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Intercultural Education in School Practice on the Example of the City of Koszalin

Abstract

Ongoing globalization, open borders, emigration and the increasing phenomenon of multiculturalism make it necessary to deal with the diversity of a pluralistic society. It has been extremely important to prepare children and young people to live in such a society, which is to shape their attitudes on the acceptance of cultural diversity, respect and tolerance for minorities or ethnic minorities, to help combat stereotypes, prejudice, racism and xenophobia. This task can be achieved through intercultural education. This article focuses on the analysis of the inclusion of multi – and intercultural education in the modern grammar school curriculum in the schools of Koszalin as an example of public institutions in the cities of one culture.

Keywords: *intercultural education, grammar school in Poland, migration*

Introduction

The dynamic development of the modern world, technological progress and globalization have resulted in significant and irreversible changes in the lifestyle of people around the world including Poland. As a member of the European Union since 2004, Poland has become a country of both immigration and emigration. The current number of immigrants in Poland has reached an estimated one million people. Officially, it is said that there are about 97 thousand legal immigrants in Poland at present, mainly from the countries of the Eastern bloc, however, the Office for Foreigners, on the basis of the information from the border patrols,

has estimated that another 50–70 thousand are the people staying illegally (the Office for Foreigners, 2012). Simultaneously, non-government organizations, on the occasion of World Refugee Day on 30th June 2011, estimated the number of immigrants without any documents at 40–400 thousand. Therefore, after taking different types of residence into consideration, the number of new immigrants may reach half a million. Together with the old national and ethnic minorities the number increases to a million. All fragmentary data indicate that there are more and more foreigners coming to Poland, especially those coming for economic purposes looking for a job or running their own businesses. There are also more and more foreign students (approximately 17,000 in 2010) and foreign children (A. Paszko, 2012). As a result of migration, Poland is slowly changing from the society of one culture to a multicultural one. This, in turn, means serious tasks for Polish school – to teach according to intercultural education. In other words, it should fulfil the aims and objectives of intercultural education, such as teaching the attitude of respect and tolerance towards the Other and the development of intercultural competence in contacts with people from other cultures as well as with those of Polish cultural background who live and think in a different way. (J. Nikitorowicz, 2010, pp. 27–35). For many years, large cities, such as Warsaw and border cities (Białystok, Cieszyn or others), have been pursuing the intercultural policy, creating integration programs for schools (PAJP Project, Project Towards Enriching Diversity, Youth in Action Project, Intercultural School in Multicultural Town, Refugee – My Friend and Neighbour, etc.), taking measures to make contact with the person of a different culture, striving for getting to know each other and thus understanding and accepting differences. However, in all the cases, the changes were, in a sense, forced by the position of a given territory. However, the cities where multiculturalism is not commonly seen often forgo this activity or treat it marginally, considering it irrelevant.

Methodology

As previously mentioned, the study has been conducted in order to analyse a state of intercultural education implementation in Polish schools on the example of the city of Koszalin. Koszalin is a city of slightly more than 100,000 inhabitants, marginally occupied by foreigners. It is located in the northern part of Poland, not bordering other countries or ethnic groups.

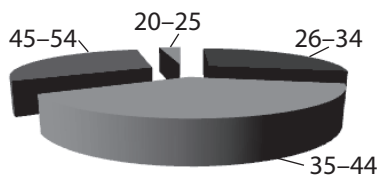
The primary objective of the study was to determine how to implement the goals and objectives of intercultural education in Polish schools on the example

of grammar schools in Koszalin. The choice of the city and the level of education were not coincidental. Koszalin, as already mentioned, is an example of a city whose location, politics or inhabiting groups do not enforce cross-cultural behavior, tolerance towards the Other or having intercultural competence directly. However, does this fact make these abilities unnecessary? Being a member of a large multinational group, such as the European Union, the progressive digitization and thus the development of communication and information systems, increased migration movements, from smaller cities such as Koszalin as well, oblige people to adapt to certain behaviors that promote respect for their own and foreign cultural norms, religion, customs and the way of thinking. Therefore, the lack of direct experience of cultural diversity does not exempt schools from including educational activities in this area. Moreover, the grammar school, level is the stage where both the core curriculum and school policy introduce information relating to civics, shaping attitudes of tolerance, responsibility, involvement in civic duties, social sensitivity, etc. It is in grammar school, the school, in which the aim of education is to introduce students to the world of scientific knowledge, to implement the sense independence, to help make important decisions and to prepare for the active participation in social life (M.Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2004:58), that special attention has to be paid to the existence of stereotypes, diversity and the necessity to build positive and satisfying relationships with Others.

