

## NARROWING CULTURAL BOUNDARIES IN THE EFL CLASSROOM: FAIRY TALES FROM INDIA

RAÚL RUIZ-CECILIA\*  
Universidad de Granada

**ABSTRACT.** *The aim of this paper is to prepare would-be EFL teachers to teach in culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. From our point of view, would-be English teachers should be most aware of the importance of cultural systems as a means to understand peoples' behaviour. In their process of learning the foreign language, students have already felt a sense of cultural awareness. So, they ought to receive special training in these issues at university level. Future generations depend greatly on the education on values they learn at school. All students should interact with and understand people who are ethnically, racially and culturally different from themselves. Many educators agree that a multicultural approach to education is essential to engage children of all cultures in learning and to prepare students for the diverse and global society that will be their adult world.*

**KEY WORDS.** *Multicultural literature, EFL classroom, fairy tales, intercultural awareness, cross-cultural competence.*

**RESUMEN.** *El objetivo de este artículo es preparar a nuestros futuros docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) para que puedan enseñar en contextos cultural y lingüísticamente diversos. Desde nuestro punto de vista, los futuros profesores de inglés deberían ser conscientes de la importancia de los sistemas culturales como un medio para entender el comportamiento de los pueblos. En el proceso de aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera, los estudiantes sienten una especie de concienciación cultural. Por lo tanto, es aconsejable un entrenamiento especial en estos temas a nivel universitario. Sería interesante que todo el estudiantado interactúe con personas que son étnica, racial y culturalmente diferentes a ellos mismos. Muchos educadores coinciden en que un acercamiento multicultural es esencial para involucrar a los niños de todas las culturas en el aprendizaje y prepararlos para la sociedad diversa y global a la que se enfrentarán en su etapa adulta.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE.** *Literatura multicultural, clase de EFL, cuentos de hadas, conciencia intercultural, competencia crosscultural.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Envisaging the foreign language as a vehicle of communication in meaningful contexts is the basis of most recent teaching approaches. The emphasis shifts from

merely linguistic knowledge (product-oriented), to getting involved in the process, analysis or assessment of values, topics or ideas (process-oriented). Pérez-Valverde and Ruiz-Cecilia (2012) state that current approaches spring from the consideration of language as a social phenomenon, means of communication and vehicle of understanding among peoples. Hence, the respect and acceptance of the Other are key factors, but to understand other cultures, we need to develop cross-cultural competence beforehand (Guijarro-Ojeda 2005).

Whenever we tackle multiculturalism at schools, we are bound to deal with three kinds of cultural borders: physical borders, borders of differences (reluctance to accept others' ways of behaving, being or doing), and inner borders (developed by the individual as a result of his/her former social experiences or education/upbringing). Notwithstanding, inner borders are the most difficult to re-construct and/or re-consider. They have been settled in the Self for years and, consequently, they are deeply rooted in the personality through a process of acculturation (usually, the minority group succumbs to the beliefs and behaviours of the dominant group in an attempt to gain access to social privilege. Sometimes, they belittle the richness of their original culture and develop a sense of shame towards it).

We are too used to thinking in our-Self and seldom do we swap roles with the Other, or do we attempt to look at the world from a different perspective. To overcome these borders, the teacher has the challenging task of making the implicit explicit and, then, raising awareness through dialogue. The student, in turn, will re-shape his or her own culture through a process of cultural relativism. We firmly believe that familiarizing children with multicultural literature from the very beginning may help them to vicariously experience crossing these borders. Cai (2002: xviii) states that through multicultural literature we “define every individual as a human being and help to form a human bond among different cultures”. This is the key element to cross cultural borders, achieve mutual understanding and intercultural harmony. Multicultural literature is in this sense the “educational tool to change people’s attitudes toward cultural diversity” (Cai 2002: xv). In addition, Mora (1998: 283) affirms that in order to lessen ethnic tension, literature can be put to work as an art form that “moves readers to hear another human’s voice, and thus experience the doubts, fears, and joys of a person who may not look or sound at all like us”.

When addressing cultural issues, there is a need to be explicit about exactly what is meant by the words multicultural, transcultural, intercultural and cross-cultural. Intercultural is generally understood as a synonym to cross-cultural, multicultural and transcultural; whereas multicultural is a term frequently used in the literature to refer to cultures in coexistence (for example, different peoples living within the same borders/context). Regarding transcultural [literature], this paper will use the definition first suggested by Norton (2005: 2) who saw it as “[...] children’s books that portray peoples, cultures and geographic regions of the world that exist outside the reader’s own country”. With reference to the term cross-cultural, it can be loosely described as the mutual understanding across cultures (extended meaning includes nuances of the words multicultural and transcultural).

## 2. OBJECTIVES

This paper is the result of a piloting experience conducted at the Faculty of Education (University of Granada, Spain). We aim to prepare our would-be teachers to teach in culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For that reason, we familiarize them with multicultural literature in an attempt to modelling good teaching practice for diversity. If they are to be successful in their teaching career, they must have some training in multicultural issues. Otherwise, their teaching will be firstly dominant-culture laden and, consequently, the cultural richness of the Other will be doomed to disappear into oblivion.

