Artigos Científicos

Traditional Portuguese Lullabies: what do they sing about?

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Abstract: This research project was developed at *Instituto de Estudos da Criança*[1] (University of Minho, Braga, Portugal) in 2008 and 2009. It focused on promoting Portuguese traditional music as a privileged field for educational practice. Considering the scarcity of good quality published Portuguese musical repertoire for musical activities in pre-school, the project started with the collection and recovery of traditional Portuguese lullabies in old song books and libraries across the country; musical activities based on the musical concepts found in the lullabies were experimented in pre-school context and organized in didactic sequence. The lullabies' lyrics were studied in order to identify recurrent themes and topics. Five main themes were found in the collection of studied lullabies. This article presents the conclusions of the project concerning the types of textual contents and themes found in the collected lullabies.
Keywords: Early-childhood; Music education; Oral literature; Popular culture; Portuguese lullabies.

Canções de Ninar Portuguesas: o que elas falam?

Resumo: Este projecto de pesquisa foi desenvolvido no *Instituto de Estudos da Criança* (Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal) em 2008 e 2009. Focalizou-se na promoção da música tradicional portuguesa enquanto campo privilegiado para a prática educacional. Considerando a escassez de repertório musical publicado de qualidade para actividades musicais no contexto pré-escolar, o projecto começou pela recolha e catalogação de canções de embalar tradicionais portuguesas a partir de cancioneiros antigos e bibliotecas de todo o país; foram idealizadas e experimentadas, com sequencialidade didáctica, diversas actividades musicais em jardins-de-infância, inspiradas nos conceitos patentes nas canções de embalar seleccionadas. Os textos das canções de embalar foram estudados no sentido de identificar temas e tópicos recorrentes. Foram encontrados cinco temas fundamentais na colecção de canções de embalar recolhida. Este artigo apresenta as conclusões do projecto de investigação no que respeita aos tipos de conteúdo textual e temas encontrados na colecção de canções de embalar.
Palavras-chave: Canções de embalar portuguesas; Cultura popular; Educação musical; Literatura oral; Primeira infância.

Introduction

The lullaby

Even though we are living in a highly industrialized society and men and women roles have been altered in the past century, some parenting behaviors resist innovation and change; babies still need to be put to sleep, independently of all the innovations and new technologies surrounding us; they still need human affection, presence and warmth (Shore, 1997). Singing while trying to put a baby to sleep is an ancestral human behavior that has not disappeared from Portuguese family habits, even though it might have been reduced in frequency or attributed to new actors. However, the increasing release of national and international recordings of lullabies and children songs (or music written specifically for children) seems to suggest that oral tradition might be in decline. Edwin Gordon (2000, p. 308) warns about this problem when reporting that children who only have access to music through television and radio "will never again have an opportunity to develop their aural vocabulary, which, in result, will lead to difficulties in singing and intonation".

Traditional songs represent (and are even part of) popular culture. They are the music repertoire in which some national traits can still be found in aesthetic form, despite globalization. This is valid not only as far as music but also text and poetry are concerned.

Lullabies are very particular in this respect, because they are more commonly associated with one particular type of performer, the mother, and because they are the first example of musical "genre" and musical "form" that humans may have contact with. It was, therefore, not surprising that during this research project it was found that several school manuals of the Portuguese dictatorship period (1926-1974) included lullabies; in fact, preparing girls to become future mothers and housewives was one of the main goals of Portuguese schooling at that time, as Artiaga (2001, 2003) underlined.

Despite all social changes in the past 40 years, rocking babies to sleep is a task still performed predominantly by women, whether at home, or in the context of kindergarten. The lullabies texts are evidence of the importance of the maternal figure in the act of singing to the baby and help perpetuate the mother's role as the songs' interpreter. In fact, Tafuri (2009) pointed out that the development of musical abilities (whether vocal, rhythmic or motor) is largely indebted to the mother's role in the baby's life, starting in the last three months of pre-natal development. Mehler & Christophe (1995, p. 947), on the other hand, found out in their perceptual studies with two-month-old babies that they can identify their mother's intonation and rhythmic features in normal speech.

