

TEORIA I PRAKTYKA ANDRAGOGICZNA ZA GRANICĄ

Hanna Achremowicz

ORCID 0000-0003-3398-0124

Anna Chmiel

ORCID 0000-0002-6949-3937

Roksana Pilawska-Gronostaj

ORCID 0000-0002-5451-8249

Martyna Pryszmont

ORCID 0000-0003-1637-8123

Kamila Wylęgły

ORCID 0000-0001-9787-5046

EXPERIENCING CULTURE OF EVERYDAY LIFE BY INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE STUDENTS. PERSPECTIVE OF ARTS-BASED RESEARCH

Keywords: Experiencing culture of everyday life; students; international exchange programs; arts-based research; higher education.

Summary: The text is an attempt to introduce and initiate a research project which focuses on experiencing the culture of daily living by international exchange students. The authors present major theoretical reflections on the issues of experience and culture of everyday life; they also characterize the community of students

– participants of international exchange programs. (Re)cognition and understanding of experience is a methodological challenge, especially in regard to dialogue-oriented inter-cultural education. The authors decided to explore the issue, using arts-based research. In this model, the role of researchers-facilitators is to introduce the respondents into the research process by inviting them to participate in joint activities focusing on cognitive, artistic, social, and educational objectives. Such participation and cooperation are supposed to result in generating critical knowledge necessary to improve the respondents' daily life. In the last part of the text the authors conduct an initial analysis of the selected international exchange programs. The goal of the characteristics of ERASMUS, ISEP, AIESEC, CEEPUS programs is to outline the official objectives and priorities assigned to formal education. In this perspective, when planning their original research, the authors asked the following question: How are these priorities present, as complementary to non-formal education, in experiencing the culture of everyday life by exchange students?

Introduction

Everyday life has invaluable and, at the same time, hardly measurable potential. It is the object of particular interests of researchers who try to describe its educational advantages. In this context, they focus on the areas of informal learning which is part of human experience from birth to death. It is treated as an element of the lifelong learning idea, the area of human activity independent from formal and non-formal education (see Edwards, Clarke, Roger Harrison, Reeve, 2003). Despite many approaches that discern these three forms of education, it is hard to keep them separate when analyzing adult learning processes. For this reason, it is worth to study them as a whole and analyze the contexts of learning and relationships between them (Edwards, 2006). The project authors intend to explore the culture of daily life of international exchange students in this perspective. Everyday life they experience as they stay in their host countries provides different learning contexts for formal, non-formal and informal education.

(Re)cognition and understanding of experience is a methodological challenge, especially in the perspective of dialogue-oriented inter-cultural education. For this reason, the authors decided on a specific research approach to explore how students experience the culture of daily living. It is the arts-based approach which allows the respondents to express their individual and common experiences of participating in everyday life culture.

The text is an attempt to introduce and initiate a research project which focuses on experiencing the culture of daily living by international exchange students. The authors present major theoretical reflections on the issues of experience and culture of everyday life; they also characterize the community of students – participants of international exchange programs. They present their original research methodology, research objectives, stages of research and adopted approach. The final part of the text is an initial analysis of the selected international exchange programs. The goal of these characteristics is to outline the official

objectives and priorities assigned to formal education. It is interesting whether these objectives are present and complementary as international exchange students experience the culture of daily living.

Reflection over everyday life in perspective of history of the present

It is not easy to date the origins of research on everyday life. Some roots of such studies in Poland may be found in the reflections of writers from the 19th and early 20th century (see W. Reymont, *Ziemia obiecana*, Warszawa 1899; W. Reymont, *Chłopi*, Warszawa 1904–1909; E. Orzeszkowa, *Marta*, Warszawa 1885; short stories by B. Prus). Their works which describe the living conditions of villagers and city workers contributed to the analyses of everyday life not only from the artistic or literary perspective but also from the scientific point of view. The historical and political circumstances of the 19th century, which hindered political studies on the Polish territory, inspired them to engage in investigating social matters according to the hitherto national thought. The outbreak of World War I stopped the research activities in this area. The revolutionary changes on the map of Europe after the Great War provided new, unique research material.

