

SOCIOCULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH NORTH AFRICAN CHILDREN'S PLAY AND TOY HERITAGE

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Abstract

The introduction offers contextual information about the author, analyzes the methodological procedures used in his research, and presents an overview of ethical aspects concerning contacts with children and families. Then follows a discussion of the sociocultural and educational development of children in Morocco in relation to children's play heritage. The last topic proposes my intercultural creativity workshops for children and adults in European and non-Western countries, workshops based on North African children's play and toy-making activities.

Keywords: Child, play, toys, children's heritage, educational development, sociocultural.

DESENVOLVIMENTO SOCIOCULTURAL E EDUCACIONAL ATRAVÉS DA HERANÇA DE BRINCADEIRAS E BRINQUEDOS DAS CRIANÇAS DO NORTE DA ÁFRICA

Resumo

A introdução oferece informações contextuais sobre o autor, analisa os procedimentos metodológicos utilizados em sua pesquisa e apresenta uma visão geral dos aspectos éticos relativos aos contatos com crianças e famílias. Em seguida, segue uma discussão sobre o desenvolvimento sociocultural e educacional das crianças no Marrocos, em relação à herança lúdica das crianças. O último tópico propõe minhas oficinas de criatividade intercultural para crianças e adultos em países europeus e não ocidentais, oficinas baseadas nas atividades lúdicas e de fabricação de brinquedos das crianças do norte da África.

Palavras-chave: Criança, brincadeira, brinquedos, patrimônio infantil, desenvolvimento educacional, sociocultural.

DESARROLLO SOCIOCULTURAL Y EDUCATIVO A TRAVÉS DEL PATRIMONIO DEL JUEGO Y LOS JUGUETES DE LOS NIÑOS DE ÁFRICA DEL NORTE

Resumen

La introducción proporciona información contextual sobre el autor, revisa los procedimientos metodológicos utilizados en su investigación y presenta una visión general de los aspectos éticos relativos al contacto con los niños y las familias. A continuación, se analiza el desarrollo sociocultural y educativo de los niños en Marruecos en relación con el patrimonio lúdico infantil. El último tema propone mis talleres de creatividad intercultural para niños y adultos de países europeos y no occidentales, talleres basados en las actividades de juego y fabricación de juguetes de los niños norteafricanos.

Palabras clave: Niño, juego infantil, juguetes, patrimonio infantil, desarrollo educativo, sociocultural.

INTRODUCTION

Readers may find it interesting to have some information about the writer of an article and the context in which he has done his research. Among other reasons, because promoting development based on children's play and toymaking activities or providing creative and intercultural workshops do not belong to an ethnographer's academic work. However, this approach relates to my training as a social worker during the last years of the 1950s in my Flemish hometown Ghent in Belgium. In 1984, I grabbed the opportunity to write my first book Games and

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Toys: Anthropological Research on Their Practical Contribution to Child Development. Aids to Programming UNICEF Assistance to Education. An offer from the UNESCO Unit for Co-operation with UNICEF & WORLD FOOD PROGRAM.

In 1989, my first attempt to develop a pedagogical approach, based on children's play and toy heritage from the Tunisian Sahara, took place in the last year of a Flemish preschool as part of a project of the Ghent Committee for UNICEF. Thanks to the teacher's support, this attempt was successful and encouraged me to make similar efforts in my own country but mostly abroad.

Fieldwork among children and their families of the Saharan seminomadic Ghrib living in the south of Tunisia (1975 and 1977) and among communities in Morocco (1992 until today), lay at the basis of my research and extra-academic activities. My dissertation (1987) and Ph.D. thesis (1973) in Dutch analyze written documents on Central African children's socialization. When looking for a place to start fieldwork, Central Africa was not a reasonable choice due to personal, economic, and political reasons. On the contrary, going to the Tunisian Sahara was much more indicated.

An important change in viewpoint about children's growing up occurred after my first fieldwork period among the Ghrib children. My research project was to study their socialization: the point of view of their parents, family members, and the local community on children's upbringing. However, I also looked for information on these children's play, games, and toys. Back home, I realized that concentrating on children's play and toy-making activities might be a better way to proceed. This change of viewpoint towards the children's point of view on their own life and that of the adults taking care of them was a far-sighted measure. Because this evolution in the anthropological study of the child only took place towards the end of the last century.

Because of changes in my professional life, fieldwork was not possible between 1978 and 1992. During these years, I scrutinized the bibliography on North Africa and the Sahara for data on play, games, and toys. I also studied the large collection of toys from these regions in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris (now in the Musée du Quai Branly). At the end of 1992, I could return to fieldwork and chose to do so in Morocco. From 1995 onwards, I turned my attention to the rural world. Therefore, most information concerns children of the Amazigh populations living in the Middle Atlas, High Atlas, Anti-Atlas, and Pre-Sahara and speaking Tamazight or Tachelhit. In 2002, I went to live in the Anti-Atlas because I wanted to return to fieldwork in a limited area and with the continuous help of local adults.