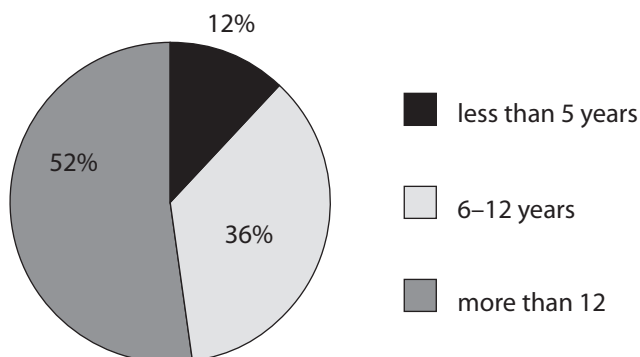
The research was conducted in 2012 by means of the diagnostic poll method, which might present feedback relating to the implementation of multi – and intercultural education on lessons by grammar school teachers. The questionnaire technique was used to collect data. The survey was conducted among 60 teachers from 12 grammar schools in Koszalin. They were asked to complete a questionnaire in the form of 21 questions, including 12 half-open ones. In each question the teachers had the opportunity to add their own comments and observations connected with their own school practice.

Out of the group of 60 surveyed, 78% were women. Men were only 22% of those polled. The respondents participating in the survey were mainly aged 35–44 years (38%), but the differences between the other age ranges (26–34 and 45–54) were insignificant, therefore it can be considered that the group surveyed was mostly women aged 26–54. (cf., Graph 1)

The respondents who participated in the research were mainly experienced people whose period of work experience at school was more than 12 years (52%), another group consisted of teachers working 6–12 years in education (36%). Only 12% constituted young workers with fewer than five years of work experience (Graph 2).

Graph 1. The respondents' age

Source: Own research

Graph 2. The period of work experience

Source: Own research

Therefore, the poll was carried out among experienced teachers, mostly women.

Results

As already mentioned, modern transformations of globalization result in numerous and challenging education tasks and, in a way, impose changes on schooling, because education should prepare people not only to benefit from the achievements of modern civilization, but also to actively participate in the process of its further existence and development. Meanwhile, according to R. Pachociński *traditional school is not prepared to take the challenges of modern civilization. It responds to changes too slowly* (R. Pachociński 2006, p.35). Hence, it is absolutely necessary to adapt modern education systems to new economic, social and cultural conditions.