References to what the Portuguese call *"canções de embalar"* ("rocking songs"), also called *"canções de ninar"*, are universal and their known history can be dated back to Ancient Greece, when, according to Abrantes (2007, p. 169, [translated]), "despite the absence of musical documents, specific words and expressions related to these songs can be found, portraying the rocking of babies". All throughout history, evidence of the existence of *"canções de embalar"* in many countries can be given and the modern designations still show that this musical genre is alive: *"canciones de cuna"*, in Spain; *"berceuses"* in France; *"ninne-nanne"* in Italy; *"wiegenlieder"* in Germany; *"lula"* in Sweden; *"lullaby"* in English speaking countries; *"konoruita"* in Japan; *"acalanto"* in Brazil, among others. In the Portuguese tradition "canções de embalar" can also be referred as *"dorme-dorme"*, *"cala-cala"*, *"ró-ró"*, *"ruge-ruge"* and *"nana-nana"* (*idem*, p. 171). These are obvious "onomatopoeiac" designations that, like the Italian counterpart *"nine-nanne"*, evoke the duple meter rocking movement and sounds made while putting the baby to sleep.

In the same way there is a variety of terms used to describe the act of rocking a baby in different countries and cultures and in different languages, there is also a variety of ways in which babies are rocked. The natural, cultural, social and economic environment is determinant for the way babies are nursed and rocked. Many times, especially in rural areas, mothers need to take their babies to work, and keep them at their back while working. On the other hand, city areas provide other resources and support systems that allow the mother to go to work leaving her baby behind with other caregivers. Financial resources and support systems can, paradoxically, hinder the intimate contact between mother and child, or other members of the family, at the moment the child goes to sleep. Pocinho, quoting Stork (1999) lists a number of different examples of how babies are put to sleep in different countries:

> [...] the African mother usually falls asleep with her baby leaning against her body, but she also frequently puts him to sleep carrying it at her back and rocking it with the walking or working rhythm; the Indian baby will either sleep against the mother's body or on a suspended net hanging from the ceiling or a tree; in Southeast Asia, namely in Cambodja, the baby falls asleep in a suspended net and is rocked for a very long time; the Brazilian baby falls asleep in the mother's arms before being put to sleep in a suspended net; in Japan babies sleep together in groups, laying on individual mattresses; in China and Taiwan, the mother silently lays down next to her baby; in North-American and European countries the baby usually has his/her own little cradle or bed. In France, the cradle is disappearing; in Portugal rocking cradles as well as small fixed beds are very common. [Transl.], (POCINHO, 1999, p. 49)

Some studies show that lullabies foster introspective behaviors in babies, while regular children songs, or played songs, stimulate their interactive abilities (Rock, Trainor & Addison, 1999, p. 531). According to the study, when listening to lullabies babies were more focused on themselves and vocalized; while listening to played songs, babies paid more attention to what went on around them, to educators, and were silent. Lullabies are, therefore, songs that provoke a more active reaction from the babies in terms of vocalizing and singing, and they stimulate the internalization of musical concepts and language concepts. Through the lyrics of lullabies words and ideals are transmitted; through the musical sounds rhythmic, melodic, tonal, dynamic and formal concepts are acquired by the babies. Popular tradition is preserved (contributing to social cohesion) and personal intimacy is developed (contributing to psychological balance). Abrantes (2007) refers to the importance of lullabies for psychological development:

> [...] this [musical] relationship between adult and child represents one of the most intimate forms of relationships that can be established (...) a moment of total contact without reserve or obstacles, which is "magic", mysterious, and involves the deepest feelings that can be present in human connections. [Transl.], (ABRANTES, 2007, p. 173)