The methodological procedures used from 1975 until now can be summarized as follows:

- Ethnographic research on children's play and toy culture based on a participatory approach with observation, informal exchanges, open interviews. Girls and boys between the age of three and fifteen years.
- Children themselves are most often the source of information. Sometimes these are memories of teenagers, adults, or old people.
- Collaborating with informants, interpreters, and in the Anti-Atlas I was lucky to find Khalija Jariaa and Boubaker Daoumani, two locals who became research assistants and friends.
- Write out a detailed description of children's games and toys and the ecological and human context.

- Use some aspects of visual anthropology with making slides, digital photos as well as some films and videos.
- Develop a qualitative perspective but without the pretension of global or statistically verifiable representativeness.
- My research evolves from the micro-level with the Ghibi of the Tunisian Sahara with a detailed analysis on a well-defined ground (1975, 1977) to the macro-level with a collection of information on the vast territory of North Africa and the Sahara. , (1980-1991) then in Morocco (1992-2002), and finally back to the micro-level in the Anti-Atlas in southwestern Morocco (2002-present).
- I also looked for information on toy and play in the ethnographic, linguistic, and other bibliographies mostly on North Africa and the Sahara. These references are found in *Saharan and North African Toy and Play Cultures*. Commented bibliography on play, games and toys (Rossie, 2021).
- The gathered information is used for a thematic, comparative, historical, and regional analysis published in the collection *Saharan and North African Toy and Play Cultures*, and in the French version of this collection *Cultures Ludiques Sahariennes et Nord-Africaines*.

Some ethical aspects should also be mentioned:

- Participatory observation is impossible without the trust of children, their families or neighbors, and local authorities. Remote viewing is possible, but children's consent is required once the observer is spotted.
- Wanting to observe and photograph children, an ethnographer will get a quick response, they accept or withdraw. Children mostly give consent indirectly by accepting a discreet and non-interfering presence.
- Obtaining consent from parents or other adults when collecting data or toys and taking photographs is necessary as the fieldwork happens in families or public spaces. This permission has been asked and given verbally.
- That the children concerned very often appreciate the researcher's interest in their games and toys certainly facilitates such research.
- I use children's real first names and correct references for the places where they live because they demand to be recognized as the actors of their games and the creators of toys. Since there are several years between taking a photograph and publishing it, I believe that their privacy remains well protected.
- The property of children towards their toys needs to be safeguarded. Therefore, the researcher must beware for adults wanting to please the researcher by giving him toys especially when they belong to small children.
- When living in a family or obtaining toys to build up the collection of toys made by Moroccan children, I used a system of viewing the hospitality or toy as a gift to a friend and offering

a return gift. Buying toys by myself or collaborators was only done when making them requires money to acquire the necessary materials.

- Trying to find out what children think of the researcher is perilous because the rules of respect, the difference in age, sex, and status as well as the limited verbal capacities of children, make a realistic response very unlikely.

The number of photographs being limited, I refer to the PowerPoint - Jogos e brinquedos tradicionais das crianças do norte de África available on: <https://www.academia.edu/37981642> (Rossie, 2018, 60 slides). And another PowerPoint - Play, Toys and Intercultural Early Childhood Education (Rossie, 2021, 118 slides) available on <https://www.academia.edu/47772606>.

Sociocultural development

This section looks at the sociocultural development of Moroccan children and populations mostly those living in rural areas. The next section will address the relation between the Moroccan education system and children's play and toy heritage.

Developing my research on child play and toy-making activities as an academic or folkloristic pursuit only was not something I could take for granted. On the contrary, I believe that this research should also bear concrete results. One might think of child welfare, the relationship between parents and children, between parents and teachers, formal and informal education, adapting the school to local conditions, community development, and the promotion of intercultural understanding.

Associations aiming to promote local culture and sociocultural development can play a role in safeguarding and using the Moroccan play heritage. There are many possibilities for using games in cultural and social activities. We can draw inspiration from youth movements like the scouts. In 2007, I witnessed a new scout group starting its activities in Sidi Ifni by organizing a wedding parade and party with local children. Youth centers and summer camps could also take advantage of traditional games and toys for their activities.

Another field that might benefit from integrating child culture is children's literature and theater in Amazigh languages and Moroccan Arabic. Make-believe play and games of skill offer plenty of themes, situations, and child-child relationships to exploit.

Popular culture museums can expand their collections with toys created by rural children and popular class urban children. Would it be too hazardous to propose the creation of regional child and toy museums in Morocco being also active in promoting local development? At the same time such museums can be touristic assets as has been exemplified in several countries on all continents.

