



The rights of children in the context of cross-cultural education – An overview of Polish literature

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Abstract:

In 1997, Poland has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the project of which has been submitted in 1978 (UNICEF). Almost two hundred countries around the world have signed up the Convention, thereby committing themselves to respect the rights of the child in various dimensions of social life. The right to education is one of the fundamental rights of the child. It also concerns foreign children, who, as a result of migration, have settled down in Poland. The number of immigrants is not as high as in the countries that have built their empires on colonialism. Polish literature raising the issue of education and the rights of foreign children to it is not comprehensive and is based on the publications on the rights of children and cross-cultural education. The main aim of the dissertation is to approximate the literature of the subject with attention to their practical use.

1. Introduction

Contemporary Europe in the post-colonial era is ethnically and culturally diverse. Also, the image of the Eastern Europe has transformed as a result of political changes. The expansion of Shengen zone, the opening of the borders with Ukraine, economical migration, the inflow of refugees from Africa, as well as mixed marriages, and the influx of specialists are all factors, that contribute to the ethnical diversity of the Polish society in terms of ethnicity, culture, and religion. This state of affairs has ripple effect on contemporary schooling, where educators face new, multicultural reality.

2. The Rights of Children in changing Poland

According to the Foreigners Authority in 2016 alone, 150 thousand foreign nationals applied for residency in Poland, those being mainly Ukrainian, Belarussian, and also Vietnamese, Chinese and Indian nationals. Ten thousand applications were submitted by EU citizens, including Germans, Italians, Bulgarians, Romanians and British (Foreigners Authority 2017). A single classroom can see students of different nationalities, while educators, in accordance with the regulations in force (Regulation of the Ministry of National Education of August 23, 2017), are obliged to teach with respect of distinct cultural background of students of different nationalities, at the same time educating them on the cultural reality of the country in which they reside. In this context, children's rights are the more linked to cross-cultural education.

The development of the concept of children's rights in Poland has been originated by social educationalists. Maria Grzegorzewska (1928) writes *O dzieciach, które wymagają specjalnej opieki* [About Children Who Require Special Care], and Czesław Babicki in his writings speaks about the *Opuszczeni* [Abandoned]. The



history of children's rights, as well as the problems of the international and Polish laws in this context, has been illustrated by Marian Balcerek in his three publications: *Rozwój opieki nad dzieckiem w Polsce w latach 1918-1939* [The Development of Childcare in Poland in 1918-1939] (1978); *Prawa dziecka* [Child's Rights] (1986); *Międzynarodowa ochrona dziecka* [International Child Protection] (1988). Also, contemporary educationalists address the issues of children's rights; Bogusław Śliwerski's (1993) *Emancypacja dzieci antypedagogicznym wyzwaniem dla dorosłych* [The Emancipation of Children as the Anti-Pedagogical Challenges for Adults], Barbara Smolińska-Theiss's (1992) *Dzieciństwo – obszary znane i nieznanne* [Childhood – the Known and Unknown Areas]. A description of how children's rights were created from the Enlightenment to the Modern movements has been depicted by Manfred Liebel (2017) in *Nieznane aspekty historii praw dziecka* [Hidden Aspects of Children's Rights History] in *Prawa dziecka w kontekście międzykulturowości. Janusz Korczak na nowo odczytany* [Children's Rights in the Cross-cultural Context. Janusz Korczak Re-Readed] edited by Manfred Liebel and Urszula Markowska-Manista. Janusz Korczak has been the most prominent children's movement figure. He is the founder of the Orphanage House, where he has emancipated children through peer arbitrations, the children's parliament and a local council (Kalinowska-Witek 2014). In his *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect], published in 1929, he has embraced the ultimate postulates concerning child's rights, which later have been included in the Convention on the Rights of the Child created by the United Nations Organizations.