This is possible, however, only with an appropriate level of preparation, as well as appropriate knowledge acquired all life. Nowadays, a person is not only a citizen of a state, but also a citizen of Europe and even a citizen of the world. The knowledge of one's own culture is just the beginning because it provides their own cultural identity and a sense of belonging and a lack of preparation for the contact with the Other/Foreign leads to intolerance because of the fear of otherness. Thus, there has been a difficult task for schools – opening to changes, because, according to Pachociński, *children have to prepare for life towards the future, although the school is closed in the past* (R.Pachociński 2006, p.83). Thus, contacts with diversity, difference, meeting with the Other/Foreign as a result of a “shrinking world” as well as the ease of contact with other cultures and sometimes the necessity of living in another culture or migrating, require from schools the preparation for life in a multicultural society. The answer to these needs is intercultural education, which *has to help, not only to “be near” but to get in contact – to integrate. Moreover – to integrate without explicit or hidden domination of one of the groups* (T. Lewowicki 2000, p.26). *It is the integration and dynamic socio-cultural changes of various social communities based on mutual rapprochement of their members that is the result of intercultural education* (P. Grzybowski 2005, p.39). When it comes to intercultural education, internal ethnic, racial and cultural differences of a given society which relate to different visions of the world and cultural concepts are respected and taken into account. It is education that recognizes and accepts the norms and values of everyone's life. It helps understand and teaches that people in different parts of the world have different attitudes to life, different customs and beliefs, and that this diversity enriches humanity. It promotes equality and human rights, triggers aversion to discrimination and promotes the values upon which equality is built (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2008, p.3). Despite the fact that education relates to the whole society, it is mainly focused on the system of relationships among children and youth, who are future citizens of the intercultural world. Education has been making a huge step towards integration and tolerance, preparing different people to cooperate and make use of heritage as well as helping maintain the identity of individuals and whole communities (T. Lewowicki 2000, p. 17). The general task of education is to build an intercultural society and culture by providing knowledge and teaching skills which are essential and helpful in resolving problems that arise from cultural diversity. This process is to take place on the basis of awareness, stimulating, encouraging, teaching, and showing appropriate attitudes, skills, needs, and consciousness associated with the perception of difference and social consequences of this fact. (P. Grzybowski 2005, pp.63–64). J. Nikitorowicz draws attention to three important issues related to intercultural

education. First and foremost, it takes education measures so that members of different cultures do not become prisoners of their own cultural conventions as homogeneous culture can be constraining. Intercultural education draws attention to values. It reminds that no one is a member of one isolated group, and that the process of creating one's own identity is required to contact other groups. And finally, intercultural education refers to the concept of culture. Cultures transform and as a result of transformation of models and values – they develop. Therefore, each group should treat their own culture as a sign of distinction and difference, however, without creating cultural ghettos (J. Nikitorowicz 2010, pp.51–52). Moreover, there is a large number of objectives of this education suggested by M.S. Szymanski. These include, among other things, being open to the world, communication on a global scale between people of different races, languages, religions, origins, traditions, lifestyles, involvement in aid of peace, equality, fraternity and solidarity in our own country and around the world, advocating for a just world without war, exploitation, oppression and hunger, awakening ecological awareness, getting rid of the sense of cultural superiority or the opposition to all forms of xenophobia, racism and hostility against minorities, etc. (MS Szymanski 1995, p.105). The range of goals means a hard job for those implementing intercultural education. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of issues and the above-mentioned objectives it can be implemented as a part of education and teaching every subject and at every level of education. So as to reinforce this process, a variety of projects that teach intercultural thinking and acting has been run.

Therefore, teachers of various subjects at the third stage of education took part in the research – first of all teachers of English, Polish and History. However, there were also Maths or Physics teachers. The data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Teachers of individual subjects

Subject	number	%
Biology	6	10.0
Mathematics	8	13.3
Polish	8	13.3
German	6	10.0
Geography	5	8.3
History, Civics	7	11.6
English	11	18.6
Religious Education	2	3.3
Chemistry	2	3.3

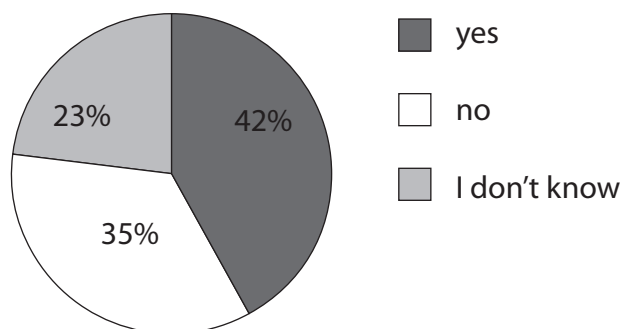
Subject	number	%
Art, Family Life Education	2	3.3
Physics	2	3.3
Information Technology	1	1.7
Total	60	100