There exists a private museum of dolls from all over the world in Rabat but looking on its website at the photographs in the overview of the exposition I did not see examples of traditional dolls made by Moroccan children. Child made dolls as shown in the collection Saharan and North African Toy and Play Cultures (ROSSIE, 2005, 2021).

Yet, In the beginning of 2020, I learned about a project to create a popular culture museum in the ksar or fortified village Aït ben Haddou in the foothills of the High Atlas. Located within that

Ksar, a cultural center will collect, transmit and bring to life the Amazigh heritage of the High Atlas. Among other topics, children's lives and their play and toymaking activities will be the subject of an exhibition room.

Organizations working for the development of communities, children or education base their actions on the following strategies and principles:

- Respect the culture of the child and his family.
- Consider the fundamental role of the family and the local environment in the life of the child.
- Base development and education on cultural and linguistic identity.
- Use the mother tongue especially for young children.
- Actively involve the child in its own development.
- Consider the experience and life of the child.
- Through play the child develops globally: physically, socially, emotionally, intellectually and morally.

These principles and strategies show the need to study, respect, and use the children's point of view and children's culture. Such an approach certainly is necessary when developing quality formal and informal education as well as in the case of organizations and associations promoting the wellbeing of children, women, and families. When forsaking this fundamental approach, their actions will harvest little success as they alienate the children from their family and environment. This way, more problems may be created than solved.

A holistic approach to the child and its environment is the only adequate one, and the Charte nationale d'éducation et de formation, the Moroccan National Charter of Education and Training promulgated in 1999 adheres to this principle in its article 6: The achievement of the objectives requires considering the expectations and needs of children, psychically, emotionally, cognitively, physically, artistically and socially. Moreover, in their publications, international organizations for development cooperation regularly mention that such a holistic approach to children and their communities is indispensable. One cannot promote the wellbeing of children when ignoring their experiences and the local children's cultural heritage. Experience and training children largely acquire through their games, making and handling toys, and their relations in playgroups with peers and older children. All these factors play a crucial role in building children's personalities and are directly related to their natural, material, and human environment. Starting from the child to promote its development necessitates observing and listening to children, view them as active participants and take their contributions and questions seriously.

The same Charter for Education and Training states: The education system is rooted in the cultural heritage of Morocco. It respects the variety of its regional components that enrich each other. It preserves and develops the specificity of this heritage, in its ethical and cultural dimensions.

Referring to this desire to preserve and develop the specificity of the Moroccan cultural heritage through education, I would like to stress that the playful heritage of Moroccan children should and could be part of this effort to root the education system in local realities.

Yet, it is useless to hold an idealized discourse on the benefits of using children's local play and toy culture. On the contrary, we must consider the problems which make it difficult to apply such good intentions. Khadija Bouzoubaâ, a member of ATFALE, points to a real difficulty in Morocco when describing the negative attitude of teachers and parents towards using games and toys in schools. She also stresses that this attitude creates an obstacle to modernizing preschools (1998, p. 6).

Educational development

In a psycho-sociological study of the schoolchild, the Moroccan scholar Haddiya El Mostafa stressed already in 1988 that the Moroccan school system must be less an agent of uprooting and should become a promotor of the rural communities and their development.

While welcoming the progress made during these last twenty years, it remains regrettable that the rule teaching must start from the personality of the child and consider its natural and human environment, seems, as far as I could attest, not explicitly mentioned in documents about improving the quality of education in preschools and primary schools. However, in this article, I will limit the analysis of the recent Moroccan educational project to preschools and their relation, or rather lack of it, to the play and toy heritage of Moroccan rural children and children from popular quarters in towns.

Let us have a look at the situation of the formal and informal preschools in Morocco. A UNICEF publication mentions for 2009 that in the absence of a real public policy on preschool education for children between four and six years, almost all the 39,000 existing establishments are private, therefore paying, and most often located in cities. In rural areas, the preschool enrollment rate for children does not exceed 35%, while the national average is 60% (44% for girls). The country also lacks educators trained in a pedagogy adapted to the needs of toddlers (L'éducation au Maroc - Observations et actions de l'Unicef).

An ambitious project started in 2000 with the *Loi n° 05-00 relative au statut de l'enseignement préscolaire*, the law on preschool education. Article 1 states that preschool education strives to guarantee all Moroccan children equality and access to education. Preschool education will promote their physical, cognitive, and emotional well-being and stimulate their autonomy and socialization.

This law on preschools stipulates in point 6 that preschool education must also prepare the child for learning to read and write in Arabic, through the mastery of oral expression and by relying on the Amazigh or any other local language to facilitate the initiation into reading or writing. As the term oral expression is used here, I believe that verbal lore, songs, and other modes of communication used by children in their play and toymaking activities may offer real help.

