



Arts for Roma Children

Cinzia Laurelli , Marianne Poncelet

International Yehudi Menuhin Foundation (Belgium)

cinzialaurelli@gmail.com, marianne.poncelet@menuhin-foundation.com

Abstract

This paper is the presentation of the basic principles of the methodology of the European Union LLP KA1 funded project Art for Roma Children (acronym: Art4ROM). The Art for Roma Children aims to foster Roma populations' social inclusion by using a methodology where art is a key component to support education for children. The project focuses on the importance of arts integration in learning and how to use art and creativity to enhance education and prevent school leaving of Roma and non Roma children.

In three different European Member States Roma and non Roma children are involved into concrete innovative workshops using arts for enhancing learning and using the power of art to improve intercultural understanding, efficiency in education and promote the acquisition of basic life-skills for a better employability in their lives. This will address many transversal key competencies as well as bringing creativity through artistic expression, learning to learn, widening the range of their skills and competences, favouring an entrepreneurship spirit. The opportunity of engaging Roma and non-Roma young children with the wider community through art education will contribute also to fight stereotypes and will lead to the improvement of their access to education and better life learning chances.

The ultimate goal of the project is to create a platform gathering the good artistic practices highlighting the Roma and their thousand-year-old culture, and to ensure a wider European visibility to promote innovation and best practices exchange for Roma's inclusion through the practice of arts.

1. Introduction

Yehudi Menuhin, one of the greatest violinists of the 20th century was usually saying « The image of the violin could symbolise the voice of cultures. I have an assembly in mind...but not of the bureaucratic kind, rather made out of people who have already proven their worth, during missions, or representations, giving a voice to groups, any group that can be recognised but whose voice is not, or not heard enough ».

The project Art for Roma Children is promoted by the International Yehudi Menuhin Foundation, financially managed by Union Romani and co-financed by the European Lifelong Learning Programme Policy Cooperation and Innovation. The project is based on the co-operation of Roma and non Roma partners Institutions from six different European countries, it started in December 2012 and will last 24 months. The Project partners are: International Yehudi Menuhin Foundation (BE), ETP Slovakia (SK), Mosaic Art 1 Sound Ltd (UK), Union Romani (ES) MUS-E Hungary (HU), MUS-E Napoli (IT), MGR (BE), European Roma Information Office (BE).

Some 10 - 12 million Roma people are estimated to live in Europe, present in each country. Being characterized by problems of literacy, early school leaving, language barriers and lack of intercultural dialogue, Roma communities need to address as priorities the promotion of their inclusion and the upholding of their fundamental rights as EU citizens. Roma children are considered to be one of the most vulnerable groups in Europe [1] and in need of attention because their success to succeed in life is constrained by poverty, lack of access to school, segregation. The project Art for Roma Children is primarily aimed at promoting intercultural understanding and social inclusion involving Roma children into formal and non-formal educational path through the practice of different art forms.

The project focuses on the importance of arts integration in learning and how to integrate and promote art and creativity into the everyday life to limit school drop- out and promote skills development for the future employability of Roma population.

The project is targeted at Roma and non Roma children aged between 5 to 10 living in the ghettos and in the settlements located in the most under privileged areas of three European countries: Italy (Naples, Scampia), Hungary, Slovakia .

Art4ROM will collect and transfer effective joined-up learning practices, produce an innovative methodology and handbook, pilot the methodology in schools, cultural centers and Roma camps. Art4ROM Outcomes include: a methodology providing equal opportunities in education for Roma children fostering the acquisition of key competencies, piloting materials to test the methodology,



piloting in schools and the creation of a platform for joint reflection and EU cooperation to promote innovation and best practices exchange for Roma's inclusion through the practice of arts

This paper consists of three major parts: an introduction to the background of the project, art in education and the Mus-e programme where culture and education are used as a tool of social inclusion for Roma and marginalized non Roma children

1.2 Background to the project

The Roma are the largest ethnic minority in the European Union but too often they are Europe's forgotten citizens and 77% of Europeans are of the opinion that being Roma is a disadvantage in society, on a par with being disabled (79%).

According to the European Parliament, "Intercultural Education is defined as a pedagogic approach aimed at fomenting a tolerant and sensitive attitude to ethnic, cultural and religious differences between individuals".

Similarly, UNESCO defines the intercultural education as: "the existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect".

Member States reveal that not too much of progress have been done to accommodate ethnic national minorities, especially such as the Roma in to the curricular of the European education systems.

Little has been done to enhance intercultural dialogue in schools between the Roma ethnic minority and majority children in many of the countries where the population of Roma is the largest.