A particular contribution to Polish studies into everyday life was made by historians, sociologists and anthropologists who were discovering and describing the reality during the interwar period (see F. Znaniecki, *Wstęp do socjologii*, Warszawa, 1922; F. Bujak, J. Rutkowski, *Roczniki Dziejów Gospodarczych i Społecznych*, 1931). Activity of Annales school of history had particular impact on the development of research in this field (Zawodna-Stephan, 2019). The outbreak of World War II again stopped the scientific efforts. During Stalinism, researchers were expected to search for arguments to confirm the political thought of the ruling Party. These circumstances influenced the development of research into daily living in Poland. The achievements of the interwar period and Stalinism were the foundations of the modern approach to social sciences, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Two new directions appeared: history and sociology of everyday life.

Popular culture in the context of daily living

In recent years, many social and cultural changes have taken place. Previously dominating humanistic understanding of culture (referring only to extraordinary human achievements) has been slowly losing its advocates in scientific circles. Using this term, researchers more and more often refer to the whole context of human activity. Such a definition is proposed, for example, by anthropologists. Dividing culture into low (not worthy of attention) and high (elite) and ignoring the elements of contemporary popular culture (as reflection of everyday reality and important area of social activity) is an incomplete and obsolete approach to this complex phenomenon.

Pop culture can be viewed as spontaneous and authentic commentary to daily living (Jakubowski, 2006). It is so deeply rooted in the present reality that most people have stopped noticing it (Anioł, 2016). Because of its omnipresence in everyday life, the level of engagement in creating or interpreting certain cultural resources determines the individual lifestyles. Even the simplest forms of participation in this reality engage the audiences and require new competencies from them, of reading the texts and critical interpretation of meanings. John Fiske (1997, p. 175) adopts a similar perspective, claiming that “popular culture is (...) a set of cultural activities through which art infiltrates the habits and conditions of daily life”.

According to this definition, culture is inseparable from the category of *everyday life* understood as the space where human life and all related activities happen (Lefebvre, 1991). Thus, *popular culture* can be defined as an omnipresent and diverse *culture of everyday life*, in the context of which analysis of socio-cultural phenomena gains pedagogical meaning and becomes an interesting area of scientific explorations (Jakubowski, 2016).

Cultural education emphasizes the role of common experience gained in daily interactions during which we not only meet new people (their language, culture, living conditions and preferred values) but we also find out more about ourselves and our abilities. However, constant participation in daily living requires individuals to be constantly engaged and for this reason, acquiring different experiences becomes an endless process of experiencing the world.

Experience – complexity of the term

Experience is a complex term. Alfred Whitehead said it is “the most deceitful word in philosophy” (after: Wolska, 2012, p.7). This notion is used in both common language and different fields of science. Its complexity is well reflected in the definition in the Pedagogical Dictionary, which includes its common, philosophical, pedagogical and physiological meaning (Kupisiewicz, Kupisiewicz 2009). In pedagogy, experience can be understood in two ways. The narrower approach refers to acquiring knowledge or/and skills, while the wider associates experience with understanding events directly and personally: “individual experience shows the course of thoughts, feelings and sensory observations which refer to certain life situation. Experiences are aggregated and can be modified, while constantly giving meaning to human actions” (Martyniuk, 2019, p. 11). In general, one can say that experience is “the total of what individuals live through, encounter, interact with, what is given and out of which comes the meaning (Martyniuk, 2019, p. 11).

Due to the multi-dimensional nature of the term, the authors needed to identify certain theoretical references used in their research. Thus, in this case, experience is close to the concept adopted in phenomenology. In this approach,

experience is not only a cognitive phenomenon; it is assumed that there is always something more to it than just sensory data. From the phenomenological point of view, experience “describes what and how a person: receives, lives through and reflects upon” (Martyniuk, 2019, p. 14). The emphasis is on the dynamics of the experiencing, revealed in constant self-creation and self-actualization. Such structure shows experience as an unfinished and ongoing project. It is also worth mentioning that hermeneutic experience (used and described by Hans-Georg Gadamer) is close to experience defined in the context of arts-based research. It involves deep, multi-faceted understanding of reality and it values the cognitive, truth-based aspect of humanities and art (Wolska, 2012).

In our research, it is worth referring to the relationships between experiencing and art. This aspect has been mentioned by Marianna Michałowska (2006). The author refers to the less tangible character of experiencing. She argues that when experiencing art, one should reflexively refer to one's own, personal experiences. Today, art refers to personal experiences of its audiences – “one needs to get rid of rational thinking to experience it” (Michałowska, 2006, p. 367). Based on the fragmentary elements of everyday life, contemporary art allows individual interpretation through the lens of personal experiences. Elements of art cannot be explained explicitly because “they refer to daily experience, to individuals experiencing beyond any esthetic code” (Michałowska, 2006, p. 368).