The Alliance de Travail dans la Formation et l'Action pour l'Enfance (ATFALE) is a professional non-governmental organization created in 1986 by a team from the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the University of Rabat. It aims to develop quality education for preschool children and particularly underprivileged children in Morocco. On the website of ATFALE the Vision Pédagogique

mentions a series of fourteen fundamental principles. Hereafter, I propose, translated in English, those related to child play, playgroups, and toy making activities with natural and waste material.

- Start with the child in the implementation of preschool activities.
- Work in small groups.
- Exploit the pleasure of play as a teaching tool.
- Open to the environment and use it pedagogically.
- Educate to respect the environment.

In the educational vision section of its website, ATFALE explains that the preschool activities will focus on the rights and needs of the child. The preschool is open to its immediate environment, anchored in national cultural specificities and respectful of universal values. Is it not necessary to achieve these goals to observe and listen to children in their natural and human environment and take their local playful creativity seriously?

Concerning ‘exploiting the pleasure of play as a pedagogical tool’ ATFALE notes that play is an essential activity for young children. It is an inexhaustible source of pleasure, satisfaction, creativity, and learning. The educator should not perceive the child's play as an obstacle to his work. On the contrary, he must rely on this activity to build an educational approach. He must consider play as a real opportunity insofar as it motivates the child, stimulates him, and leads him to discoveries. I am convinced that in this context, it is indispensable to stress the importance of analyzing and recognizing indigenous child culture and find ways to use it for pedagogical purposes (Rossie, 2019).

Another pedagogical principle put forward by ATFALE is the need to work in small groups as written in the Pedagogical Vision: Young children adapt more easily and are less lost in a small group than in a big anonymous group. In a small group, they can communicate and interact with each other and with the educator.

About small groups in preschools, one should not forget that Moroccan rural children and those from popular neighborhoods have a lot of experience with small groups, especially in their playgroups composed of a few siblings and neighborhood children. Such local playgroups have a role in the development of young children. It is in their playgroups that children learn most of the games and venture to make toys. On a social level, they integrate the rules governing relations between younger and older children and peers. Moreover, first in mixed playgroups and then in gender-separated playgroups, they learn a lot about what it is to be a girl or a boy and about the relations between women and men. To talk about these experiences with preschool and primary school children might be a good start.

Examining a few documents on the cooperation between the Moroccan authorities and UNICEF between 2007 and 2015 mentioned in the References, I did not find any indications that points towards using indigenous child culture and specifically the knowledge and skills of preschool and primary school children. Among others, those acquired through games, the creation of toys, and participating in playgroups.

Nevertheless, in a publication called *The Education Revolution*, UNICEF declares the following about a comprehensive approach towards learning for life in the 21st century:

The learning environment must also be transformed to one that is active and child-centred. It must be linked to the development level and abilities of the child learners. Children must be able to express their views, thoughts and ideas; they need opportunities for joy and play; they need to be comfortable with themselves and with others; and they should be treated with respect (p. 22).

It must be problematic to formulate a better statement about the need to relate to child culture and the creativity and viewpoint of children. If educators want to make the classroom experience fulfilling and relevant, is taking local play and toy-making experiences into account not one of the best ways to achieve this? At least, if these adults do not change the play activities into purely didactic exercises.

In Gerison Lansdown's *Every Child's Right to be Heard*. A resource guide on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 12 (2011), published by Save the Children UK on behalf of Save the Children and UNICEF, a section of the chapter "Implementing article 12 in different settings" is devoted to play, recreation, sport and cultural activities. In the beginning of this section, it is written that through play "children acquire social skills, and develop creativity and innovation, capacity to negotiate and to care for others, and the ability to establish, understand and abide by rules. However, central to the right to play is the principle that children must be free to create their own activities and games without adult control. In other words, the right to play is exercised through the right of children to express their own views" (p. 109). About "children must be free to create their own activities and games without adult control", it is important to say that in Morocco children's indigenous play and toy-making activities have been and still are organized by the children themselves with little or no adult interference.

In programs for physical education, teachers could use several indigenous games of skill such as hopscotch, bungee and rope jumping, marbles, round and running games, games where balance, speed, precision, and self-control. Examples of the introduction of traditional games of skill or sports in physical education exist in several countries. In Morocco, some physical education teachers of Amazigh origin have taken an interest in this field, but I am not aware of any concrete project.

There is no doubt that formal and non-formal education can benefit from the thoughtful use of indigenous play and toy heritages. When this is true for the Moroccan school in general, this certainly the case when education must adapt to Amazigh-speaking children and their families, especially in the preschool and first cycle of primary school. Talking with children about their play and toy-making activities will promote a positive bond between the teacher and these children and reduce the divide between the family environment and children's culture on one hand and preschool and elementary school on the other hand. For example, it may be appropriate to refer to the knowledge and skills that children did acquire when making toys with natural material for teaching lessons about nature and the environment. Many Moroccan children still live in rural areas where making toys even by three-year-old children remains a regular activity and create traditional dolls or animal figurines continue to exist (Rossie et al., 2021). Educators could build on the experience of older children and their interest in making toys. A preschool teacher may even find help to build pedagogical and other toys by proposing older children who are the real toy-making experts to help.

