

Social Contexts of Child Development

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Intercultural Education: from Theory to Practice¹

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to present the idea of intercultural education as a lifelong process and to indicate the practical possibilities of its implementation. Three educational initiatives, which the author designed conceptually and practically, are discussed in reference to the premises of lifelong intercultural education and to the studies on attitudes to 'otherness.' The initiatives are: the Programme for the Development of Sensitivity Toward Otherness *The Adventures of the Other*, as well as two educational projects *Towards Ethnic Diversity* and *Immortalize Atlantis*. The abovementioned ventures aim at meeting the needs of the residents of the Podlasie region, taking into consideration the character of the pre-school and school environments in the region. The initiatives are examples of the implementation of intercultural education through innovative, based on active participation teaching methods.

Key words: multiculturalism, interculturalism, lifelong intercultural education, intercultural education project and programme, activating methods.

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Introduction

Cultural diversity has long been a challenge for broadly defined education. In times of dynamic political, social and cultural transformations, finding optimal educational tools for a culturally diverse environment has become particularly significant. Since Poland's systemic transformation and admission to the European Union, it has been an important priority for Poland as well. Apart from indigenous minorities, more and more foreigners from different, even the most distant, parts of the world have been settling down in Poland. Moreover, the mobility of modern man has increased. Therefore, encounters with the Alien/Other have become a natural element of human life, which requires developing competence to function in a culturally diverse environment.

The purpose of this article is to present possible tools for intercultural education, taking into account the theoretical premises. In this paper, I will characterize the idea of intercultural education as a lifelong process. As examples of the implementation of the idea, I will describe three educational projects carried out in the Podlasie region. I had the opportunity to develop the projects conceptually and to implement them into practice.

1. The Idea of Intercultural Education

In the 1990s, intercultural education started to appear in Polish public discourse, along with the systemic transformation and socio-cultural transitions. Nikitorowicz writes that *intercultural education is a peculiar response to multicultural society, constant migrations, the flow of information, changes in the value systems of individuals and groups, the disintegration of behaviour patterns, identity dilemmas,*

giving importance to the cultural identity of a group, and identity ambivalence (Nikitorowicz 2003-2004, p. 934). Intercultural education is more than education adapted for *the phenomenon of multiculturalism*. *Multiculturalism* is treated as a fact, whereas *interculturalism is a task and an educational challenge* (Nikitorowicz 1999, p. 25). In terms of intercultural education, a multicultural society is a society where different national, religious, language etc. groups live side by side. Social relations are limited to re-actions, being far from any constructive inter-actions, which is a result of numerous unverified and negative stereotypes and prejudices. Diversity in a multicultural society is often perceived as a threat, which leads to hostility and discrimination. In an intercultural society, on the other hand, interactions establish and regulate social relations and consequently intercultural communication². Existence of such a society is enabled by the intercultural competence developed by its members in the course of broadly understood education. Intercultural competence includes knowledge, skills and attitudes that facilitate establishing friendly relations with Aliens/Others.

² This type of differentiation between the concepts of intercultural and multicultural societies can be found in the works of intercultural education theoreticians, i.e. in the works of L. Korporowicz, J. Nikitorowicz, P. P. Grzybowski. See: L. Korporowicz (1997), *Wielokulturowość a międzykulturowość: od reakcji do interakcji*, [in:] *U progu wielokulturowości. Nowe oblicza społeczeństwa polskiego*, M. Kempny, A. Kopciak, S. Łodziński (eds.), Warszawa; J. Nikitorowicz (2009), *Edukacja międzykulturowa i regionalna*, Warszawa; P. P. Grzybowski (2009), *Od wielokulturowości ku międzykulturowości. Koncepcje edukacji wielokulturowej i międzykulturowej w kontekście europejskim ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem środowiska frankofońskiego*, Kraków. A similar definition of “multicultural society” can be found in the documents of The Council of Europe and the European Union. See: *Uczenie Międzykulturowe*, Strasburg 2000, Polish edition, Fundacja Rozwoju Systemu Edukacji, p. 98.