Aesthetic concerns are usually not relevant in the interpretation of lullabies. The adult is more concerned about providing comfort, tranquility, protection and stability to the baby. Even though lullabies are not meant to accompany games, adults often develop creative interactions through the modification of the musical material or words. The quality of the sounds, the intensities, the variations in speed or intonation are all elements that can stimulate the baby's curiosity. However, these elementary games are usually associated with moments when the adult does not want the baby to fall asleep. Some Portuguese lullabies, for instance, refer to evil characters that might be considered threatening (*eg.* "Bicho Papão", [a non-defined animal that eats everything]). In these songs the adult can use the text as a source of narrative inspiration for more active interaction with the baby; a deeper voice, a softer or more aggressive tone quality can be used, and facial expressions can be explored. Unique moments of interaction and concentration can be produced, developing new forms of communication, new codes and new meanings. For Rodrigues (2005): " the first musical scores of human communication are also a learning process of seduction, attention grabbing, irritating, saddening, and so on, using the color of sound" [Transl.], (p. 66).

Through lullabies the child has access not only to music and particular lyrics, but also to information about the external world, about feelings, attitudes and communication. Rodrigues (2005, p. 63) underlines that the development of the baby's "aural and kinetic" abilities through the listening of lullabies represents an important emotional "thesaurus" that will be determinant for the child's capacity to face certain moments later in life. The psychologist adds that "the awakening of the senses is structural and structuring in the Initiation to the World" (*id*, ibid).

The benefits of the lullabies are, indeed, many. The personal, musical and social development of the child may be fostered by listening to lullabies. The fact that the lullaby occurs in a period between vigil and sleep is extremely important, suggesting that the song may represent a crucial bridge between reality and its interpretation. Rodrigues (2005, p. 77) underlines the fact that, during sleep, the brain is not only resting from daily activity, but also active in different ways. Therefore, the singing of lullabies just before the child falls asleep may be an excellent way to connect the fragmented perception of the different aspects of reality experienced by the baby and the meaning and interpretation the baby can build and attribute to those experiences, thus developing a sense of integration and adjustment to the world.

Lullaby texts in the research collection

As far as their melodic structure is concerned Portuguese lullabies consist of a simple melody, general in steps or conjunct motion; sometimes the interval of a minor or major third is also very common. The lullabies are usually monodic and unaccompanied. The group of collected songs shows that the typical sounds "ó...ó.." (usually sung as a calling of sleep) appear frequently at the end of many lullabies, as if marking the transition between the realm of language and the realm of sleep and dreams.

The collected lullabies' lyrics may be sung syllabically (and transmitting a certain number of concepts or stories) or melismatically (particularly on the sound "ó...ó"). Canez (2007, p. 45) indicates that usually the rhythm of lullabies is simple and, in fact, a particular coincidence between the words "ó-ó", "ró-ró", "nana-nana", "rola-rola" and "dorme-dorme" and a duple meter can be found in many of the songs collected.

Portuguese lullabies are characterized by their focus on a diversity of themes, such as religious topics (angels, Mother Mary, Jesus), absent parents who will soon return from work, mythical figures such as "João Pestana" ("John Eyelash", who is an evocative character of sleep) or scary figures such as "Bicho Papão" (an animal that eats everything, as previously explained) or "Coca" (a huge serpent). Rodrigues (2005, p. 69) suggests that the reference to these evil characters in some of the lullabies' texts may serve the purpose of reassuring the baby that it is safe in the parent's lap, despite the dangers of the world.

In the collected lullabies it is possible to identify several themes. In fact, even though lullabies have a specific purpose (to rock babies to sleep) many songs collected in this research project have texts that do not relate to that purpose. There are many Christmas songs that are identified in some older songbooks as lullabies, suggesting the popular belief in a thematic and spiritual connection between the human birth of the baby and the divine-human birth of Jesus Christ.