Intercultural education in schools has been a topic for discussions in policy and projects within EU organizations and institutions increasingly in the last decades both because of:

1. International migration;
2. The historical and multicultural assets of many European countries;
3. The necessity to make formal, non-formal and informal education more culturally open as well as a response to an increasing trend of racial intolerance, discrimination and prejudices against the migrant and national ethnic minorities in several European countries.

In Art for Roma Children art that is at the core of Roma cultural heritage is used as universal language and tool to promote intercultural education and learning opportunities for all the children.

Aim of this project is to foster intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding and social inclusion among children (both Roma and non-Roma) aged between 5-10 by using an innovative educative methodology based on the practice of the arts in school and non school environments.

1.3 Arts in Education

The use of arts in education is considered by UNESCO "a tool for equipping students with knowledge and skills across the curriculum to stimulate cognitive development and encourage innovative and creative thinking, inventiveness and critical skills" [2] and at the same time "the art in education approach is explained using the concept of "multiple intelligences", reflecting the belief that there are many kinds of intelligence and a number of ways of learning" [3].

Recent developments in cognitive science and neuroscience help explain the power of the arts. These developments have shown that "the mind is embodied"—that brain and body make up a single, fully integrated cognitive system. [4] And international scholars and researchers have been studying methodology issues related to art in education. Many effective project designed to foster art in primary schools are flourishing supported by investigations and findings in social science, psychology, anthropology, neurosciences and the arts.

Art and creativity are considered the new economy levers and their impact and effect on economic development are valued as a vital contribution for economic growth, tourism development, population policy, cultural capital of citizens.

Art integration programs demonstrated how through the art is possible to empower each individual to actualize their creativity and critical thinking skills that are necessary for developing potential paths for our future. The children as future citizens should gain those skills that will enable them to develop and improve problem solving and decision taking attitudes, and more over these skills will open the psychological and intellectual horizons towards new prospective of personal and collective happiness.

1.4 The MUS-E® programme



MUS-E programme was thought out in 1993 by the outstanding violinist and humanist Yehudi Menuhin (1916-1999) and took on practical shape thanks to the efforts of Werner Schmitt, head of the music school of the Bern Conservatoire, and Marianne Poncelet, Executive Vice-President of the International Yehudi Menuhin Foundation.

MUS-E® is inspired by the educational musical concept developed by Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967), a Hungarian composer, ethnomusicologist and teacher. His concept, circulated throughout Hungary, was that music should be part of daily education and be accessible to everyone.

Zoltán Kodály defended the idea that each country should know its own traditional culture. Yehudi Menuhin extended Kodály's concept by adapting it to the current realities of multiculturalism. While agreeing with Kodály about the importance of singing, he also insisted on the importance of movement, the various senses, the body and the imaginary world in the practice of art from different Cultures.

1.4 Culture and Education as a tool for Social Inclusion

The purpose of the MUS-E® programme is the social and cultural integration of children through introducing artistic activities, music, drama, dance and plastic arts in primary schools in Europe. MUS-E® thus contributes to the prevention of violence, racism and social exclusion by providing an opening to various cultures and awakening the creative potential of each child. The fundamental principles of this programme were outlined by Lord Menuhin as follows:

- Art makes a decisive contribution to the intellectual, aesthetic and social development of a person.
- Art develops the personal ability to overcome difficulties and transcend them, drawing additional strengths from them.
- The practice of art is a source of access to knowledge; rooted in experience, it boosts the pleasure of discovery, curiosity, interest and access to other types of knowledge.
- Art in general, and singing and dancing in particular, reconnects the body with the spirit and the spirit with the body, while reconnecting emotions with the mind and the mind with emotions.
- Artistic expression generates new relationships with ourselves and the outside world.
- Discovering traditions from their region of origin helps children rediscover their own cultural heritage, sometimes forgotten in migratory situations.
- Art creates links between an individual and different cultures. Artistic creation contributes to shaping a common culture and reinforces the feeling of belonging.
- Art is a tool for developing self-respect and respect for others.
- Art can contribute to the development of social dynamics

1.5 The Project Art4ROM

Art4ROM will address the following needs:

1. Improvement of Roma's access to education Equal and better life learning chances
2. Enhance Roma's active citizenship, foster intercultural dialogue and social cohesion.

Roma and non-Roma children will be involved into concrete innovative projects using arts. The opportunity of engaging Roma and non-Roma with the wider community through education will ultimately lead to the improvement of their access education.

The need of equal and better life learning chances will be addressed by this project, through the promotion of innovative educational practices and artistic exchanges to overcome stereotypes and prejudice.

References

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