Intercultural education refers to the concept of culture and presupposes an equality of cultures. In the process of the transmission of values and behaviour patterns, all the cultures undergo certain transformations and any way of learning about the Other from the perspective of one's own culture boosts one's development (Nikitorowicz 2009, p. 290). Intercultural education abandons the idea of *the colonization of consciousness* by one particular culture and finds all cultures equal (Lewowicki 2000, p. 31). The basic category, typical of postmodernism, in the theory of intercultural education is *the irreducible difference* (Lewowicki 2000, p. 31). From the perspective of intercultural education every socio-cultural feature may be simultaneously a criterion for defining oneself and others in terms of differences, and a factor of alienation/otherness. One can distinguish the following categories of features. Biological features will include gender, age, skin colour, eye and hair colour, mental and physical abilities/disabilities. Economical features are financial status and its consequences, whereas social features include national or ethnical affiliations and their related status. Cultural features are about one's own religious and cultural identities and the autonomy associated (Golka 2010, p. 168). Hence any educational activity should be designed with cultural and interpersonal differences in mind.

In intercultural education, difference is not treated as a value in itself but as a constitutive feature of every human being and a factor influencing mutual development (Grzybowski 2008, p. 60). Intercultural education is not about eliminating differences. It is about increasing one's awareness of existing differences as well as learning about and accepting the elements of different cultures (Lewowicki 2000, p. 31). Intercultural education is seen as the educational meeting of cultures or as the education of conflict (Lewowicki 2000). This refers both to a dialogue between the meeting cultures as well as creative attempts to resolve conflicts. The idea of intercultural education is based on

the paradigm of coexistence which presupposes *the possibility of one's personal growth as a result of the ongoing internal processes of dialogue, rapport, negotiations, and cooperation. It restores our faith in the internal power of every human being and their awareness of the needs of the Other. For an individual to stay among cultures, it requires accepting the normative function of culture, relying on one's own creative abilities, using one's own mind and heart and their creative power* (Nikitorowicz 2005, p. 26). The paradigm of coexistence constitutes the basis for intercultural education. It also determines its main goal, which is to prepare society for living in the post-modern world, where diversity is inherent (Lewowicki 2000, p. 31). An important task of intercultural education is to develop multi-faceted identity of an individual and to stimulate the process of self-discovery, thereby implementating the postulate that the discovery of one's true identity should underlie every intentional action. Human self-awareness, sense of dignity and identity are the criteria used to evaluate Others and to show readiness for communication (Olbrycht 2006, p. 117). Intercultural education means staying in a relationship with oneself, with one's own culture and with Others.

The process of defining intercultural education is complex. Establishing the model of intercultural education is an important educational problem and the subject of a number of studies (Ogrodzka-Mazur 2009, p. 137). The literature on the subject is rich in descriptions of modes of intercultural education. Various elements of education are emphasized: its content, its goals, and the process itself. Local, regional or global perspectives are used³.

³ Definitions suggested by D. Markowska, J. Nikitorowicz, J. Lewowicki, M. Sobeczki, E. Ogrodzka-Mazur, A. Szczurek-Boruta.

2. Intercultural Education as a Lifelong Process

Intercultural education can be a spontaneous process, happening within a family or a local community, and not regulated by the curriculum. Intercultural education can also be of a formal character, happening at school or in the mass media and curricularly organized by state social policy. Regardless of how it is implemented, the idea remains the same (Maj 2005, p. 279). Considering intercultural education as a lifelong process, one can distinguish three types of intercultural education that interpenetrate and complement one another: formal intercultural education (at school), non-formal intercultural education (out of school), and informal/incidental intercultural education (spontaneous). It has become common practice to emphasize the lifelong intercultural education approach whereby intercultural education is a process of developing intercultural competence that encompasses the whole of society.