Students – characteristics of community of international exchange program participants

The world of individual experiences exists in every social group. However, the text focuses on students who are the object of the proposed research. Academic community of students in Poland gained popularity in the 1990s (Mynarska, 2011) and evolved during the recent years. Today, it is diverse in many ways: educational and professional background, aspirations, economic and social status, and age. Students are people with life experience which plays important role in their academic education (see Panacci, 2015) and, at the same time, remains a unique component that builds their adult identity (Whitbourne, 1986). Considering this component and age criterion of (full time) students, this stage of life can be described as the period of entering into adulthood or of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2012). Timeframes of this period are 18–25 years and involve certain activities not observed in other stages of life. Despite some authors (e.g. Hajduk) defining the student community as adolescents (based on the framework of developmental psychology), students are adult citizens with a variety of rights and obligations. They are responsible for themselves, their behavior, choice of studies and completion thereof. Many representatives of this social category decide to leave their family homes and live in campuses or rented rooms, which adds further importance to their decisions (Hajduk, 2003).

Reflections on student activities should consider the selected theories of adult learning, namely existential learning (Jarvis, 2012) and situational learning (Wenger, 1999). Peter Jarvis points out that the learning process is situated within social interactions which take place between an individual and their social environment. The result is individual life experience tied to personal biography. Both experience and biography are life-long, thus learning can be treated as an existential process (Jarvis 2012; Malewski 2010). It includes learning process as well as physical maturing – in this sense, there is a dualism of mind and body (Muszyński, 2013). However, given the natural social dynamics, people learn through observations and interactions with others in the right environment (Malewski, 2000). Learning takes place in different spaces and takes on different forms.

Research plan

The methodological tradition selected for the project is the participatory paradigm (Lincoln, Guba 2000; 2009). Our intention is to integrate the cognitive and practical activity and then, set it in the culture of everyday life of the respondents. The research is organized in a way to release the critical and creative potential of the participants. It means, in the first place, that the research will be based on certain values that will motivate joint activities of the researchers and the respondents (Kubinowski, 2010). The role of the researchers-facilitators will be to introduce the respondents into the research process by inviting them to participate in joint activities oriented towards cognitive, social and practical objectives. Second, participation and cooperation will generate critical knowledge necessary to improve the respondents' daily life (Malewski, 1998). The project is oriented towards meeting cognitive as well as practical and social, including educational, goals. They are presented in the table below:

Table 1. Project objectives

1.	Explore the culture of daily living of international exchange students
2.	Explore the phenomenon of interfering cultures of international exchange students
3.	Explore the learning contexts of international exchange students
4.	Explore the available international exchange programs addressed to academic communities
5.	Build awareness of different cultures and attitudes of acceptance of cultural differences
6.	Support the (socio-cultural) integration of international exchange students through artistic activities
7.	Cross-cultural/cultural education of academic community
8.	Prepare a guide (to intercultural education) based on the daily experiences of international exchange students. The guide will use visual materials

Source: Authors' own compilation.

The project will be implemented in the academic community of international exchange students staying in Wrocław. The coordinators and group leaders will be the university staff members and doctoral students who have relations with the respondents. All respondents will be recruited according to the following criteria: students must be active international exchange participants whereas coordinators and leaders must be active staff members or doctoral students, interested in the issues addressed in the project.

Given the intended integration of the research, artistic and educational activities, the authors want to use an arts-based approach. There are many descriptions of this approach in the literature. This diversity is the effect of original projects and views which differentiate this tradition.

P. Leavy made an attempt to define this tradition: “ABR practices are a set of methodological tools used by researchers across the disciplines during any or all phases of social research, including data generation, analysis, interpretation and representation” (Leavy 2018, p. 30). What is important is that these tools are used to address social research questions in a holistic and engaged way, where theory and practice intersect (Leavy 2018, p. 30). The authors of the project will use the notion of arts-based *research*. The choice is based on the fact that we use artistic activity in the research process, that focuses on a selected form of art, namely movie and photographs, to describe and understand the culture of daily living of international exchange students and education of the beneficiaries of the project. Artistic activities will concentrate on movies and photographs and will be used as: 1) a tool to collect data about this culture; 2) a medium to present and disseminate knowledge and as a basis for the analysis of the research problems. At the same time, another important assumption is that the research is to reveal different threats and stimulate actions to change the negative practices (see Finley, 2009). Our goal is to initiate critical reflection on the culture of everyday life of international exchange students. The results may facilitate communication within different communities as well as help build knowledge about their functioning in wider social groups.