The overall quest of the research can be formulated as twofold: (1) How useful multicultural literature may be for teacher trainers?, and (2) how texts from other languages are decoded in our current cultural system? Thus, this study looks to provide perceptual data that will further the discussion of the importance of introducing texts from different cultures into the English class.

## 3. LITERATURE AND EDUCATION IN VALUES

*The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (Council of Europe 2001) (henceforth CEF) stresses the importance of literature in the language classroom for the education in values: “Literary studies serve many more educational purposes –intellectual, moral and emotional, linguistic and cultural– than the purely aesthetic. It is much to be hoped that teachers of literature at all levels may find many sections of the Framework relevant to their concerns and useful in making their aims and methods more transparent.” (Council of Europe 2001: 56).

Literature, in this sense, is addressed from a linguistic and aesthetic viewpoint. Within these imaginative, artistic or aesthetic uses of language, we embrace tasks to develop expression, comprehension, interaction or mediation expressed orally or in the written form. These tasks would include:

- singing: infant songs, popular songs, pop songs...
- listening, reading, telling, or writing imaginative texts (tales, songs...), including audiovisual texts, cartoon stories, illustrated tales...)
- performing plays with or without script.
- attending or acting out literary texts as, for example: reading and writing texts (short stories, novels, poetry...); representing and attending poetry recitals, plays, opera...

Then, literary education ranges from aesthetic awareness to educational, intellectual, moral, emotional, linguistic, and cultural aims. The success, however, also depends upon the talent, educative, literary sensitivity, and personal awareness on the part of the teacher.

As just stated above, benefits derived from literature are not limited to the linguistic or cognitive levels. We go a little bit further: we pursue an education of the whole person. In this way, if we concentrate on the values portrayed in literary texts,

students will develop positive attitudes towards them. In addition, in a parallel process, they define and redefine their own values. They can also learn to express their feelings and thoughts and, what is more important, to share them with their peers. Consequently, the use of multicultural literature in the EFL classroom can be highly motivating for students since they become well-acquainted with their inner world.

Following this premise, literature appears as a system which draws together values within a society or culture acting as support for the expressive development of it. It enables us to grasp complexities, problems and meanings of values of that society with the purpose in mind of understanding the meaning of Others. This is of great value for the coexistence of people and a correct civic-mindedness. That is, the understanding, acceptance, and involvement of the Other through tolerance and otherness-friendly pedagogies. It is an essential means to reflect upon those conflicts which are grounded on ethnic, culture, gender, religion, or social status problems which affect the Other (Guijarro-Ojeda and Ruiz-Cecilia 2011). Finally, literature functions as cultural glue which gives sense to a specific community.

#### 4. PREMISES TO WORK WITH MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE

A truly understanding of our modern society entails the acceptance of multiculturalism as a growing reality. Multiculturalism is the passport for achieving equality, keeping one's identity, taking pride of our ancestry, and having a sense of belonging. Once we surpass the barrier of mainstream culture as the only acceptable, we are able to develop solid feelings of affectionate esteem and self-confidence. Experience has shown that multiculturalism encourages racial and ethnic harmony and enhances cross-cultural understanding. In this line, one of the CEF basic principles highlights the fact that diversity should not hinder communication but foster mutual enrichment and understanding (Council of Europe 2001: 2).

In the ever-challenging task of growing a society multiculturally friendly, we need to take into account several factors. First of all, teachers have to believe in multiculturalism. From our point of view, this is the basic pillar in the process of developing positive attitudes. If we do not believe in what we say, then we are doomed to fail in the raising of multicultural children. Secondly, we have to feel what we say. Children need to experience that the teacher's feelings are in accordance with his or her thinking. Finally, the third pillar would be behaving multiculturally, i.e. putting into practice all your beliefs and feelings. Believing, feeling and performing are to be in perfect equilibrium in order to become multicultural coherent selves. In this sense, the CEF (Council of Europe 2001: 11-12) develops the so-called existential competence which is considered as:

[...] the sum of the individual characteristics, personality traits and attitudes which concern, for example, self-image and one's view of others and willingness to engage with other people in social interaction. This type of competence is not seen simply as resulting

from immutable personality characteristics. It includes factors which are the product of various kinds of acculturation and may be modified.

Lewis and Doorlag (1995) present the following reasons for developing multicultural education:

- (1) Commonalities among people cannot be recognized unless differences are acknowledged.
- (2) A society that interweaves the best of all of its cultures reflects a truly mosaic image.
- (3) Multicultural education can restore cultural rights by emphasizing cultural equality and respect.
- (4) Students can learn basic skills while also learning to respect cultures; multicultural education need not detract from basic education.
- (5) Multicultural education enhances the self-concepts of all students because it provides a more balanced view of the U.S. society (*also applicable to the Spanish society*).
- (6) Students must learn to respect others.

## 5. READING MULTICULTURALLY

According to McGinley *et al.* (1997: 43), “stories can be a means of personal and social exploration and reflection –an imaginative vehicle for questioning, shaping, responding, and participating in the world”. This is the basic theory underlying our approach of working with multicultural stories (at this stage of the research, only popular folktales). Students are given the opportunity of exploring new territories and reflecting upon them.

The introduction of multicultural literature in the curriculum entails challenging the dominant ideologies and affirming the values and experiences of historically underrepresented cultures (Ruiz-Cecilia and Guijarro-Ojeda 2007). Learners, on the other hand, develop attitudes to foster acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity, develop sensitivity to social inequalities, and encourage transformation of the self and society. (Cai 2002: 134).