Szczurek-Boruta points to the fact that *intercultural education does not go along the traditional division into primary and secondary education. The following dimension of education should be regarded as a transcultural teaching-learning process. It is a lifelong cognitive and practical experience of every human being as an individual unit as well as a member of society. This allows the participants of the teaching-learning process to acquire tools for understanding, to affect their environment, to participate and cooperate with others in every sphere of human activity* (Szczurek-Boruta 2009, p. 152). Lifelong education, as Nikitorowicz (2012) suggests, should be acknowledged as the leading strategy for education, once the changeability, dynamism and unpredictability of multicultural societies are taken into account. Lifelong education with its premise of lifelong learning allows for shaping and modifying human attitudes according to the following guidelines:

- *To be yourself*: learn to be yourself, know yourself; value your own sense of identity; work on the ability to manage your personal development, personal fulfillment and identity.
- *To experience the presence of Others*: through interactions, learn to live together with them; perfect your skills in peaceful coexistence and interaction; use cultural diversity for mutual enrichment; notice others, get to know them, cooperate, try to understand them and communicate with them.
- *To learn about yourself and Others*: learn about each other and be able to overcome negative emotions; learn to understand cultural diversity and to comply with social norms and the rules of culture contact.
- *To cooperate*: learn to work for peace preservation, and create conditions for life in peace; develop your ability to work effectively under conditions of cultural heterogeneity (Nikitorowicz 2012, p. 72-74).

Fulfilling the abovementioned prerequisites contributes to the construction of intercultural society. Importantly, the whole of society should participate in the process. As noted by Grzybowski, *a society, where particular groups, minority groups or majority groups, work within certain boundaries to satisfy their own interests and to achieve their own goals, cannot be called "intercultural"* (Grzybowski 2009, p. 86). Following this idea, it is noteworthy that intercultural education should involve all age groups. However, as written by M. Taylor, intercultural education is mostly concerned with the system of relations between children and young adults. The choice of these age groups is justified by the fact that it is children and young adults that will comprise future intercultural societies (Taylor, as quoted in: Grzybowski 2009, p. 63). The statement is unquestionable when one takes into consideration the results of the empirical research on the development of negative stereotypes and prejudices among children,

as well as the research results that show the level of social distance to Aliens/Others presented by children, young people and adults.

Scientific explorations have revealed that three-year-olds hold an image of the elder that is simplified and imbued with negative valuation, while among children aged between 7 and 13 the stereotypes and prejudices which prevail are based on age, ethnicity, or language⁴. The ability to notice ethnic differences develops in children at the age of 4–7. Therefore, it is the right time to introduce the subject into educational programs (Wygotski 1971, p. 544). Attitude studies point to the fact that young people indicate high level of social distance in terms of nationality, ethnicity, religion. The results show that those who participate in classes designed to increase students' awareness of cultural diversity shorten their social distance toward Aliens/Others (Jasińska-Kania, Staszyńska 2009). All things considered, abandoning the idea of designing activities for promoting equality of people and positive image of the Alien/Other may result in stereotypes and prejudices being crystallized and the level of social distance toward otherness being elevated.

Another challenge facing intercultural education is promoting educational initiatives addressed to those who have already completed their formal education. The initiatives should aim at stimulating interest in diversity, creating possibilities to overcome the limits of negative stereotypes and prejudices, and developing intercultural competence. The results of scientific research show that adults reveal a high level of social distance towards ethnically, nationally and religiously different groups⁵. Educational activities beneficial for adults may include

⁴ See the results of the research by Davidson, Cameron, Jergovic, [in:] B. Weigl (1999), *Stereotypy i uprzedzenia etniczne u dzieci i młodzieży. Studium empiryczne*, Warszawa; See also: E. Chromiec (2004), *Dziecko wobec obcości kulturowej*. Gdańsk.

⁵ According to the research run by the Public Opinion Research Centre that resulted in the following reports: *Przejawy dystansu społecznego wobec innych narodów*

festivals, cultural events, discussions on multiculturalism, as well as all types of courses, trainings, and educational projects.

The idea of lifelong intercultural education is difficult to employ. However, this is the direction set by the modern world.

3. Intercultural Education Implemented: Examples from the Region of Podlasie

In Poland, institutions for formal and informal education more and more often engage in activities dealing with intercultural education. Frequently, both types of institutions work together. Elements of intercultural education appear in the core curricula at all stages of education.