Source: Own research

The analysis of the collected empirical material indicates that the Koszalin school environment definitely relates to one culture. Only 21.6% of the respondents see the cultural diversity in their area, however only in relation to different religious beliefs. Nevertheless, 81.6% of them are or were in contact with someone from a different cultural background only during trips. Only 5.0% have met such people during international youth exchanges, such as Socrates-Comenius, organised by the school. What is more, the classrooms where the respondents teach relate to only one culture, since only 15% of students are culturally or ethnically different. However, each school, regardless of the stage of education and the level of diversity in the environment, is required to execute the core curriculum, which clearly indicates that the purpose of education at the grammar school level is: broadening students' knowledge about the culture of their region and its relationships with national culture, making and maintaining contact with the local community to form close relationships and to understand different human backgrounds, or learning about the national cultural heritage from the perspective of European culture. Therefore, the role of school is to make students aware of the habits, customs and behaviours characteristic of the representatives of the culture in the area of a foreign language taught, developing the attitude connected with being curious, open and tolerant towards other cultures, teaching the attitude of tolerance, patriotism, the implementation of the tradition of European as well as national culture (The core curriculum for grammar and secondary schools which give students school leaving certificates after passing the secondary school leaving exam from 15th January 2009). What does it mean to teach an active civic attitude, the attitude of respect for the traditions and culture of students' own nation as well as for other cultures and traditions? (The core curriculum with comments) Thus, how do schools implement these goals and objectives? The analysis of the empirical material collected indicates that the results are not clear-cut. The question of whether the school implements any content related to multi – and intercultural education was answered affirmatively by the respondents from five grammar schools, which constitutes 42% of all the responses, in other institutions such content is not implemented at all or

the teachers were not able to give an unambiguous answer (Graph 3). The way of implementing the content is primarily through cross-curricular activities or on foreign language lessons mainly by teaching foreign languages. This indicates that the teachers think of foreign language teaching and learning as one of the main ways to implement intercultural education. It is rarely an integration program, such as Socrates-Comenius, an anti-discrimination program, e.g. Everyone Different – All Equal, a simulation game enabling students to be in the role of the Other, etc. The city of Koszalin has taken several initiatives when it comes to intercultural education, such as the Festival of Ukrainian Children Groups, European Film Festival Integration You and Me, Francophone High School Theatre Festival, Polish-German Youth Festival, All-Poland competition of knowledge about the European Union “THE STAR CIRCLE” or the program “My School in the EU.” However, are these measures sufficient? Only one of the schools surveyed takes a number of initiatives in this area, such as a regular youth exchange within the framework of agreements signed with five countries, including the Netherlands, Turkey, Spain, Greece and Italy, an international Photo Day, Culture Days and many more.

Graph 3: The implementation of multi – and intercultural education in schools of Koszalin



Source: Analysis of own research

The empirical data collected show that the aims and objectives of intercultural education are not executed in the grammar schools of Koszalin. Moreover, the teachers responded that although the objectives as well as tasks at the school level are not always executed, they provide the content of multicultural education themselves. 77% of the respondents included the content of inter – and multicultural education in the education program of their subjects. Most often it appears in

English classes as well as on Polish and History lessons (Table 2). Unfortunately, the respondents did not give more detailed answers connected with the ways and forms of the implementation of such content. The only response was the statement “during the classes”.

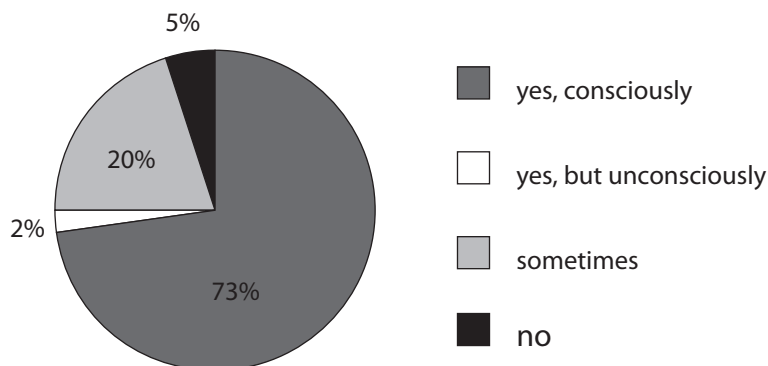
Table 2: The implementation of multi – and intercultural education in schools of Koszalin on the basis of individual subjects