Bishop (1994) argues that through multicultural reading, students are exposed to multiple perspectives of the world and, hence, are challenged to look at themselves and the world differently. Rasinski and Padak (1990) posit that we also develop an ability to identify and critically analyze cross-cultural problems. At the same time, we are empowered to solve those cultural problems or ethnic differences.

## 6. DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

The underlying objective of this paper could be summarized in the following statement: we want to move our students from informing to empowering. That is, would-

be teachers and in-service teachers need to be well-acquainted with these emerging issues involving the use of multicultural literature in the classroom. But, in addition, they need to be empowered in order to think, feel, and behave in real multicultural terms.

### 6.1. *Context*

The experience was conducted at the Faculty of Educational Studies, Granada University (Spain). The study was piloted in March 2009 (from March 2 to March 31). The piloting process proved to be extremely valuable in evaluating and improving the research instruments and demonstrating feasibility.

The fact that our students will be teachers themselves, led us to bring multiculturalism to the debate arena. We believe that university teachers should be acquainted with multicultural, non-sexist approaches to education in order to train students in a non-biased approach. In addition, we wanted to start a program that teaches students about respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, caring, fairness, and citizenship in our plurilingual and multilingual society.

Through our selection of fairy tales from India, we examined cross-cultural understanding and inter-cultural empowerment. We delved into implicit multicultural knowledge piled up by our students and attempted at encouraging them to make it explicit. They should not be shied away from expressing their inner multicultural feelings. We believe that schools should aim at developing positive attitudes towards other cultures and in creating a true rapport among peers.

### 6.2. *Participants*

The subjects for this pilot study were 10 undergraduate EFL teacher trainees who were in their second year of university study. The age of the students ranged from 19 to 20 (M. 19.3). Among the subjects, five were men (subjects 1 to 5) and five were women (subjects 6 to 10). All participants voluntarily participated in this study and were assured that their responses would be anonymous and confidential. None of them received any compensation for the participation. They showed great enthusiasm in being involved in multicultural issues, as an extra to their formal EFL training. As this was a pilot study, the number of subjects was limited to ten undergraduate students since our scope was smaller for this phase of the project. However, we plan to use a broader range of participants (primary education teachers, secondary education teachers, and undergraduate students) in the full study.

Students' level of English proficiency was also a key factor in the selection of the participants. The whole group (50 students enrolled in the course *Phonetics*) completed the Oxford Placement Test (henceforth OPT) at the beginning of the academic year. So, volunteers were asked to have achieved a minimum of B1 (following levels of attainment established in the CEF) to take part in the experience. A lower level of English could

hamper students' comprehension of the stories. Semantically speaking, 96% of lexical coverage is required to be able to understand the text.

In addition, no previous knowledge on Indian folktales was required, so as to ensure that the information portrayed on the stories was new for all of them.

### 6.3. Instruments and procedures

The 10 volunteer-students, whose level of English was B1 or higher, were gathered at the beginning of March 2009 (week 0) for an initial training seminar. They were introduced to concepts such as multiculturalism, interculturalism, transculturalism, crossculturalism, and existential competence (from CEF). After this general introduction, we explained the main guidelines of the experience. Students were required to read three Indian fairy tales: *Kanai the Gardener* for week 1; *The Boy Who Had a Moon on his Forehead and a Star on his Chin* for week 2; and *The Prince Who Was Changed into a Ram* for week 3 (at a pace of one per week). These readings were chosen because they exemplify riveting topics within the Indian folklore, and for their length (no more than 20 pages per story), making it easier for the invited participants to have them read before the discussion. Then, every week we held a meeting to discuss the target reading focusing on multi/inter/cross/transcultural issues. In-group discussions were taped (with the written permission of the students) for later analysis. Students were encouraged to participate actively in the discussions (but without pressure). Albeit they showed signs of shyness or nervousness at the beginning, they were very participative and interested. All of them contributed greatly to the successful dynamics of the group. Each session lasted for 90 minutes. The first part focused on the content of the stories; the second on the cross-cultural value of the texts (discussion of burning issues featured in the stories); and the third, on the proposal of tasks for the teacher or the EFL student. Besides, qualitative interviews were conducted at the end (on the last week) to check participants' output and obtain feedback. The interest was placed in the interviewees' point of view, giving thus priority to what they saw as relevant and important. As our tool is a qualitative research interview, the participants' answers were totally unpredictable and, accordingly, the order of the questions varied and even the wording of these. As a result, students commented on our weekly meetings and highlighted the most valuable conclusions.

Taped sessions were analysed and systematized considering a list of criteria:

- (a) Reading comprehension, reading strategies, and main topics of the story.
- (b) Values coupled with inter/cross/multi/transculturalism (axiological point of view).
- (c) Tasks to be carried out in the EFL class.

Armed with these results, the interviews were tackled to elicit more detail about their general feeling based on personal experience. They were envisaged as an important source of feedback and input for a future version of this study and interviewees posited the main suggestions for further research.

## 7. RESULTS

For presentation purposes, we have decided to discuss each fairy tale separately. Thus we will start analysing data related to *Kanai the Gardener*; followed by *The Boy Who Had a Moon on his Forehead and a Star on his Chin*, and ending with *The Prince who was Changed into a Ram*.