In this paper, I will describe three projects in the field of intercultural education. The projects are targeted at children, young people and adults simultaneously. In the years 2008-2011, pilot versions of the projects were carried out at schools of Eastern Poland. They were implemented by non-governmental organizations, the University of Białystok Foundation and the Foundation of Education and Creativity as well as volunteers: students of the University of Białystok and teachers. All activities were based on the diagnosis of the needs existing in a given institution and the uniqueness of the local environment. The activities were designed according to the theories of intercultural education discussed in this paper. The need for implementation of the theoretical prerequisites of intercultural education resulted from the recognition of the ongoing socio-cultural changes and several years of cooperation with kindergartens and schools from the region of Podlasie.

i religii, (2007), Warszawa; *Dystans społeczny czy tolerancja i otwartość? Postawy wobec wyznawców prawosławia, protestantyzmu, judaizmu i islamu*, (2001), Warszawa; *Stosunek Polaków do innych narodów*, (2001), Warszawa. See <http://www.cobos.pl>, [access: 11, 2012].

The undertakings presented in the paper were primarily designed to develop intercultural competence. In the process, interpersonal or economic commonalities and differences between people were taken into consideration. At every stage of their implementation, the educational projects involve creative work, that is artistic, photographic or verbal ways of expression. The projects are realized as part of extra-curricular or after-school activities organized at schools and kindergartens. Open formula of the projects allows for their realization by other educational institutions. Reviewed methodological publications are the final outcome of the projects. The publications allow further implementation of the projects⁶.

Program for the Development of Sensitivity to Otherness *Adventures of the Other*⁷

The program is designed for children at the age of 5–9 and the pilot program was completed within this age group. The program can be introduced to younger or older groups, provided that certain changes are made as to the contents and time regarding the children's perceptual abilities. The contents of the program refer to different types of people, problems and to the culture of the Other, the distant

⁶ The publications include: A. Młynarczuk-Sokołowska, K. Potoniec, K. Szostak-Król (eds.) (2011), *Przygody Innego. Bajki w edukacji międzykulturowej*, Białystok; A. Młynarczuk, M. Sokołowski (eds.) (2010), *Uwiecznić Atlantyde. Wielokulturowość Podlasia w edukacji nieformalnej*, Białystok; A. Młynarczuk, K. Potoniec (eds.) (2009), *Edukacja międzykulturowa wobec integracji dzieci polskich i czeczeńskich na przykładzie projektu „Ku wzbogacającej różnorodności”*, Białystok. The electronic versions of the books are available on <http://undacja.uwb.edu.pl>, tab: *Publikacje*.

⁷ In 2012, the programme *Adventures of the Other* won the first prize in the international contest organized by the World Organization for Early Childhood Education OMEP and won the title of the Social Initiative of the Year 2011, a competition organized by the governor of the Podlasie region.

and close one. The method is beneficial as it aims at improving the attitude to society as a whole and not to a particular group of people⁸.

The program *Adventures of the Other* is based on the original intercultural stories that present various types of “otherness”. The stories were created by teachers and educators engaged in intercultural education. The stories include as follows. *The Other in the Forest* by Solbut is a story about biological otherness. *The Other and the Fear of Darkness* by Stanisławska deals with the issue of physical disability. *The Other and the Treasure Hunt* by Szostak-Król refers to economical differences. *The Other Meets the Thoughts Keeper* by Rusiłowicz discusses religious otherness. *The Other Visits A Gypsy Camp* by Rusiłowicz focuses on ethnic differences. *The Other On a Refugee Trail* by Szostak-Król describes the otherness of the refugees and the problems they encounter. *The Other Travels to the Land of the Dragon* by Rusicka-Karoui delves into the subject of cultural otherness/the distant Other and shows the problems of immigrants.

Intercultural stories belong to the canon of psycho-educative stories, as well as fit within with the trend of educative (developmental) bibliotherapy. An intercultural story is targeted at children. Its main objective is to develop children’s sensitivity to differences between people in all the aspects of human existence: biological, economical, social and cultural. These differences are embedded in every social reality⁹. The contents of intercultural stories present children with problems the Alien/Other encounters and help them

⁸ For further reading see the guidelines for designing educational programmes: B. Weigl (2008), *Stereotypy i uprzedzenia etniczne u dzieci i młodzieży – istota zjawiska i przesłanki zmian*, [in:] *Edukacja przeciw dyskryminacji*, K. Białek, T. Halik, A. Marek, R. Szuchta, B. Weigl (eds.), p. 104-105.