Some songs could also be found duplicated with different texts in different songbooks, suggesting a popular process of musical *pastiche*. Being orally transmitted, these songs were evidently changed and adapted over the years in different regions until their written recording. The Portuguese composer Lopes-Graça (1974, p. 39) believes that "the Portuguese popular song is essentially of the same type of the "*voix-de-ville*", meaning: during centuries, and in many regions, there are melodies that continually receive different texts (new, or old and well-known). This is probably the reason why, during this research project some lullabies were found (identified as such) that exhibited texts that can be found in adult popular songs. Canez refers to this fact in her literary study (2007, p. 33); she suggests that Portuguese lullabies can be grouped according to themes that are not always referring to childhood. The groups identified by the author served as an organizer for the collection of lullabies in this research project – and, indeed, no other themes were found in the collected lullabies.

The study of the lullabies' texts was only a small part of this project; however, it emerged as a very significant one, and one that could offer early childhood educators an easily adjustable text system for interdisciplinary activities.

Theme 1: Religious inspiration

The first group of songs consists of lullabies referring to Christian ideas, concepts and spirituality. Some songs focus on the Sacred Family (St, Joseph, the father; Mother Mary, the mother; Jesus, the baby; St Ann, the grandmother), with deep symbolic meaning.

Portuguese strong Catholic traditions emerge, therefore, as the root for this direct identification between the baby and Jesus, and between the family of the baby (for whom the lullaby is meant) and the family of Jesus. Through this process of identification the baby receives an extraordinary and almost divine attention and respect, suggesting that it deserves the utmost protection and care. From a cultural point a view, it is sustainable that these religiously inspired songs should be included in the pre-school curriculum as much as all the other theme-songs (animal themes, mythical figure themes, and so on). According to the authors of this article, the multi-cultural curriculum perspective should not exclude, therefore, the cultural manifestations and artifacts of the country where the curriculum is being implemented.

Here are some examples of lullaby lyrics focusing on members of the Sacred Family. The figure of St Joseph is seen as the father figure, helping the mother take care of the baby while she takes care of the house:

> José embala o menino / *Joseph rocks the baby*
> Que a senhora logo vem/ *the lady will come soon*
> Foi lavar os cueirinhos/ *she went washing the diapers*
> à fontinha de Belém./ *at the little fountain of Bethlehem.*
>> Quatrain from the song "Joseph rocks the baby [transl.]" in *Canção Popular Portuguesa* (GRAÇA, 1974, p. 53).

The mother figure can be either the human mother or, quite often, the Mother of Jesus. Again, the process of identification is observable. The figure of Our Lady is often seen as the mother figure, doing house work (frequently washing the clothes) as in the following quatrains:

> Senhora lavava,/ *The Lady washed*
> São José 'stendia,/ *St Joseph hung the clothes to dry*
> chorava o menino/ *the baby was crying*
> c'o frio que fazia./ *as it was so cold*
>> Quatrain from the song "The Lady washed (Rocking Jesus) [transl.]" in *Cancioneiro de Entre Mar e Serra da Alta Estremadura* (SOUSA, 2004, p. 41).

> Encontrei Nossa Senhora/ *I found Our Lady*
> junto ao Rio de Jordão./ *nearby the Jordan River.*
> Lavava as fraldinhas bentas/ *she was washing the holy diapers*
> pela sua própria mão. /*with her own hands.*
>> Quatrain from the song "I found Our Lady (2)" in *Cancioneiro de Entre Mar e Serra da Alta Estremadura* (SOUSA, 2004, p. 43).

> Nana, nana, meu Menino,/ *Nana, nana, my Little Baby,*
> Qu'a Mãezinha logo vem./ *'cause Mummy will come soon.*
> Foi lavar os cueirinhos/ *she went washing the diapers*
> Ao pocinho de Belém./ *at the little water well of Bethlehem.*
>> Quatrain from *Cancioneiro de Cinfães* (PEREIRA, 1950, p. 386).