The Convention of the Rights of the Children clearly defines the right of children to education and the right to creating equal opportunities for development (*The Convention of Rights of the Children*, art. 28). Children's Ombudsman in Poland has issued the *Prawo dziecka do edukacji. Założenia pedagogiczno-prawne i bariery realizacji* [Child's Right to Education. Pedagogical and Legal Foundations and Barriers in Execution] by Małgorzata Kozak (2013). It is a part of a doctoral thesis, and a winning piece of work in a competition ran by Children's Ombudsman. The aim of the paper is to clarify the term 'the right of children to education', and discussing the way it's being executed in the education system in Poland. Among other publications in the Children's Ombudsman's library collection there are also works by Janusz Korczak, that explicate the ideas of children's rights: *Momenty wychowawcze* [Pedagogical Moments] (2017), *Jak kochać dziecko. Internat. Kolonie letnie. Dom Sierot* [How to Love a Child. Dormitory. Summer camps. Orphanage] (2012), *Jak kochać dziecko. Dziecko w rodzinie, Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [How to Love a Child. The Child in a Family] (2013, also published in English). *Konwencja o prawach dziecka. Wybór zagadnień (artykuły i komentarze)* [Convention of the Rights of the Child. List of Related Issues (articles and commentaries)] edited by Stanisław Leszko Stadniczeńko (2015), also published by Children's Ombudsman, includes an article by Ryszard Balicki and Partycja Mateusz-Protasiewicz, *Prawo dzieci migrantów* [The Rights of Immigrants' Children]. The authors point out that the right of a immigrant's child to education performs an assimilating role. The topic of integrating foreign students into the school environment has also been brought up by Edyta Januszewska and Urszula Markowska-Manista (2017) in the book *Dziecko „Inne” kulturowo w Polsce. Z badań nad edukacją szkolną* [A Child Culturally 'Different' in Poland. Based on the Research on School Education]. There are papers containing lesson plans with students from different cultures and their classes: *Imigranci w mojej klasie. Scenariusze zajęć* [Immigrants in My Classroom. Lesson Plans] by Izabela Czerniejewska (2010), and *Inny w polskiej szkole. Poradnik dla nauczycieli pracujących z uczniami cudzoziemskimi* [The Other in Polish School. Guide for Teachers Working with Foreign Students] (Kaczmarzyk, Walczak, Rejmer, Wasilewska-Łaszczuk, Zasuńska 2010), published by the city of Warsaw. What hampers the assimilation of foreign students at school is educational exclusion linked to, first and foremost, the lack Polish language skills. Conflicts with peers and the absence of the foreign students at school trips and events make for another obstacle to their successful assimilation. Urszula Jędrzejczyk (2013) in *Problemy edukacyjne i wychowawcze w szkołach wielokulturowych* [Educational and Pedagogical Issues in Multicultural Schools] in „Problemy Opiekuńczo-Wychowawcze” raises another impediment in teaching to foreign children. According to Jędrzejczyk, a difficulty in educating such students is their, and their parents' approach to learning the Polish language. Many foreigners regard Poland as a transit country and do not put much value to, as they see it, a temporary period in their children's education. The author of the article highlights: 'A few comprehend that the whole world operates on the same mathematical formulas, uses the English language to communicate, reads the same map, therefore it is worth to learn' (Jędrzejczyk 2013). *Dziecko „Inne” kulturowo w Polsce...* (Januszewska, Markowska-Manista 2017) includes guidelines on how to educate children from different cultures in Polish school environment. Apart



from employing a foreign culture assistant, which is not always possible given the limited budget of the local government, it is necessary to focus on teaching cross-culturally, which is included in the syllabuses of many school subjects.

Cross-cultural and multicultural education are the two terms, that can be found in the source literature. However, they are not identical. In his book *Edukacja międzykulturowa – przewodnik. Pojęcia – literatura – adresy* [Cross-cultural Education – Guide. Concepts, Literature, Addresses], Przemysław Grzybowski (2008) demonstrates the distinctions between multiculturalism and cross-culturalism. Multicultural education is meant to protect the majority, that seeks to impose its cultural beliefs and preferences on the minority through education policy. Whereas, cross-cultural education pursues the two-way integration through learning, understanding and cultural enrichment. Relying on her research, Izabela Czerniejewska (2013) in the book *Edukacja wielokulturowa. Działania podejmowane w Polsce* [Multicultural Education. The Actions Undertaken in Poland], suggests that cross-cultural education in Poland is still only an aspiration, and in fact the only objectives being executed are those of the multicultural education.

Being a teacher in a culturally diverse school involves having the appropriate skills. In the article *Międzykulturowe kompetencje nauczycieli – realia, wyzwania, możliwości* [Teachers' Cross-cultural Competence – Realities, Challenges, Opportunities] published in the work *Edukacja kulturowa oczekiwania i potrzeby* [The Cultural Education. Expectations and Needs] edited by Agnieszka Roguska, Małgorzata Danielak-Chomać and Mirosław Jan Dyrdy, Agata Świdzińska (2012) draws attention to the importance of cross-cultural competence in order to develop a society open to variety and tolerant for cultural diversity. The author, based on Krystyna Błeszyńska's (2012) work *Teoretyczny status edukacji międzykulturowej* [Theoretical Status of Cross-cultural Education], lists three competency models that a teacher in a culturally diverse school should possess:

- substantive competence – the understanding of multiculturalism and multicultural society, its problems and needs, the knowledge of the culturally diverse world (cultures and religions), familiarity with how institutions that deal with multiculturalism function and work,
- methodical competence – the skill of pre-planning and running classes using a variety of methods and resources,
- educational competence – empathy, tolerance, openness, the skill of working with children from different cultures, and coping with psychological barriers and problems such as ethnocentrism, xenophobia or racism.