⁹ The term “intercultural story” has been defined for the educational program *The Adventures of the Other*. For further reading see: K. Potoniec, *Bajki w edukacji międzykulturowej*, [in:] *Przygody Innego. Bajki w edukacji międzykulturowej...*, op. cit., p. 12.

understand that everybody has the right to their 'otherness'. Moreover, the stories enable the target group to notice the diversity of the world, and develop their cognitive curiosity. They also motivate students to interact with the Alien/Other.

Running classes with the use of intercultural stories is not limited to passing on the contents of the stories. It entails the use of a wide range of activating and expository teaching methods, which engage all the spheres of child's activity and add variety to the learning process. Working with intercultural stories proceeds according to a pattern. Every story is introduced with activating teaching methods, which is followed by reinforcement classes that aim at consolidating and expanding knowledge of related contents. An important role in the program is played by additional meetings with Aliens/Others, which aim at direct interaction. Apart from the methodologically planned teaching-learning process, they give opportunity to ask questions, get used to other languages and people belonging to other cultures. They also help to overcome fear and to fight with negative stereotypes and prejudices.

The program assumes the use of individual, collective and group-work activities, with particular focus on the latter, as they help to develop the capacity for team work, sharing experience and cooperation. The implementation of the program was preceded by the introductory lesson, whose aim was not only to introduce the discussed issues to the participants and to integrate the group, but also to run the preliminary diagnosis of the image of and the attitudes toward the Alien/Other with the use of discussion or drawing. The program ended with a concluding lesson that helped to revise the acquired knowledge and skills, and identify the changes in the perception of the Alien/Other – with the use of the same methods as in the introductory lesson.

In the school year of 2010/2011, the pilot program *The Adventures of the Other* was completed by volunteer students from the University

of Białystok Foundation and teachers from seven educational institutions in the region of Podlasie (kindergartens and grades from 0 to 3 of the elementary school)¹⁰. 121 pupils took part in the pilot program. The groups were very diversified. Apart from interpersonal differences, there were also biological, national, and religious differences. The pilot program included three classes with Chechen children, a significantly diversified class in terms of religious affiliations (the class included Orthodox Christians, protestants and Jehovah's witnesses), and a group of six-year-olds from an integrated kindergarten (the group comprised a few children with the Down syndrome, intellectual disabilities or autism).



The class: The Other Travels to the Land of the Dragon

The pilot edition of the program was conducted in a safe and friendly atmosphere, in an active and meaningful way. The project was carried out in the children's natural environment (classroom), where various differences appeared (in terms of mental and physical fitness, nationality, religion, communication), which fostered mutual

¹⁰ A. Młynarczuk-Sokołowska i K. Szostak-Król provided theoretical background for the volunteers, adjusted the stories and scenarios and coordinated the pilot program in kindergartens and primary schools (October 2012-February 2011).



The workshop with the puppet of the Other



The team of the programme

respect (respect for the close Other). In realization of the program, the puppet called *the Other* played a significant role. The Other was present at every lesson. It was a figure of a twelve-year-old boy who told intercultural stories.

The lessons based on intercultural stories and the subsequent reinforcement classes allowed children to share their opinions and to include elements of their own cultures in the learning process. The extracurricular classes about the culture of Aliens/Others in the

form of meetings with the Chechen children from the dance group *Lowzar* and a volunteer girl from Germany were actual encounters with people of different cultures. The meetings helped to overcome the negative stereotypes and prejudices, thus contributing to creating a positive attitude towards the Alien/Other in a process of positive interaction. The extracurricular classes allowed for active participation of parents. Teaching methods used in the implementation of the program created favorable conditions for free and creative work and were thought-provoking. The children were eager to participate in the lessons. They listened to the stories carefully, took part in educational games, did arts and crafts as well as physical exercises, and expressed their opinions about the activities performed.

Educational Project *Toward Enriching Diversity*

The project included a series of workshops on interculturalism targeted at Polish and Chechen children living in Białystok. Moreover, the initiative encompassed additional meetings that engaged parents, teachers and members of the local community. Educational activities were aimed at fostering integration through intercultural sensitivity. The core principle of the project was the equality of cultures. The assumption was made that diversity is a value, hence every encounter with the Other may be fruitful, and that through integration we learn about ourselves and about our cultural identity. The project was carried out by volunteer students of the University of Białystok. It was addressed to 120 pupils of 2 Białystok primary schools attended by Chechen children. Pupils in first and fourth grades – a total of 81 students, including 12 Chechen students – participated in the intercultural workshops. The groups were chosen as a result of discussions with the headmasters and school counsellors, who decided which target groups needed this type of intervention. The proficiency level of Polish among the Chechen children who took part in the project

varied. The Chechen students in fourth grade handled communication quite well, while children in first grade exhibited a limited range of vocabulary.