### 7.1. *Kanai the Gardener*<sup>1</sup>

#### *Comprehension of the story*

At the beginning of each session, we devoted 10-15 minutes to check the understanding of the story and highlight the main strategies used in order to overcome semantic difficulties. From the linguistic point of view, this story did not hobble our participants' intrinsic motivation and they were able to cope with any formal constraints imposed by the text itself (all of them showed evidence of having understood the plot correctly). Contextual clues helped them greatly in the articulation of meaning at sentence level. They claimed to have used the dictionary only when strictly necessary, i.e. when they "could not picture the idea clearly" (participant 3). Cognitively, the central topics of kindness (acknowledged by 4 subjects), givingness (3 participants), caring (3 students), trustfulness (5 of them), envy (100% agreement), having (7 participants), ignorance (only for one), and material happiness (all of them) woke up subjects' interest and active involvement. In fact, these content areas paved the way for subsequent tasks.

#### *Discussion arena*

The second part of the seminar focused on the discussion of values from a cross-cultural perspective. The 10 participants were asked to write down three values they thought they had been depicted in the story (stated at the end of the paragraph above). After a 20-minute conversation, they agreed that this story is a perfect instance to address the meaning and implications of caring, trustfulness, and happiness in schools (in particular), and in society (in general). Besides this, we raised discussion over the importance of these values/attitudes in our closest environment and the reasons why they are overemphasized or overlooked in the teaching training process. According to the story and students' perceptions, both cultures have a similar interpretation of trusting and envying but they tended to differ greatly on issues related to happiness and givingness. After this, we chaired a debate about the importance of keeping secrets vs. gossiping since it is a central topic in *Kanai the Gardener*. It was a very enriching and involving experience as it made them reflect deeply on concepts such as friendship and trustfulness.

Next, we focused on how the form and content portrayed in *Kanai the Gardener* may bear some resemblance with variations of the fairy tale in their home culture. We asked them to think about tales with a similar teaching even though the action and the characters had nothing to do with the ones portrayed in the Indian version (some of the



examples were *The Little Mermaid*; *Goldilocks*; *The Red Chicken*). Something which struck them greatly was the fact of reading about flying elephants. Though in the European popular folklore it is uncommon to have this type of flying animals (with the exception of *Dumbo* from the Disney factory), it is a recursive one in some Asian cultures. The participants made a list of atypical flying animals according to their popular lore and established links with the meaning conveyed by those animals in both cultures. This part helped them to become aware of how reality is interpreted in different ways depending on the cultural system in which the individual is embedded.

A third block addressed possible tasks to be carried out in the EFL classroom. Students were asked to think of ways of introducing this story with students in Primary Education (or early stages of Secondary Education). Most of the activities they proposed are culture-oriented. For instance, subject 1 suggested a brainstorming on the ideas they have about India (or the Indian) since it is of paramount importance to set the starting point. Another cultural activity was planned by subject 9 who put the focus on the geographical dimension. So, she would ask students if they were aware of the fact that English is spoken in many parts of the world other than the United Kingdom and the United States. She would mention the specific case of India (though also explaining the fact that there are eleven official languages in this country). Participant 7 discussed how “materialism” was featured in the story, and its implications for achieving happiness (related to the concepts of plentifulness and moreness). Subjects 4, 8 and 10 had in mind different cultural notes (more suitable for in-service or pre-service EFL teachers than students in primary or secondary stages):

- Cultural note: look for information about the meaning of elephants in the Indian culture and why they are worshipped (bear in mind that elephants embody obedience and respect) (subject 4 and 10).
- Cultural note: look for information about Oirabot (the King-God of elephants) focusing on what makes his birth special. Re-read the story and use the new information to go a step further in the multilayered interpretational dimension (subject 8).

Other participants explored the literary facets of the story. Thus, subject 10 was interested in raising students’ awareness concerning the concept “English Literature” versus “English Literatures” which would embrace literatures from all English speaking countries. Subject 5 asked to identify what type of folktale it is (fairy tale, myth, legend, tall tale, fable, or religious story).

Subjects 2, 3, and 6 highlighted the writing skill when dealing with this fairy tale in class. On the one hand, participant 2 would ask learners to write down different ways of starting and ending folktales in the L2 and in their L1, in order to compare them and draw conclusions. Furthermore, volunteer number 3 added a metafictional turn as he suggested a rewriting of the fable in modern times and situations (using elements from our cultural background). Learners will update the story to create a modern tale which

gives the same lesson but represents the learner's environment or setting. On the other hand, subject 6 wanted to know what would happen after the characters in the story fall back to earth (suitable both as an oral or written task).

## 7.2. *The Boy Who Had a Moon on his Forehead and a Star on his Chin*<sup>2</sup>

### *Comprehension of the story*

Bearing in mind linguistic features of the text, this is appropriate for intermediate users of English (B1-B2). Consequently, the overall story's level of difficulty did not impede our participants' comprehension as their scores in the OPT fitted in well. Notwithstanding, it is worth mentioning the fact that this text should be adapted were it to be used in primary or secondary schools.