An important aspect of teacher's work is also to know about the children's and human rights, as emphasized by Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak (2017) in *Prawa człowieka i prawa dziecka w kształceniu nauczycieli – potrzeby i możliwości* [Human Rights and Children's Rights in Teacher Training – The Needs and Possibilities], in the book *Prawa dziecka w przestrzeni edukacyjno-społecznej* [Children's rights in the educational and social space] edited by Iryna Surin and Anna Babicka-Wirkus. The author points out that already in the 1980's the Council of Europe recommended introducing these issues into the teacher training curriculum. The assumption behind it is the desire to build a democratic society, which is not possible without educating children and young people in a democratic school environment. The educator is supposed to bring a young person into the world of democracy. This is only possible through abiding by the rights of the children.

Before culturally distinct students can go to a Polish school and become a member of the its community, their parents must first sign them up at the establishment. The conditions of foreign student enrollment at Polish educational institutions are set out in the *Regulation of the Minister of National Education* of 23 August 2017 on 'the education of non-Polish citizens and Polish citizens who used to attend schools in countries'. Such students have the right to education on the same terms as the Polish students, meaning they are also eligible for free education. The new regulation introduces a novelty to the previous *Regulation of 9 September 2016*, granting foreign students access to a culture assistant, however limiting the period one can benefit from such assistance to twelve months. On the other hand, foreign students are entitled to extra five Polish language and compensatory classes in a week. Supplementary Polish language classes are crucial to overcoming their barriers and integrating with peers, as well as being necessary in gaining further education, and not being discouraged from learning. Failing to do home assignments, lack of focus during classes resulting from student's inability to understand teacher's instructions leads decreased motivation factor in the learning process (Kaleta 2015). Additional support for principals and teachers is to be provided by District Family Help Centers, that



runs individual integration programs. As part of the program, the Center's main responsibility is to support the non-native in the encounters with the local community (Leśniewska 2015). Ewa Sowa-Behtane (2016) in *Rodziny wielokulturowe* [*The Multicultural Families*] writes on the topic of available support funds for multicultural families. Stories and fairy tales are helpful in the classroom, the content of which brings the 'Other' closer to the local culture, and facilitates the process of his assimilation. *Wyczytać świat – międzykulturowość w literaturze dla dzieci i młodzieży* [Read the World – Cross-culture in Children's and Adolescents' Literature] edited by Bernadette Niesporek-Szamburska and Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek (2014) may be the source of inspiration for the search of this kind of literature. Teachers can also draw on numerous publications on cross-cultural education and those that address the issue of migrants' children education in particular. Many of these works are based on the implementation of research in a particular educational institution. Gaining expertise on the ways of teaching and integrating foreign students helps in devising efficient work procedures in a culturally diverse classroom. Such publications include *Procesy migracji w społeczeństwie otwartym. Perspektywa edukacji międzykulturowej* [Migration Processes in Open Society. The Cross-cultural Education Perspective] edited by Jerzy Nikitorowicz and Dorota Misiejuk (2009), *Wychowanie wobec współczesnych przemian społeczno-kulturowych* [The Upbringing unto the Contemporary Socio-cultural Transformations] edited by Dorota Bis, Ewa Smółka and Ryszarda Skrzyniarz (2012), *Children in the Postmodern World. Culture – Media – Social Inequality* edited by Hanna Krauze-Sikorska, Michał Klichowski and Anna Basińska, *Edukacja dzieci i młodzieży w środowiskach zróżnicowanych kulturowo* [The Education of Children and Adolescents in Culturally Diverse Environments] edited by Tadeusz Lewowicki, Barbara Chojnacka-Synaszko and Gabriela Piechaczek-Ogierman (2014), and others from the *Edukacja międzykulturowa* series.

3. Conclusions

The rights of children in the Convention have been designed to protect and look after children, who are not mature enough to be able to take care of themselves (UNICEF). The topic of child's rights in the context of cross-cultural education is gaining more attention in Polish literature. Teachers working in a culturally diverse environment have books and articles on cross-cultural education at their disposal. Researchers describe, among other things, teacher's competencies of working with foreign children. Educators focus on the problems that exist in Polish schools in the context of multiculturalism. Unfortunately, few of them present practical ways to solve these problems. Only certain publications offer lesson plans for both, foreign and native students, to integrate the whole group. Polish source literature on the topic lacks publications that would aid teachers in helping the foreign children break the barriers encountered by foreign children and overcome educational difficulties. The sole familiarity with legal regulations, even though helpful (extracurricular classes for foreign students, a foreign culture assistant), and having the appropriate competencies will not rid all the difficulties of teaching in a culturally diverse class that educators face. It is therefore important for the new publications to include not only theoretical knowledge that helps understand the surrounding reality, but also practical references, which foster educational and pedagogic practice.

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