Analysis of selected international exchange programs

To meet one of the objectives of the project, namely, exploring the available international exchange programs addressed to academic communities, the project authors have conducted the initial analysis of the selected options. The table below presents descriptions and analysis of the following programs: ERASMUS+, ISEP, AIESEC, CEEPUS. They were chosen based on the fact that they are representative projects implemented in Polish universities. In addition, each program has some unique features resulting from the activities offered (education, professional development, voluntary work) and target groups (students or academic staff). The authors considered the following criteria in their characteristics: objectives,

participants, scope, preparation to participate in culture and society of the host country, engagement of the beneficiaries in activities to promote their own cultural and social identity, and educational priorities. The goal is to focus on the intended cross-cultural education declared in the programs, and its two aspects: participation in the culture of the host country and opportunities to share the culture of the home country. Such an approach to education would include the values of openness, respect and cultural dialogue. The authors used formal resources to describe the programs. In this context, the values declared may differ from the ones implemented and expressed in academic *praxis*. Another goal of the comparison is to identify the educational priorities these programs focus on. They refer to different areas of learning: formal, non-formal and informal. But reflection on the participation in culture must include all three, complementary areas of education.

The main objective of ERASMUS+ program is to support the achievement of “Europe 2020” strategic objectives for economic development, employment, social justice and social inclusion, as well as strategic objectives of the European framework of cooperation in education and training – ET2020. The program also supports sustainable development of the partner countries in the field of higher education and contributes to the achievement of the EU Youth Strategy (ec.europa.eu, 2020). Given the above, ERASMUS+ is a program which promotes values and priorities considered important for the European community. The strategic EU postulates include democratization as well as social and educational equality. There are also priorities which are to facilitate sustainable economic development, e.g. promotion of professional education and training of youth and adults to reduce unemployment. This practical and social approach seems to determine the emphasis on the idea of lifelong learning. In this context, it is worth considering (at least) three questions. First, how are these values and priorities achieved in the Member Countries from outside the EU (for example Iceland, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey) and partner countries (like Kosovo, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, Russia)? The question about values also refers to the already mentioned consistency of the values declared with the actual ones. Second, given the objectives of the research project presented herein, how is informal education implemented, for example through participation in the culture of everyday life? Third, save for the social, educational and economic potential mentioned in the declarations, how is cultural capital supported in the program?

Cross-cultural education is the important priority of ISEP, both at an objective level and during preparations of the beneficiaries to study abroad. For program founders, culture is a filter through which we see reality. Understanding a culture is crucial in the process of communicating with its representatives. ISEP founders assume that participation in an international exchange program provides students with the opportunity to immerse in the culture of the host country. And their role is not the role of observers but members of the host community. Students are advised to get information about the cultural, social, political and economic situation of

the host country. However, the knowledge of the present problems and foreign affairs of their home country is also important. Without a doubt, it can influence the attitudes of the host country representatives towards the visiting student. In order to facilitate cultural interactions, the program authors provide guidelines used by anthropologists during cultural studies. In the light of these declarations, it is interesting, what practical activities are undertaken by the program authors and beneficiaries? For this purpose, it might be worthwhile to study students' blogs and vlogs available on the program website, where they share their individual experiences gained during exchange. Nevertheless, the textbook with characteristics of the host countries, available on the website, presents only general information about certain countries and does not focus on their cultural potential.

AIIESEC was founded based on the idea of building peace through intercultural understanding. It was the response of a group of students to the events of World War II. Today, AIIESEC's main objective is to strengthen leadership skills of young people in order to develop both their individual potential and the potential of their communities. The organization also concentrates on cultural understanding and experiential learning. It is involved in different activities focusing on international voluntary service, professional internships, giving voice to young people and implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals ¹. Compared to other, above-mentioned programs, AIIESEC clearly emphasizes the aspect of building an individual career path. Pavel Suba analyzed students' motivation to participate in the AIIESEC program and identified five main motivators: *travelling and leisure, experiencing new culture and people, acquiring advantage at the labor market, gaining experience from abroad, and altruism* (Suba, 2017). The range of values declared is wide. However, we can refer to the already mentioned questions – to what extent is the program and participation of countries which fulfill the UN Sustainable Development Goals to a lesser degree, coherent with the values declared? Does the focus on individual career development remove cross-cultural understanding from the scope of interests, contrary to the program principles? One of the analyses of workshops led by AIIESEC volunteers (Mińkowska, 2017) points out to elements of superficial preparation of volunteers to work and participate in the culture of their host country. It is also worth mentioning that some AIIESEC projects focus on work in certain, highly globalized industries. So, despite travelling to another part of the world, a volunteer or an intern performs work that does not differ much from the one performed in their country of origin.