Some specific words may be unknown (for instance, runt, saddle, bridle...) but there are enough contextual clues to unravel meaning (suggested by subjects 2 and 6). From the cognitive point of view, the story is straightforwardly told, and is especially rich in capturing how a process of mutual understanding and cooperation unveils the truth. The central topics of the story are humbleness (subjects 3, 7, 9), truly love (subjects 1, 2), maternity (subject 6), (dis)trustfulness (subject 4), jealousy (subjects 1, 5, 8) fatherliness (subject 10), responsibility (subjects 1, 2, 5, 8, 10), and friendship (all subjects).

### *Discussion arena*

This story fosters, extols, and upholds values such as cooperation, justice, trust, family, and friendship. The cultural backgrounds of the learners may enrich this tale by tackling it from different angles. However, in the discussion arena we concentrated on the role of women as pictured in the tale (the main character is Muslim and he has several spouses) because if they attempted a reading through the eyes of their home culture, they might find it extraordinarily shocking. This debate was enriched with the participation of a Muslim student (not taking part in the experience). So, we invited her to partake in this lively discussion (her contribution was highly appreciated and helped us to have a closer view from inside. Definitely, future developments of this project must involve people who are an integral part of the cultural system depicted in each of the stories). We should promote critical understanding for other ways of envisaging reality. At all moments, as the person chairing the debate, I tried to make them think carefully on their personal statements and not to overreact. Participants, though aware of this cultural fact, found it difficult to understand. Women (subjects 6-10) thought it was "a hidden way of male domination" (participant 8) and "a sign of female repression" (participant 6). Our guest explained her reality and enlightened some prejudices from the part of the cultural *outsiders*.

Besides, some time was devoted to establish connections between the target fairy tale and those of the home culture. The one which first came to their minds was *Peter and the Wolf* as part of the story is retold in *The Boy Who Had a Moon on his Forehead and a Star on his Chin*. Peter, in this case, would be embodied by the wicked wives and the Wolf personified by the husband. Another fairy tale pointed out by participants 3 and

7 was *Cinderella* as for the presence of similar evil characters in both stories (stepsisters and wives) and good ones (*Cinderella* and the gardener's daughter).

Concerning the tasks, they have been grouped into two main categories: those addressed to the learner (students in Primary or Secondary Education); and those addressed to the teacher (in this case, the ten teacher-trainees). Regarding the first category, they suggested:

- Study the setting of the story. Locate India on a map (participant 5).
- List the setting, the characters, the problem, and the solution in this tale. The tale could be compared and contrasted to tales from various cultures (participant 9).
- Ask the students to reduce the message of the tale to a single sentence or saying (participant 10).
- Make a list of words related to men and words related to women in the story you are about to read. Think about the underlying meaning. For example, some words referring to men are “hunting, beautiful, terrible, furious, master...” (denoting power), while terms such as “jealous, misery, wicked, frightened...” are used to describe women (implying weakness) (participant 1).
- Write down roles assigned to men and those assigned to women as presented in the story. For instance, a female character in the story says “when I grow up, I’m going to marry and have the most beautiful son in the world” (voicing that marriage is her top priority as an adult). The king, on the other hand, is a hunter (associated to maleness) (participant 8).
- In the story, what makes the boy beautiful is that he has two birthmarks and aquamarine eyes. Are these qualities also appreciated in your culture as a symbol of beauty? If not, which are the most relevant? (participant 6).

In relation to the second categorization, our group put forward:

- Have students to retell the fairy tale. Tell them to make it sound like a folktale from another country, have them change it so that it shows a reflection of life in that country (participant 2).
- Cultural note: look for different meanings associated with the word “moon” in the Indian culture. Why is so special to have a birthmark of a moon? (participant 4).
- Cultural note: look for information about the social role the “harem” plays in the Indian culture (participant 7).
- Magic animals in our popular folklore. Is that common to have magical horses in the cultural heritage of your country? Which animals are attributed special powers in the tales you have read? (participant 3).

### 7.3. *The Prince Who Was Changed into a Ram*<sup>3</sup>

#### *Comprehension of the story*

From a linguistic point of view, the story is well within the subjects’ (undergraduate teacher trainees) current level of proficiency in English. They all claimed to have

understood it without much difficulty and with the help of the dictionary on some occasions. On the other hand, tackling the folktale from a cognitive perspective, students did not encounter severe content gaps which might have hampered the reading process. The form and content illustrated in this fairy tale is common to many cultures around the world. The beauty princess, the charming prince, the wicked witch, the enchantment, the breaking of the enchantment, the challenge, and the unveiling of the truth are the pieces of a giant story-making puzzle. These elements are cleverly interwoven in our folktale and catch the reader's attention from the very beginning. There is a magic transformation of cultural laden objects (or situations, words...). What is new is skilfully intertwined with what is known, and the reader's motivation grows as the reading advances.

The main topics of the story are loyalty (all participants agreed), kindness (subjects 1, 5, 8, 9, 10), love (all subjects), respect (subjects 2, 3, 6, 7, 9), and friendship (subjects 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10).

### *Discussion arena*

As regards the discussion held in the third meeting, the main topic of interest was related to the role of the princess in this fairy tale: a woman disguised like a man to attain social recognition. It was thought to be a very brave action in a male-ruled society where women fulfil secondary roles. Discussion went a step further as they directed the arguments towards Western society where men occupy the vast majority of management posts in private companies, and women are overrepresented in administrative and support-staff positions. The fairy tale limns a courageous woman who can rule a kingdom if she is given the opportunity. All participants agreed on the fact of not underestimating or prejudging anybody (raising, in this way, cross/inter/multi/transcultural awareness).