In the project, activating methods typical for intercultural education were used. The lessons were based on educational games that motivated students, fostered creative energy and were thought-provoking. They helped students to go beyond stereotypes and develop the ability to perceive the Other as interesting and important. They also were an excellent opportunity to bond.

In the lessons, the potential of cultural diversity was incorporated into teaching-learning process. In an intercultural atmosphere, the lessons were conducted on the basis of workshop scenarios designed by university students, teachers and educators. The first lesson, *Refugees* (Szostak-Król)¹¹, was to sensitize the children to refugee issues. The children learnt the term 'refugee' and found out about the problems their classmates may encounter. Because of the sensitivity of the topic, the Chechen children did not participate in the lesson. The main purpose of the second lesson *Let's Get to Know Each Other Better* (Kamińska, Kiryluk) was to integrate the class and let the teachers get to know the children. The second lesson was organized in a form of classroom games, which made it possible to notice interpersonal similarities between children. The third lesson *We Have a Lot in Common* (Mościcka, Radziejwicz) focused on discovering similarities between the children and developing the ability to discern these similarities. The lesson was a direct introduction to the fourth lesson *Cultures Far and Near* (Mioduszevska, Młynarczuk). In the fourth lesson, focused on similarities between people, the students' attention was drawn to the cultural diversity of their own region and of the world. The lesson aroused the cognitive curiosity of the students, giving importance to otherness in cultural terms.

¹¹ The names of the authors of workshop scenarios are provided in brackets.

The three meetings that followed were devoted to selected elements of Polish and Chechen cultures. They emphasized the uniqueness of either culture, pointing to the similarities and differences between them. The meeting *Among the National Symbols* (Chodorowska, Sienkiewicz) was designed to familiarize the children with the Polish and Chechen flags, coats of arms, legends, and anthems, and to teach the pupils respect for national symbols of other countries. In the following meeting *Music and Dances of Polish and Chechen Cultures* (Chodorowska, Sienkiewicz), children learnt the basic steps of the polonaise, a Polish dance, and of the lezginka, a Chechen dance. During the workshop, children experienced the extraordinariness of traditional foreign dances, and learnt about the traditional costumes the dancers wear. The subsequent meeting *Our Religions* (Kamińska, Kiryluk, Potoniec) was devoted to the dominant religions in

Poland and Chechnya, Catholicism and Islam respectively. The children learnt about similarities and differences between the two religions. The artistic workshop *The Poles and Chechens – What We Have In Common* (Mościcka, Radzewicz) concluded the eight-hour series of classes. In this workshop, children made works on the cultural and individual similarities they noticed between the two cultures.



The intercultural workshop

The events concomitant with the series of workshops

were significant for the project. They included Chechen dance workshops, culinary workshops, and a trip to the places of Białystok cultural heritage. All the additional meetings happened after the lessons and complemented the series of intercultural workshops. The abovementioned activities made integration occur spontaneously, in a safe and friendly environment. The project permitted the children, parents and teachers to spend some quality time together and, as a result, get to know each other and acquire new skills. Some of the effects of work were presented at the meetings that concluded the project. The meetings were open to the local community as well. At those meetings, the elements of Polish and Chechen cultures were shown. There was an exhibition of children's works made during the workshops. The events were organized to celebrate World Refugee Day.

The project was an attempt to cater for the need of integration through intercultural education that is implemented at schools



The cooking workshop



The sightseeing tour of Białystok

attended by Chechen children. In the realization of the project *Toward Enriching Diversity* all the activities concerning intercultural education were carried out as part of in-school or after-school classes. Activating teaching methods were used, therefore the children willingly participated in the lessons. The children skillfully drew meaningful conclusions and noticed the enriching quality of diversity both in cultural and interpersonal terms. The integration process was particularly effective during after-school classes, especially during the Chechen dance workshop. With the supervision of a professional dance teacher, children learnt traditional Chechen dances. Exploring dancing was facilitated by a friendly, hierarchy free, atmosphere filled with team spirit.