Three examples from sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s demonstrate that it is possible to use games and toys for a development better suited to the needs of children and the environment in which they grow up. The first example I have found in *We are also human beings: a guide to children's rights in Zimbabwe. Practical ways to introduce young children to their rights* (2000), concerns a Zimbabwe program that uses play and building toys to educate children about their rights and responsibilities. In an article with the same title, one reads it is “essentially a practical manual for direct work with children and adults that includes many practical exercises. Although designed for children from 10 to 17 years, many of its approaches and ideas also seem useful for younger children too, perhaps in cooperation with older children or adults. The first exercise for pupils in Zimbabwe schools is about “Girls, boys, dolls and puppets. Children collect materials suitable for making dolls or puppets, e.g., old socks, cloth, wool, string, wire, card, wood, seeds, dried leaves, etc. All this refers directly to what rural Moroccan children do in their playgroups when collecting natural and waste material with whom they create dolls, animals, utensils, musical instruments, means of transport and communication (ROSSIE, 2005-2021).

The second example refers to a project of the Tanzanian Ministry of Education and Culture. Elisa K. Lwakatare, the preschool education coordinator of this ministry, wrote in 1999 that the education policy in Tanzania asks for equitable access to quality education and training and fair access to toys as educational materials. Therefore, the use of toys must become an integrated aspect of the communicative process in education. However, this can only happen by stimulating the on-site design and manufacture of toys, preferably with local materials. In his conference text Elisa K. Lwakatare wrote (ROSSIE, 2005/2013, p. 201):

Toys serve an important part in human life in the socialization process through the activity of play. In other words, the use of imported toys encourages the development of cultural norms and values that are foreign to Tanzania. While some toys are suitable and could be adopted into Tanzanian culture, the accessibility is still limited due to low purchasing power of many Tanzanian families. The thrust of Education and Training policy in Tanzania as spelt out in the current education reform is to promote equitable access to quality education and training. This means equitable access to toys as educational materials. In other words making the use of toys as an integrated aspect of the educational communicative process. This can only come about by promoting local design and manufacture of toys, preferably, using local materials. The need for educational play materials, therefore, is enormous due to the promotion of pre-school education in this reform. The number of pre-schools in the country is growing rapidly. While they were only 247 in 1993, the number has risen to 3667 to date (1999). The rising in demand calls for an equal rise in supply of play materials if this level of education has to be adequately supported. This provision of educational materials (toys) must be backed with a thorough research in order to come out with the most suitable designs and economic use of materials.

In 2005 I wrote about this project: “Even though this Tanzanian policy of developing educational toys adapted to local sociocultural and material conditions is in its beginning, it is already of great importance because it puts forward the problem and develops means to resolve it (ROSSIE, 2005/2013, p. 202).

The third and one of the best examples I know uses local play and toy-making activities in the early childhood education program. This program was initiated, controlled, and led by Samburu parents in northern Kenya in relation to social changes of their semi-pastoral life. Traditionally the

children were looked after by the grandmothers when the parents go away during the transhumance season. These grandmothers took care of the children. At the same time, they played with them and taught them poems, stories, and songs. This system is called *Imwate*, meaning fence. Although this system worked well for countless generations, it had fallen into disuse. After discussion, the adults decided to create a modern *Imwate*. Based on the advice of the elderly, they collected traditional songs, tales, proverbs and poems, and constructed toys and play devices. Toys include “wooden and leather dolls and balloons, clay or rattan animals, rattles, catapults. The play equipment included climbing frames, raised platforms, miniature houses, swings, see-saws, hoops, crawling tunnels and so on...” *Imwate* is open every morning and cannot operate without the participation of parents. All the mothers take turns working there. Soon this modern *Imwate* was supported by the Samburu Early Childhood Development Project, a joint project of the Kenya Institute of Education and the Christian Children’s Fund (ROSSIE, 2005/2013, p. 202).

Now more than at the end of the last century, the need for educational toys exists in North Africa and the Sahara. When seeing all the toys made by children in these countries, it cannot be difficult to find models for educational toys that are cheap to produce and useful for preschools, youth centers, and vacation centers. When in Morocco pedagogical practice will consider the value of children’s indigenous play and toy heritages, the use of children’s toy-making skills will become necessary simply because western educational toys are so expensive that there are not enough financial means to buy them.

The book *Toys, Play, Culture, and Society* offers a broader analysis of the section on educational development (ROSSIE, 2005/2013, p. 187-210). The reader can also find useful information in the above-mentioned book of Gerison Lansdown in the section on children’s rights in education (p. 100-111).