After analysing all the tasks advocated by the students, we decided to group them under three categories:

- a) Based on fairy tales archetypes:
  - Ask students to look for fairy tales where there are animals. Are rams popular in their findings? (submitted by subject 1 and appropriate for students in Primary Education).
  - Ask students to look for fairy tales where there are people's transformations. What are they changed into? (outlined by subject 9. Suitable for Primary and Secondary Education).
  - Look for information about talking birds in fairy tales (recommended by subject 10. It could be an activity for Primary Education students or for teacher-trainees).
  - Ask students to think of brave women in fairy tales. Is that usual? (set forth by subject 5 in a Primary or Secondary school contexts).
- b) Gender awareness:
  - Find words (or expressions) associated with the prince and words associated with the princess. For example, the prince is described as "good looking"

- while she is portrayed as “intelligent and witty” (mentioned by subject 2. Suitable for any level).
- Think how the woman’s role is portrayed in the story (brought up by subject 6. She thought it might be more appropriate for teacher-trainees).
  - What do you think would have happened if the princess had not disguised herself as a man? Do you think she would have been given the same opportunities as a woman? (presented by subject 8. Teacher-trainees should complete it).
  - Compare the wedding in the fairy tale with a wedding in your country? Make a list of similarities and differences (suggested by subject 7. Appropriate for any level).
  - Discuss the position of the father in his son/daughter relationship (advanced by subject 3. Befitting teacher-trainees).
- c) Involving Fairy tale actions:
- Ask students to write down the moral of the story (propounded by subject 1. Any level may fit).
  - How is evilness described in the story? Elements used by the author (pictured by subject 4. Appropriate for all levels).

## 8. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Through this paper, we have intended to highlight the need of educating new generations multiculturally. We have to consider our social reality from a multilayered cultural perspective because multiculturalism means richness and it should be maintained, preserved and even strengthened.

Developing a heightened sensitivity to and an understanding of people from various cultures and traditions is a basic goal of education for our children. Would-be teachers need to be directly trained in this issue since they play an important role in the education of children at schools. They have to fight against cultural stereotypes and teach them to look through the eyes of many children. Empower them to be cross-culturally minded, to critically analyse cultural misunderstandings, and to take action to solve these problems. In a word, they should help children to live in a diverse society and strive for common goals toward peace. All this can be a reality if we foster dialogical tools in the classroom and bring their voices into interaction with others’ voices.

Objectives set out for this paper have been fully achieved as suggested by students in the individual interviews. Thus, they feel more able to work in multicultural contexts where cultural diversity is the predominant feature. In this sense, we contributed to developing students’ cultural awareness since it is necessary that our would-be teachers have a sense of cultural sensitivity and that they are well aware of its importance within the language classroom. In participant 5’s words “approaching a new culture wakes up the awareness of our own system of beliefs, of values, of being. We relativize our closest reality and learn to swap places with the Other”.

All subjects recognized that they had learnt to listen to other points of view and “to envisage other cultures as enriching sources of knowledge” (participant 3). Multicultural approaches give us the opportunity of increasing world knowledge and raising a positive awareness towards the Other.

Regarding our first research question, multicultural literature was valued as highly positive by teacher trainees. In their individual interviews, all of them expressed their enthusiasm for having been familiarized with Indian fairy tales. Students became acquainted with other forms of folklore rather than their own. Participant 8 emphasized the fact that during the meeting we approached multicultural literature from a humanistic perspective. We placed the focus on the Self to make them aware of the importance of the perception of their experiences. “It is an approach which enhances personal growth and change” (participant 1). In addition, participant 10 added “we should not envisage difference as an enemy but as an ally. Understanding of differences means understanding of the Self”.

The second research question was tackled directly in the weekly sessions where they were asked to interpret the text and pay attention to the main values/topics. As pointed out in the highlights of the discussions from section 7, the first interpretation was culture-laden (students’ dominant culture) but through the course of the debate, they opened their minds to other cultural interpretations. Consequently, if we want our future teachers to develop and transmit positive attitudes towards multiculturalism, then it is imperative an implicit training in these issues. Teacher-trainees need to believe in what they say in order to train their students successfully in cross-cultural matters.

The paper has presented the main ideas, tasks, and discussions held during our one-month reading program. At the end of the experience, all participants recognized having developed true rapport that leads to lasting and successful cross-cultural exchanges. They really appreciated having been taught how to be in other’s shoes. This is the best way of erasing stereotypes and prejudices against different cultural systems. However, some of them (subjects 5, 9, and 10) complained about the lack of time to put all their proposals into practice (either in Primary schools or with the rest of the group not taking part in the experience). They were not sure whether this might be successful in real contexts with behavioural disorders and non-involved parents who are often indifferent toward their children or unwilling to encourage them. They suggested a second phase of the research to apply all they had learnt in an actual educational context.

We would like to make some suggestions for further research:

- To design a multicultural reading program and apply it in two schools: one with a great diversity of cultural origins (minimum 10 students from different countries) and another one with a more homogenous cultural origin (maximum two students from different countries).
- To put this experience into practice (as suggested by participants) in schools or at university level (with EFL teacher-trainees)
- To analyse current teaching methods and study how multiculturalism is represented.