Educational Project *Immortalize Atlantis*

The project *Immortalize Atlantis* was initiated by a group of students, teachers, educators, who are enthusiasts of the multiculturalism of the Podlasie region and who work or intend to work with young people. The project was designed for the junior high school students from various, often difficult, educational environments of Wasilków

and Krynki, two little towns in the Podlasie region. Both towns have a rich multicultural heritage. This potential created the learning space for the youths, the organizers and the experts running the classes. The main purpose of the project was to draw the participants' attention to the multicultural character of the Podlasie region in an interesting and enticing way.

The project started with an integration meeting for the young people. Then, there was an outdoor photography workshop, where the participants learnt to use a professional camera. Then a series of multicultural workshops was organized. The workshops revealed the secrets of the multicultural character of the region and they proceeded according to the following scenarios: *Traditional Belarusian Wedding Reception* (Charytoniuk), *Clash with the Past. Polish Romanies Seen From the Perspective of Culture, Migration and Place* (Markowska-Manista), *Oriental Mosaic of the Podlasie Region* (Szostak-Król), *At the Białystok Jewish Cemetery – a Field Trip* (Poczykowski), *Shabbat Shalom* (Sztóp-Rutkowska). After the workshops, the teenagers participated in a trip that was to trace the multiculturalism of the Podlasie region. During the expedition, the participants immortalized the multicultural heritage of the region with their cameras. They visited Tykocin, Kruszyniany, Bohoniki, Krynki, and Święta Woda.

At every stage of the educational project *Immortalize Atlantis*, interesting forms of work were intentionally used – a workshop, a field trip, to name a few. Moreover, activating teaching methods were employed – the impressionist method, expressionist method, and educational games. The participants could experience the multicultural character of their region. The young people contemplated Atlantis of the Podlasie region by learning about the Hebrew alphabet, reading the inscriptions on tombstones at one of Białystok Jewish cemeteries, discovering the symbolism of the synagogue in Tykocin, and learning about the history and architecture of the mosque in Kruszyniany. The pictures taken allowed the participants



In Kruszyńniany



The field workshop on the symbolism of *matzevas*

to keep record of the places visited, and later on rediscover them and experience the past anew.

Every co-creator of the project partook in the process of creative learning. The participants had the opportunity to expand their knowledge, experience multiculturalism through interactions with people from other cultures, and develop their interests or even passions by creative work. The young people appreciated the professionalism of experts and the practical skills they acquired, such as different pho-

tographic techniques, which triggered their cognitive curiosity. The teaching-learning process was boosted by the relaxed atmosphere and ubiquitous team spirit. Consequently, some of the participants prided themselves on being rooted in the multicultural community of the region. Pivotal for the project was the fact that the students of two different towns, schools and educational environments integrated naturally and spontaneously.



The project conclusion meeting

The educational project *Immortalize Atlantis* closed with an event held for the local community. As part of the event, there was a lecture on the multiculturalism of the region. The young shared their opinions on the project. An exhibition of the photos taken in the course of the implementation of the project was prepared as well.

Conclusion

Meeting the Alien/Other, both the close and the distant one, has become a natural element of contemporary socio-cultural reality. The character of the meetings depends largely on education. Education is a factor that can make diversity important. It can help abandon the

perception of people as dangerous Aliens and see them as inspiring Others. It can also counteract all types of discrimination that are ingrained in every multicultural society. Therefore, it is of great importance to prepare the whole of society, children, teenagers, adults, for interactions with Aliens/Others. On the basis of the results of scientific research as well as personal experience, one could say that the process of developing intercultural competence should start at an early age. Finding interesting and effective ways for intercultural integration is a challenge for contemporary education. Nowadays, intercultural education is considered to be the best educational model that allows one to develop intercultural competence in the culturally diverse world. The abovementioned initiatives illustrate ways of implementing the idea of intercultural education into the teaching-learning process at kindergarten and elementary school, engaging adults, parents and the members of local communities, into the process. The initiatives created interesting possibilities of intercultural education by means of personal experience and creative work.

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