INTERCULTURAL CREATIVITY WORKSHOPS FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS

Intercultural education becomes indispensable because of the global globalization of economy and culture. Intercultural education in Morocco would probably refer to “the variety of its regional components which enrich each other” (*Charte nationale d’éducation et de formation*, Première Partie, Principes Fondamen-taux), then to cultural diversity in North Africa and the Sahara.

I have used the information gathered through my research for activities and workshops with Argentinian, Belgian, French, German, Greek, Italian, Moroccan, and Portuguese children or adults, linking an intercultural approach to building toys with natural and waste material as many Moroccan children still do today.

Explaining to children and adults the situations, lifestyles, and customs in foreign countries and compare their similarities and differences with local ones without provoking ambivalent or negative feelings is problematic. However, this can get easier when using examples of universal topics like play, games, and toys or dance and festivals, because this offers opportunities for recognition and positive feelings. When not just talking about foreign children’s play, toymaking, and toy use but proposing participants to be creative in a workshop, this becomes an active and self-directed training. The often enjoyed fun during the workshop stimulates an open attitude to new ways of doing and being.

Using natural and waste material to make masks or toys also promotes environmental awareness. If possible, collecting these materials in the surroundings at the beginning of the

workshop is advisable, or asking participants to bring some from home. At the end of the workshop, participants can take their works home, which offers an additional stimulant.

The usefulness of the Saharan and North African play and toy heritage is not limited to North Africa and the Sahara or to the Third World as it is quite possible to integrate it in what is called intercultural or peace education, for example in Western Europe where many immigrants from these regions settled down decades ago.

The analysis of educational development and children's play and toy heritage is largely based on the study of documents but the proposals for using my information in the sphere of intercultural or peace education in a western and non-western context are based on personal experience. In this context, the following words of Claude Lévi-Strauss: *the discovery of others is the discovery of a relationship, not of a barrier* are particularly significant.

When being a volunteer of the Ghent Committee for UNICEF in Belgium, my first experience was about "the world at play: intercultural education through toys and play". This project started in 1989 with a preschool group of children of about five years. I showed them a short series of slides on the games of make believe of the Ghrib girls and boys of the Tunisian Sahara. In this series of slides the reality of the Ghrib children's daily lives is portrayed as well as the interpretation of this reality in their play and toy making activities. The themes evoked were life in the desert, the oasis, animals, the household, spinning, weaving, and the modernization of nomadic life. After the preschool children have seen and commented on the slides, I asked them to look for some advantages of living in the desert and some disadvantages of life where they grow up as well as for some inconveniences of life in the desert and some pleasant aspects of life in their homes. The children spoke, for example, of the sunny weather, the free space, the availability of play-mates in the desert in contrast to the rainy weather, the danger of playing outside, the loneliness of a lot of children in Belgium. Among the disadvantages of living in the desert, the scarcity of water, food, modern toys and luxury goods was mentioned versus the abundance of all this in Belgium. After playtime, the girls and boys were divided in several small groups. Each group made something to create an oasis village as seen at figure 140 on next page. Some children made a copy of the houses they saw on the slides, others made a palm tree, a well, a dromedary and so on. The materials at their disposal were waste material, Plasticine, building blocks, green pipe cleaners and cardboard tubes of kitchen rolls. As I mentioned at the beginning of the event in the preschool, the relationship between the travelling of the Saharan nomads and that of the modern nomads of circuses and fairs, some children created with Lego blocks a caravan pulled by a horse. Another task was to find among plastic animals those that can live in the desert and the oasis. At the end, the children learned a little song with repetitive simple melody but with adapted words. Then they walked around their oasis village while singing and imitating the walking of a dromedary.

Since this experience, I have used the same approach to the intercultural from the first to the sixth year of the primary school, each time in sessions of one hour. In the class I use a video of twenty minutes on the way children from Kenya in East Africa live and play, a video made for the Dutch Committee for UNICEF. So doing, some Ghent pupils were confronted with a quite different material situation and family life but they also saw that the Kenyan children are creative in making toys. This brought more than one primary school child to express spontaneously its admiration for the creativity and know-how of youngsters living in Kenya. After the video, the same way of opposing what the pupils like or dislike in their own life and that of the African children is worked through. As I gave this intercultural program in the lessons of religion or lay ethics, the teacher often continued this approach in a subsequent lesson and/or gives the children the possibility to make toys with

waste material they brought from their homes. This way a small pedagogical project could be elaborated possibly giving rise to an exposition of the toys, designs and stories realized during this intercultural education program. It also occurred that I was asked to enter a pedagogical project related to a specific theme such as 'water', 'waste and recycling', 'environmental protection', 'children's creativity'. In these cases, I selected a series of slides on play activities and toys from the Tunisian Sahara and Morocco to exemplify certain topics linked to these themes.

