music event* (N = 53) can be found in the fact that most music courses relate to European musical art that is performed in concert halls, theaters, or outdoors. *Sense of place* (N = 29) is related to local or regional musical heritage. Although it is folklore or traditional heritage that builds an individual's identity and intercultural foundations, these results confirm that artistic music that has a global character and is not tied to a place still prevails. The least number of the learning outcomes belongs to the *creation process* (N = 26). Namely, the process of creation is connected with creativity. In order for students to be able to approach musical activities creatively, they should have acquired and developed musical competencies. Therefore, it can be concluded that the music courses mainly comprise basic content that will allow all students to master theoretical musical knowledge and skills. In this way, they develop intercultural competence and communication (Piršl, 2011) which consists of intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes that need to be developed in contemporary global society.

## CONCLUSION

This research presents the contribution to analyzing the intercultural communication in higher education, especially in early preschool education. The correlation of intercultural communication and the music is very hard, and can be described in the point of view of traditional and intercultural culture. Results of this research bring some conclusions: intercultural communication is represented approximately similarly in all studies in Croatia; there are a big number of syllabuses belonging to the music syllabuses; learning outcomes are very well addressed according to the levels of Bloom's taxonomy; the content regarding the intercultural communication in music syllabuses can motivate students to preserve traditional and intercultural culture; and regarding the model of Dionyssiou (2017) learning outcomes mostly belong to the *music event*, and to *sense of place*.

Based on the findings of this research, suggestions can be made for improving programs in higher education. Given that plans and programs are the foundation of quality teaching and learning, the integration of key contents in accordance with the STEM/STEAM/STREAM educational approach should already be visible in the syllabuses so that students can acquire competencies for integrated learning and their future educational work more effectively. Integration can be arranged through interdisciplinarity and connecting elements from all important areas, which would contribute to successful intercultural communication in education.

This research contributes to the elements of intercultural communication in the context of learning and promoting the traditional culture and music of the region. Teachers will educate children to learn about their culture and will be the ones who will transmit the values in the preschool environment. The implications of these results can be described by the proposal that in the 21st century, intercultural communication should be addressed more extensively in higher education teaching, especially in the area of early and preschool education, to foster traditional music as one of the important elements of a nation's culture and to be part of global music map.

This research has some limitations. The first is certainly that only study programs were observed. By analyzing teaching practice in higher education, it would be possible to observe more connections and determine the degree of connection between intercultural communication and traditional music. The second limitation is that this is only the first step in analyzing the connections between intercultural communication and traditional music. The second step can be to investigate the opinion of university teachers, especially the opinion of music university professors about many possibilities of teaching and learning in the context of intercultural communication in teaching music. There is also a third limitation. When we talk about traditional music, there are many elements of very rich Croatian tradition. The aim of some future research can be to examine various types of Croatian traditional music, which should and is just now an important basis for the development of intercultural communication at the national and international level among students – future preschool teachers.

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