Subject	yes	no	I don't know	TOTAL
Biology	4	2	0	6
Mathematics	3	5	0	8
Polish	7	1	0	8
German	5	0	1	6
Geography	5	0	0	5
History, Civics	6	0	1	7
English 3	10	0	1	11
Religious Education	2	0	0	2
Chemistry	1	1	0	2
Art, Family Life Education	2	0	0	2
Physics	0	2	0	2
Information Technology	1	0	0	1
Total	46	11	3	60

Source: Own research

In addition, the respondents were not able to specify the objectives or tasks of intercultural education, their most frequent answer was “I do not know,” 79%, or “its goal is to introduce the language, traditions and cultural customs of students,” 9% of the respondents and “promoting the attitude of acceptance, tolerance and being open to others,” 12% of the teachers. However, in response to the next question they claimed that they were consciously and deliberately involved in the development of their students’ intercultural skills through their own educational actions. Only 20% said they were not sure and 5% of the teachers claimed they did not develop such skills. (cf., Graph 4)

This means that the teachers who work in the conditions of low cultural diversity are not familiar with the tasks of intercultural education, since, most probably, they do not include them in the scope of the content of their subjects, although they declare such activities. However, the inability to indicate the types of undertaken tasks clearly indicates that the teachers are convinced that they execute the core

Graph 4: Awareness of teachers in the development of students' intercultural skills

Source: Own research

curriculum by working with the textbook, which already contains the content. This is indicated by the responses relating to the content connected with intercultural education in the textbooks of the subjects taught. According to the teachers, the content cannot be found only in materials for teaching IT, Chemistry or Physics. However, most of it can be found in the textbooks for teaching foreign languages, Polish and History (Table 3). The content generally relates to literary texts connected with Polish and foreign literature, foreign texts describing the customs, cuisine and traditions of other cultures, mainly English-speaking ones, global politics as well as Polish and worldwide contemporary problems.

Table 3: Cross-cultural education content in textbooks of individual school subjects

Subject	yes	no	I don't know	total
Biology	5	1	0	6
Mathematics	1	7	0	8
Polish	7	1	0	8
German	5	1	0	6
Geography	5	0	0	5
History, Civics	5	1	1	7
English	10	0	1	11
Religious Education	2	0	0	2
Chemistry	0	2	0	2

Subject	yes	no	I don't know	total
Art, Family Life Education	1	0	1	2
Physics	0	2	0	2
Information Technology	0	1	0	1
Total	41	16	3	60

Source: Own research

Conclusion

The research conducted among grammar school teachers in Koszalin suggests that the state of the implementation of tasks connected with intercultural education is low. The teachers declare taking, even conscious, initiatives in this area but are not able to identify the kind of those initiatives. Moreover, they often do not know the objectives of multi – and intercultural education. The teachers' statements show that they are certain that there has already been content connected with this field in materials and textbooks, which exempts them from taking independent action. In addition, 90% of the respondents said that they were not qualified enough to work in conditions of multiculturalism and 15% of them claimed that it was not necessary, because of the one-culture environment in Koszalin. The causes of a lack of preparation of teachers were justified by the following statements: "This is the new content, which has been current for several years and I still do not know it" (a teacher with more than 12-year experience); "No teaching aids for the implementation of the content of multiculturalism" (a teacher, 6–12-year experience), "I work intuitively, I think that a course is needed" (a teacher, 6–12 year experience).

In conclusion, the study has shown that training teachers and providing them with teaching aids are indispensable for educating and preparing young people for living in the modern global society, so that detachment from the present day (mentioned by Pachocinski) does not happen (Pachocinski 2006, p.35). The current reports of the Ministry of Education refer to the plans to introduce a compulsory subject called "multicultural education" in Polish schools at all levels of education, and thus to prepare qualified teaching staff in this field. (Nasz Dziennik No. 121 (4660), 25–26 May 2013.)

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