Another experience, I lived through in April 1992, brought me into contact with two groups of completely or partially deaf children. The program lasted for half a day. As the possibilities of verbal expression are limited, I stressed the visual aspect by showing first the already mentioned video followed by a series of 50 slides on the life and the games of the Ghrib children. Afterwards the pupils of the specialized primary school made toys with waste material as they had seen on the video and the slides. This attempt clearly shows the usefulness of this approach, although it would be necessary in order to be more efficient to insert in the pedagogical process an introduction of at least one hour to transmit to such deaf children the verbal information that makes the visual information more easily understood.

What I found very stimulating and adequate in such playful approaches to intercultural education is, next to the stimulation of the creativity and personal effort of these Ghent children, the promotion of a more positive image of Third World children, an image that often is unilaterally negative and based on images of sick, miserable or starving children, images one regularly sees on television, as if this is the only reality of Third World children.

The results of these pedagogical activities have convinced me of the certainly limited but creative possibility of using play activities and toys for an intercultural purpose. By doing this it may be feasible to prepare young children to become adolescents and adults less prejudiced towards the social, cultural or ethnic minorities or majorities living in their country, on the one hand, and towards peoples and societies of foreign countries on the other hand.

In 1992, my intercultural activities ended because of doing research in Morocco but they resumed in July 2008 when being invited by the Greek Museum of Childhood of the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation in Nafplion to develop an educational program related to Anti-Atlas children's play heritage. Inspired by toys Amazigh children had made, Nafplion children between six and twelve created their own toys during six workshops. These Greek children made masks and dolls with natural and waste material searched for in the park surrounding the museum.

As I was regularly invited by Gorgio Bartolucci to his home and his *Centro Internazionale Ludoteche*, I could also in 2008 lead similar intercultural workshops in Florence. The theme of this workshop was the Ashura festival and Imachar masquerade in southern Morocco. In a library section for young girls and boys of the Biblioteca delle Oblate and a year later at the *Festival della Creatività*, the children had fun making masks sometimes with the help of a parent.

Since then, using natural and waste material to create masks, dolls, and possibly other types of toys such as vehicles, has been a recurrent theme in my workshops up to the last ones organised for children and family in the *Musée du Jouet de Moirans-en-Montagne* in 2014 (ROSSIE, 2015) and in 2019 with preschool teachers in training at the Higher School of Education, Lisbon, Portugal (ROSSIE, 2019).

A few outstanding events have marked these intercultural activities (ROSSIE, 2013, p. 274-286). The first one followed the international seminar *Infancias, Juegos y Juguetes* taking place in October 2010 in Buenos Aires. During a few days at the end of October the *Instituto de Formacion Docentes de Bariloche* asked the author to intervene in the training of their students and to show the possibilities of using children's play and toy cultures not only for a more holistic children's development but also for promoting intercultural and international understanding. In order to give this message a more concrete form, a workshop was planned with pupils, teachers in training and appointed teachers that resulted in an inspiring happening. In Neuquén, another Argentinian town, similar workshops have been organised in a primary school, a centre for professional education and a teacher training institution. The enthusiasm of the children and adolescents participating in these activities has been inspiring and stimulating.

The second example is special because the workshop was integrated into a larger project made possible by the author's gift of about hundred Anti-Atlas children's toys to the *Associazione Lucertola Ludens* of Ravenna in Italy. This project was called *I Giocattoli in valigia* as they were brought in a luggage from southern Morocco to Ravenna. When staying in Ravenna in September 2011 and in collaboration with the toy maker Renzo Laporta, I conducted a training seminar, two lectures and a workshop for children and their parents creating dolls and cars with natural and waste material. During 2012, this intercultural project was further developed by Renzo Laporta in a primary school of Ravenna. The project's objectives are promoting creativity, using natural and waste material, and bringing pupils in contact with the play and toy culture of an African country.

Another example to promote intercultural awareness, understanding and goodwill based on Moroccan children's play and toy-making activities during the ten-day long Ashura festivities, is found in my proposal for Global Education *Ashura a children's feast in Morocco* (ROSSIE, 2008). This document offers a PowerPoint and a text comparing Moroccan children's folklore with similar folklore in Great Britain and other European countries. The text also mentions some issues and statements related to global education and discussing the topics of similarity, diversity, change and environment.

Next to organising workshops or seminars and giving lectures, I donated about 1200 toys to museums and sociocultural organisations in Australia, Belgium, France, and Italy. Except the about forty toys from Ghrib children of the Tunisian Sahara, all the other toys belonged to Moroccan children. The great majority of these toys were made by children with natural and waste material. The major reasons to offer these toys to institutions in Western countries are the preservation and disclosure of this slowly but sometimes also quickly vanishing children's culture, the lack of interest of Moroccan cultural institutions in these toys and the promotion of the integration of these remarkable artefacts into the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity. A description of the concerned toys is given in a series of books called *Saharan – North African – Amazigh Children's Toy Catalogs* available on the two websites mentioned in the References.