¹ AIIESEC projects include: Global Volunteer (voluntary international projects that aim at gaining practical experience in projects addressing economic, ecological and socio-cultural issues), Global Talent (professional internships lasting from 6 weeks to 8 months, to gain skills necessary for future career development), Global Entrepreneur (internship in startups, during which young people can see the world of entrepreneurship), Youth 4 Global Goals (initiative to activate youth towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals), YouthSpeak (providing space for young people to voice their opinion and take action – this objective is achieved through the YouthSpeak Survey and YouthSpeak Forum events).

How much is intercultural activity and how much is the element of functioning of the global market?

The last of the selected programs, CEEPUS, involves student and academic teacher exchange within countries of Central and South-East Europe. In the context of other programs, its scope is least formalized and refers less to inter-cultural experiences. Even though the cultures of the member states differ from one another, they are relatively similar. What is more, the strictly academic character of the project assumes cooperation based on mutual research interests. Thus, the official program objectives do not mention culture. The research conducted among the academic teachers who have participated in the project indicate the following motives to participate: *teach lectures* (68%); *build up sustainable professional contacts* (62%); *get an experience abroad in general* (58%); *interest in a particular teaching domain of the partner institution* (54%); *friendship* (53 %); *participation in a CEEPUS network* (53%); *interest in internationalization* (Scheck, Zupan, Schuch, 2015). As revealed, the above mentioned goals do not refer to intercultural issues. There is no analysis of students' motives to participate in CEEPUS. They can receive a 3 to 10 month scholarship. They can also go for shorter visits as they prepare their dissertations. In the context of this analysis, the unique character of the program is in minimizing the number of the values declared and focusing on practical issues. At the same time, it avoids the question about the differences between the declared and actual situation. Instead, one can explore the actual elements of partnerships within the program. Are there cultural differences between the program participants that should be included in the official program? Is ignoring the inter-cultural issues in an international exchange program not based on the idealistic vision of (trans)cultural intellectual exchange? In the research proposed herein, it is worth to explore more the issue of experiences of the beneficiaries and differences in experiencing culture of daily living, by confronting CEEPUS with the programs which emphasize inter-cultural aspects more clearly.

Questions instead of conclusions

This text presents the theoretical grounds of culture of everyday life, the concept of experience and the characteristics of international exchange students, as well as the methodological outline of the planned research project.

Experience-based studies are highly individualized, which results from the unique nature of cognition and interpretation of each individual human experience. The goal of the research is to describe, at possibly deep level, the character of this process. Arts-based approach enables not only verbal expression or reporting the experiences of the respondents but also allows to express the emotional or sometimes maybe intuitive side of these experiences. Methods of artistic expression enable the research audiences to participate in the experiences of the respondents.

The comparison of the principles of the selected international exchange programs (ERASMUS+, ISEP, AIESEC and CEEPUS) allows to formulate more questions which set new directions of the planned inquiry: How are declarative objectives of the programs coherent with students' experiences? How do students experience formal, non-formal and informal education? How do these forms of education infiltrate the experiences of international exchange students? Do students feel properly prepared to participate in the culture of daily living of their host countries? If so, how are they prepared? Are international exchange students invited to share their culture during the exchange programs? If so, how? Do and how international exchange programs provide a space for cross-cultural education? How do students learn the culture of their host country?

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Selected international exchange program websites:

<https://aiesec.org/>

<https://aiesec.pl/>

<https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/>

https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_pl

<https://erasmusplus.org.pl/>

<https://nawa.gov.pl/naukowcy/ceepus>

<https://www.ceepus.info/#nbb>

<https://www.ceepus.info/#nbb>

<https://www.frse.org.pl/program/erasmus-plus/>

<https://www.isepstudyabroad.org/>

<https://www.isepstudyabroad.org/year-in-review>

<https://www.un.org.pl/aiesec-polska>

Contact:

mgr Roksana Pilawska-Gronostaj

Institute of Pedagogy

University of Wrocław

e-mail: roksana.pilawska@uwr.edu.pl

mgr Hanna Achremowicz

Institute of Pedagogy

University of Wrocław

e-mail: hanna.achremowicz@uwr.edu.pl