The identification of the baby with Baby Jesus is also quite evident, and frequently used as a means to put human suffering in perspective: if Jesus, who is divine, suffered so much, human suffering is also to be expected. This "implied comparison" of biblical resonance (*"The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head"*, Mt, 8, 20) can be found in quatrains such as the following:

Meu menino está nuzinho/ *My little boy is naked*
na manjedoura deitado./ *laying in the crib.*
Ó meu Deus! Tão sofredor/ *Oh, my God! He suffers so much*
por causa do meu pecado./ *because of my sin.*

Ó meu Jesus! Tão sozinho/ *Oh, my Jesus! So alone*
na manjedoura deitado. / *laying in the crib*
Vós aí no sofrimento / *Thou there in suffering*
e eu aqui tão regalado"./ *and I here so joyful.*

> Quatrains from "Christmas (or Lullaby) Songs [transl.]" in *Cancioneiro de Entre Mar e Serra da Alta Estremadura* (SOUSA, 2004, p. 49).

Very often references can be found indicating that the mother figure hands in her baby to angels, so that they may offer protection from all evil, as seen in the two following quatrains. Again, the fusion between the world of reality and the world of faith is so strong that biblical characters assume the same degree of importance and actual existence as the real family characters:

O meu menino é d'oiro,/ *My baby is of gold,*
d'oiro é o meu menino,/ *golden is my baby,*
Hei-d'intregá-lo ós anjos,/ *I shall hand him to the angels*
p'ra lembrar qu'é pequenino./ *reminding them that he is little.*

> Quatrain from *Cancioneiro de Cinfães* (PEREIRA, 1950, p. 384).

Dorme, dorme, meu filhinho/ *Sleep, sleep, my little baby*
um soninho descansado,/ *a quiet little sleep*
que o Anjo da tua Guarda/ *because the Guardian Angel*
vela por ti a teu lado./ *is vigilant by your side.*

> Quatrain from the song "The rocking of children [transl.]" in *Romances Populares da Minha Terra* (SERRANO, 1921, no p.).

Theme 2: Expression of maternal love

The second group of lullabies in the collection gathered during this research focus on the expression of maternal love: joy, sadness, concerns, meditation are aspects mentioned in the lyrics, reflecting the mother's care for the child's life, in the present and in the future. Some quatrains show the specific pain mothers can feel when noticing that their babies are not well:

Não choreis, ó meu menino!/ *Don't cry, oh, my baby boy!*
Não choreis, ó meu amor!/ *Don't cry, oh, my love!*
Essas lágrimas choradas/ *Those cried out tears*
Cortam-me a alma de dor! /*Cut my soul in pain!*

> Quatrain from the song "Songs to Baby-God [transl.]" in *Cancioneiro de Entre Mar e Serra da Alta Estremadura* (SOUSA, 2004, p. 47).

Dorme, dorme, meu menino!/ *Sleep, sleep, my baby!*
Que o teu pai anda a cavar!/ *'cause your father is out digging!*
Fecha os olhos e dorme,/ *Close your eyes and sleep,*
que me dói de ouvir chorar! / *'cause it hurts me to hear you cry.*

> Quatrain from the song "Rocking Song [transl.]" do *Cancioneiro de Entre Mar e Serra da Alta Estremadura* (SOUSA, 2004, p. 685).

Quem tem meninos pequenos/ *Those who have little children*
por força que há-de cantar./ *will of course be forced to sing.*
Quantas vezes as mães cantam,/ *How many times mothers sing*
com vontade de chorar!/ *when they feel like crying!*
> Quatrain from the song "Who has little children? [transl.]" in *A Canção Popular Portuguesa em Fernando Lopes Graça* (WEFFORT, 2006, p. 277).

Theme 3: Continuous tradition

The group of songs in which the idea of "continuous tradition" is present describe situations or feelings that do not seem to change throughout generations, across centuries. The concern for social justice and the concern for the future of the child emerge as two of the most important feelings in this group of songs. In the following quatrain the author shows the mother's preoccupation about what the future of her baby will be:

As passadas do caminho/ *The steps of the way*
sei-as eu todas de cor./ *I know them by heart*
Só não sei o teu destino,/ *I only don't know your destiny*
meu menino! Meu amor!/ *my little boy! My love!*
> Quatrain from the song "Baby Song [Ttransl.]" in *Cancioneiro de Entre Mar e Serra da Alta Estremadura* (SOUSA, 2004, p. 686).