The interested reader can find a discussion of possibilities for and examples of using children's play and toy heritages in developing countries in some of my publications (ROSSIE, 1984; 2005/2013, p. 189-204; 2013, p. 262-268). The syllabus for lessons on *Play, Toys and Intercultural Early Childhood Education* in the context of the *Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees Play, Education, Toys and Languages* offers, among other topics, an overview of an anthropological approach to intercultural early childhood education, and on using indigenous play and toy heritages for pedagogical and sociocultural purposes (ROSSIE, 2021, p. 2-8).

In my book of 2013 in the collection *Saharan and North African Toy and Play Cultures*, one will find a larger analysis of my workshops together with a series of photos (Rossie, 2013, p. 262-290). One could also read a short article with a few photos "Using North African children's play culture for pedagogical and sociocultural applications" (ROSSIE, 2016).

Lazarine Bergeret of the International Federation for the Education of Parents shares this idea. In her article on dolls in the toy library she writes that the curiosity of those working there extends from the toys to all cultures, all latitudes, all periods, all civilizations and the enrichment of their information brings them slowly to look for a common message of humanity for which play could be a common language. If a toy library decides not to lend them out, maybe at least the dolls can be exhibited in the toy library just as it could be done in a school. She continues by saying: often the teachers I could inform or stimulate to take advantage of the workshops, organized within the exposition on the dolls of the world in the Musée de l'Homme (1983), telephoned to tell me of their observation of an enrichment in the children's improvisations but also of a better understanding between children of different ethnic groups. It was not the anticipating choice of the parents that determined the style of the dolls but a first step towards a possible empathy through the sole confrontation with the dolls of the others. I cannot affirm or deny that it is necessary to have dolls in a toy library. Each team of toy library workers has to think about its own choices; however, I know that each child writes its own history through the changing succession of its choices. And perhaps this history would be less violent if already during childhood the dolls of others were known and accepted (BERGERET, 1985, p. 164, 166).

Another intercultural activity has been the collaboration in developing exhibitions based on my donations of toys from Moroccan children and a few of Tunisian Sahara children. The most important expositions are *Deserts: Saharan and Atlas Mountain Children* of the Toy Museum in Moirans-en-Montagne (662 toys, 2006-2008, France) and the permanent exhibition of some of these toys in the same museum (2013-present), the exhibition *Children's dreams: crescere giocando, dal Marocco a qui* of the 'Centro per la Cultura Ludica', city of Turin (268 toys, 2010-2012, Italy), and the project of a permanent exhibition in collaboration with the 'Euro-African Center for Field Studies', University Cadi Ayyad of Marrakech (2020-present, Morocco). However, the coronavirus pandemic has delayed this project.

CONCLUSION

Children play an active role in the transmission and adaptation of many aspects related to the development of individuals, cultures, and societies. Therefore, we must not only promote their rights but also recognize their contributions. Morocco has ratified the UNESCO conventions for the safeguard of the tangible and intangible culture of humanity. However, I could not find any reference to child culture and local play and toy heritage.

Moroccan children's outdoor play experiences are important for their physical, cognitive, communicative, emotional, and social development. Moreover, all this happens through children's efforts and active interpretation, not through passive imitation. However, children do not play to become socially adapted nor to ameliorate skills. They play for the fun and well-being it procures them.

Observing children's play and toy-making activities is favorable to understanding their viewpoint and their participation in the culture and community to which they belong.

Noticing the growing influence of the school, media, toy industry and recent high-tech products in the lives of nowadays Moroccan children, I suspect that several traditional games and toys will become obsolete or forgotten in the forthcoming decades. In this context, the Moroccan preschool and primary school could be useful by recognizing the value and eventual role of children's local play heritages.

As far as I could learn from their documents published on the Internet, some governmental and non-governmental organizations for educational development rarely consider ethnographic and anthropological research on children, socialization, indigenous training, child culture, and child point of view. Often pedagogy was based on theory and practice on what children are to become as adults while neglecting the reality of indigenous development of children, their lives, and the environments in which they grow up. Changing an adult perspective to a child perspective can be promoted by integrating the knowledge and skills of local children gained in play, toy-making, and toy use (ROSSIE et al., 2021).

I suggest linking an *intercultural approach to play*, which fits my research, to a *playful approach to the intercultural*. It is necessary because people cannot survive in our multicultural and interdependent world when they do not understand the universality and the specificity of the conditions of living in their community and in other societies. Using children's play heritages from all over the world for pedagogical and sociocultural activities offers a nonthreatening, positive, and joyful way to relate children and adolescents to different ways of life and to the natural and sociocultural environment in which foreign populations thrive. I hope this way youngsters and adults can function more appropriately in the multicultural societies that have developed recently not only in cities but also in rural regions.

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