## NOTES

\* Correspondence to: Raúl Ruiz Cecilia. Universidad de Granada. Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación. Campus Cartuja s/n. 18071-Granada. E-mail: [raulruiz@ugr.es](mailto:raulruiz@ugr.es).

1. The summary of the story is provided in appendix 1.
2. The summary of this fairy tale is available in appendix 2.
3. The summary appears under appendix 3.

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## APPENDIX 1

*“Kanai the Gardener”*

This tale was originally published by William McCulloch. In the fairy tale, we come across Kanai, the Rajah’s Gardener, who was very fond of plants. He loved talking to plants as he worked. Kanai’s garden had trees, shrubs, and flowers from all over the world. The garden, thanks to Kanai’s special care, was a paradise. However, there was something which disconcerted him greatly: each night, the ripest fruits were eaten by a mysterious creature. At sunset, he normally left the garden. One night he decided to unveil the mystery and stayed until midnight in his workplace. Suddenly, the earth seemed to shift underfoot and Kanai hid behind a tree. A huge elephant came down from the sky. He was supposed to be Oirabot, a heavenly white elephant which carries Lord Indra. While Oirabot walked among the plants pulling up the tenderest shoots and picking the choicest fruits, Kanai followed it in the shadows. When the elephant was about to leave, Kanai grasped its tail and clung on grimly. Oirabot started flying upwards without noticing his passenger. As soon as he arrived in heaven, Kanai strolled around. Everything was much bigger than in the Rajah’s garden. As everything was extremely cheap, he got some stuff for his wife and gorged himself until he was full. Then, he looked for the elephant to find his way back to earth. Once they arrived, he hurried home to see his wife. She was worried because of her husband’s absence from home for two days. But all worries faded away as soon as she saw the mango and betel nut Kanai brought her from heaven. The gardener explained her the whole story but asked her to be very discreet and not to tell anybody about how cheap and plentiful food was in heaven. But, unfortunately, she trusted the secret to her best friend, who trusted her best friend, who in turn told her best friend... At the end, everybody in the village knew about the wonders in heaven. So, Kanai thought of a way of taking everybody to heaven. The gardener seized the elephant’s tail and they all formed a chain. When they were almost past the seventieth star, Kanai’s wife best friend asked how big the betel nuts were in heaven. She passed the question to her husband who begged her to wait, but as they were too impatient, Kanai stretched his hands out to show the size. Consequently, he released Oirabot’s tail and they all ended up went head over heels down to earth.

## APPENDIX 2

*“The Boy Who Had a Moon on his Forehead and a Star on his Chin”*

This story was first published by Maive Stoke’s in *Indian Fairy Tales*. In this version of the fairy tale, there were seven daughters of poor parents who were allowed to play with the gardener’s daughter at the king’s garden. They often talked about their lives, and the gardener’s daughter kept saying that when she got married she would give birth to a beautiful child with a moon on his forehead and a star on his chin. Nobody took her seriously except for the king who overheard her telling her friends. He was really



taken with the idea of having such a son, so he told the gardener he wished to marry his daughter. A few weeks after the marriage, she announced she was expecting a baby. Though the king was overjoyed at this news, the other four wives were very jealous. When the baby was almost due, they took to visiting the young girl each day and intent on making her life a misery. They tried to make the gardener's daughter not to trust her husband. As the king was always hunting, the four wives asked her what would happen if the baby was born while he was out. She fretted over the problem and as soon as her husband was back, she posed him the problem. The king gave her a kettle drum. As soon as he heard the beating, he would be back. However, the four wives made her doubt, and pushed her to try it several times before the actual moment of birth. The king got angry because of the fake testing and he didn't come when the real moment arrived. The four wives tricked the gardener's daughter again and bound her eyes during childbirth. She gave birth to a boy with a crescent moon on his forehead and a star in his chin. The four wives whisked the baby away and ordered a servant either to kill him or to hide him very well in exchange of money. Instead of the baby, they made her believe she had given birth to a stone. The king flew into a terrible rage and told her that from that moment onwards she would be a palace servant. The baby was carried deep into the jungle and buried alive. But the king's dog, Shankar, had followed the servant and as soon as she left, it dug up the box and opened it. When the dog saw the baby, he decided to protect him and hide him in its stomach. After six months, the dog decided to go back to the jungle to see how the boy was feeling. The child was beautiful. But the dog's keeper had followed it and saw everything. He hurried back to the palace and told the four wives. They were terrified. So, they tore their clothes and faked an attack by Shankar. The king decided to have the dog shot. Shankar, who overheard the king's plans, trusted his secret to Kantar, the king's horse, and begged him to take care of the boy. So, the horse swallowed the child and in his fifth birthday he decided to check how the gardener's daughter fared. Unfortunately, a groom saw everything and told the four wives. Once again, they faked an attack and the king arranged the execution of the horse. Kantar, realising what was coming, let out the prince. Since he was a magic horse, he produced a saddle, a bridle, some exquisite clothes, a sword, and a gun. The horse gave him instructions. The boy did as he was told and they escaped to another country. Kantar told the prince the whole story about his birth. Then, he asked the prince to put some old threadbare clothes on. From that moment on, he would be a poor man and he had to learn a trade. Later, the horse turned into a donkey and the boy into an ugly man just by twisting their ears. Only the boy's eyes and voice remained the same. The boy found a grain merchant who needed a servant. One day, while he wandered into the king's garden, he began to sing a song of his homeland. The youngest daughter of the king heard it and she fell in love with him. She asked her father to give her the opportunity of choosing her own husband. All the eligible princes of the kingdom were summoned to the palace. The princess, dressed in the rarest silks, wore a simple gold chain around her neck to be placed around the neck of her would-be husband. Twice she chose the grain merchant's servant. As the king pledged his word to his daughter, the wedding took place the next