In the song "Saint Ann rocks baby Jesus [transl.]" (a Christmas song used as a rocking song) the feeling of concern of the grandmother for her grandchild is far more prominent than the Christmas spirit. A comparison is made between the poverty of her grandchild, Baby Jesus, and the life and richness of the well-to-do ones. This lullaby is, simultaneously, a lament and a cry for social justice:

Os filhos dos homens ricos/ *The sons of rich men*
nascem em berço doirado... /*are born in golden cribs...*
E só vós, ó meu Menino,/ *And only you, oh my Little Boy*
em pobres palhas deitado./ *in poor straw lay down.*

Os filhos dos homens ricos/ *The sons of rich men*
no meio de cobertores.../ *in the midst of blankets...*
E só vós, ó meu Menino,/ *And only you, oh my Little Boy*
aqui coberto de dores!/ *here covered in pain.*

Os filhos dos homens ricos,/ *The sons of rich men*
deitados em lençóis finos.../ *laying down on fancy sheets...*
E só vós, ó meu Menino,/ *And only you, my Little Boy*
aqui cercado de espinhos!/ *here surrounded by thorns!*

Os filhos dos homens ricos,/ *The sons of rich men*
em seu fino travesseiro.../ *on their fancy pillow...*
E só vós, ó meu Menino,/ *and only you, my Little Boy*
encostado a um madeiro!/ *leaning on wood!*
> Quatrain from the song "Saint Ann rocks baby Jesus [transl.]" in *Cancioneiro de Entre Mar e Serra da Alta Estremadura* (SOUSA, 2004, p. 46).

Theme 4: Sleep induction

The main goal of the rocking songs is to put the baby to sleep. For this purpose, many songs have texts that are specifically oriented to induce sleep and exhibit simple formulas that are constantly repeated in order to create a certain "hypnotic" effect. These formulas consist of neutral syllables such as "á...á..." and "ó...ó...", among others. The following quatrain is an example of that procedure:

> Á...á...á...á...á...á... / *Ah...ah... ah...ah... ah...ah...*
> Nana nana meu menino/ *Nana, nana my little boy*
> Nana nana meu menino/ *Nana, nana my little boy*
> Que a mãezinha logo bem/ *'cause Muumy will come soon*
> Que a mãezinha logo bem/ *'cause Muumy will come soon*
> Á...á...á...á...á.../ *Ah...ah... ah...ah... ah...ah...*
>> Quatrain from the song "Rocking [transl.]" in *Cancioneiro Regional de Lafões* (PINTO *et al.*, 2000, p. 257).

Two other examples of a sleep-inducing songs, recurring to verbal formulas:

> Dorme, dorme, meu menino,/ *Sleep, sleep, my little boy*
> Qu'a tua mãe tem que *fazere*!/ *'cause your mother has things to do!*
> Ah, ah! Ru, ru!/ *Ah, ah! Ru, ru!*
> Ela tem muito trabalho/ *She has a lot of work to do*
> E tem pouco que *comere*!/ *And she has little to eat!*
> Ah, ah! Ru, ru!"/ *Ah, ah! Ru, ru!*
>> Quatrain from the song "Sleep, sleep, my little boy [transl.]" in *Cancioneiro Popular Português* (GIACOMETTI, 1981, p. 14).

> Ó... menino, ó, ó,...ó,/ *Oh... little boy, oh, oh,... oh,*
> Ó menino ó,/ *Oh, little boy, oh,*
> Teu pai foi ao eiró,/ *Your father went to the field*
> C'uma vara de aguilhão/ *with a pointed stick*
> P'ra matar o perdigão./ *to kill the partridge*
> ó,...ó,...ó,...ó. *oh,... oh, oh,... oh.*
>> Quatrain from the song "Crib song [transl.]" in *Folklore do Concelho de Vinhais* (MARTINS, 1938, p. 88).

Theme 5: Protection and avoidance of sleep threats

Apart from the themes already mentioned, another theme can be identified in some lullabies: the reference to evil characters such as "Papão" or "Coca". The allusion to these characters is a means of reinforcing the child's perception of safety and protection when in company of the mother or the person who is rocking. The lyrics often show an actual dialogue between the mother and the evil character as a proof of her courage and as a sign that she will be afraid of nothing in order to protect her child, as can be seen in the following quatrains in two different songs:

> Vai-te embora ó papão, / *Go away, oh Papão,*
> de cima desse telhado: / *from that roof top:*
> Deixa dormir o menino/ *Let the little boy sleep*
> um soninho descansado. /*a quiet sleep.*
>> Quatrain from the song "Vai-te embora, ó papão" in *Canção popular portuguesa em Fernando Lopes-Graça* (WEFFORT, 2006, p. 215).

Vai-te embora ó papãozinho, / *Go away, oh little Papão*
vai-te de uma vez embora. / *go away for good.*
O meu menino quer dormir / *My little boy wants to sleep*
não mo acordes agora. / *don't you wake him up now.*

Dorme, dorme, meu menino, / *Sleep, sleep, my little boy*
não deites as mãos de fora. / *don't let your hands outside.*
Fecha os teus olhos tão lindos / *Close your pretty eyes*
que o papão já se foi embora./ *'cause the Papão is already gone.*
> Quatrains from the song "Canção de abanar meninos" do *Cancioneiro de Entre Mar e Serra da Alta Estremadura* (SOUSA, 2004, p. 686).

Conclusions

Portuguese lullabies are a rich *repositorium* of cultural traditions. Aspects such as religious traditions, forms of expression of maternal love, ideals of social justice, family habits, and psychological strategies for the development of the feelings of security and self-esteem are present in their lyrics. Their simple musical structure and elements allow for an excellent use in kindergarten context, as well as for the development of interdisciplinary activities that might relate with the concepts expressed in the lyrics. This suggestion is in accordance with recent studies that indicate that there is a need for pedagogical consideration from thefamily in the development of musical abilities and in the organization of songs, games and musical play for children (Marsh, 2008). Language development can also be fostered, both from the communication and the linguistic and vocabulary points of view. In fact, as pointed out by Hohmann and Weikart (2007, p. 669), children use songs as one of the ways to gain understanding of the world: "pre-school children have a special pleasure in singing whole songs; singing connects them with the world of adults".

Differently from popular belief, musical behavior (expressed in intonation, rhythmic abilities and motor control) can be affected by education, especially if the child is exposed to formal or informal learning processes from an early age. Welch (1998, p. 27) underlined the adaptability of children's musical behavior to the influence of a nurturing educational context, despite the different learning rhythms of the individuals. As the author pointed out "with appropriate support, all young children can achieve a degree of mastery in the contemporary musical idioms of their maternal culture" (id, ibid.).

Portuguese lullabies are, indeed, a beautiful repertoire that allows for the preservation of national culture traits in a world of globalization and for the fostering of a stronger link between the informal learning context of family music and the slightly more formal educational environment of Portuguese pre-schools. As the composer Lopes-Graça once wrote (quoted by Weffort, 2006, p. 24), the popular song is "a life and work companion of the Portuguese people, following them from the crib to the tomb, expressing their joys and pains, hopes and uncertainties, love and faith". The recovery of the old lullabies and their incorporation in family and pre-school practices is, therefore, highly recommendable and desirable for the education of Portuguese young children.

Endnotes

[1] This *Institute of Child Studies* was converted into a new school at Universidade do Minho in 2009 and is now called *Instituto de Educação* (Institute of Education).

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