day. The princess's six sisters had all married well-off princes and they laughed at her for her choice. One day, Katar's friend went out for a walk and told his horse about the mockery he was suffering for being ugly and poor. Then, Katar asked her to twist his left ear and he became a horse again. The boy, then, twisted his left ear and became himself again. When he arrived to the place riding his horse, nobody recognised her. He had to explain his wife the whole story, how they first met, the wedding... The king was delighted with his *new* son in law. Some time later, the prince returned to his homeland in order to introduce his wife to his father. When he was close to the palace, he sent the king, his father, a letter inviting all the people's kingdom to a week-feast. When everybody was assembled, the prince saw that his mother was not there. After some questioning, the king realised he had forgotten the gardener's daughter. The prince ordered his wife's handmaidens to go and bathe her in jasmine and dress her in the finest silk and bring her back to join the rest of the people. When the carriage arrived, the prince himself helped the gardener's daughter out of it. Two days later, the prince inquired the king for his son, but he had no idea about what he was talking about. The prince, in turn, said that he was his son and explained the entire story. The king felt very blissful and he commanded the other four wives to leave the country at once. He also pleaded forgiveness and asked her to be his wife once again.

### APPENDIX 3

#### *"The Prince Who Was Changed into a Ram"*

This story was collected by James H. Knowles from Shiva Báyú of Renewárí, Sínagar, and published in *Folk-Tales of Kashmir*. In this fairy tale, the storyteller features a kingdom with 1600 wives but only one son. The king's main ambition was to find him a princess who was at the same time delicate and strong, only daughter, and whose father had as many wives as he himself. The king trusted his wisest advisor, a talking parrot, to fly as far afield as necessary to find the right woman. In his travel, he found a mynah bird looking a prince for a princess. After some talking, they realized they were searching for the same person (the prince and the princess). The parrot gave the mynah a prince's portrait to be showed to his princess. On the other hand, the parrot flew to the princess's kingdom to check her beauty. The princess was delighted with the prince portrait and the prince was willing to marry her. They make elaborate arrangements for the wedding, but three days before the special day, the prince's father fell ill and died. So, the wedding was put off. When the prince finally set off with the parrot leading the way, it took him two days to reach the princess's kingdom. The night they arrived, he camped in the garden below the palace wall, within sight of the princess's room. But, the gardener shot the parrot for stealing dates; the king was angry because of the prince's delay and he didn't listen to the explanation given by the prince. He was very much opposed to the wedding. However, the princess was more in love than ever and she planned a way to flee away to the prince's own country. They galloped

recklessly all night. After another full day on the road, they had to spend a night in a small village. Unfortunately, the only place to stay was the witch's house. The witch had an only daughter who fell in love with the prince. So, while the princess was wandering around, she threw a cord around the prince's neck and cast an incantation. He was changed into a ram at the moment. By day, with the cord in place, the ram followed her like a shadow. By night, the ram became a prince again, but he had forgotten all about the princess. The princess, confused and upset because of her husband's behaviour, disguised herself as a man and presented herself at court. The king was impressed by her intelligence and wit and appointed her a deputy police inspector. Her main goal was to find her beloved. In *his* new position, *he* visited several times the witch's daughter who gradually fell in love with *him*. She began to give *him* gifts, tokens... One of these presents was a bolt of cloth very cleverly woven that when the light and the wind caught the material, the jewel-like animals in the design seemed to stir and glow, pulsing with a life of their own. The queen heard of the miraculous material and asked some for her rooms. The deputy inspector hurried to the witch's house to ask where she could find more cloth. The problem was that the cloth was sent to the witch by her brother who lived in a very inaccessible island. In addition, he killed everyone daring to approach the island. The deputy inspector decided to go himself. The witch, knowing her daughter was in love with him, decided to help him and produced a small clay jar which hung on a thong around her neck. It contained her brother's soul. She smashed it, and her brother died. The deputy inspector was successful in his expedition to the island and came back with the finest cloths and jewels. The king was so pleased that made her his heir. Some years later, the king died and the deputy inspector succeeded him. She then ordered every ram in the city to be brought to her. She examined all of them, but none seemed to recognize her. She asked her police inspectors to make sure no rams had been hidden. In a second inspection, they found the witch's daughter feeding her ram. As they approached the palace, the ram ran toward the king, the cord broke, and there stood the prince, still young and beautiful. The king banished the witch and her daughter to her brother's island. Later that night, the king revealed her true identity to the prince and told him how she had come to be king. Delighted to be reunited, they decided to face the people together and tell them the truth about their king. The next morning, the king declared he was their king, though a woman. He had the courage of a man, yet he was still a woman. She repeated the whole story and the people accepted them both as their rulers.

