

Multi-cultural Education and Its Pitfalls: The Case of Popular Non-governmental Education Programmes in Poland



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Abstract Considering the diverse history of both regions, associations with the concept of multiculturalism and cultural diversity in Poland are different from those in postcolonial Western Europe. Even so many Polish handbooks and educational scenarios resemble their Western counterparts and/or treat multi- and interculturalism as a universal and global phenomenon. The first part of the article indicates the differences between Polish and Western associations and presents the most important contexts in which multiculturalism appears in Poland. The second (main) part of the article is based on the analysis of three handbooks of multi-cultural education which treat multiculturalism as a universal phenomenon, addressed to Polish practitioners, mainly teachers.

Firstly, three kinds of justifications of multi-cultural education are identified: pragmatic, ethical and utilitarian. Secondly, two ways of expressing the idea of multiculturalism for educational activities, present in different proportions in each of these parts, are identified. The first one suggests the cultures are separate, distinct beings, which can be described and are usually linked to a nation. They should be learnt and given respect and tolerance, often contrary to the negative emotions associated with contact with otherness. The second one is aimed at deconstructing ethnic differences and treating them as one of many dimensions of similarities and differences between people and at demonstrating the fortuitousness and contextuality of such differences. Thirdly, several problems faced by multi-cultural education and present in analysed papers are indicated, for example, (1) the difficulty separating different, often incompatible ways of understanding multiculturalism and the tensions between them; (2) the risk of replacing negative stereotypes with opposite generalisations; (3) denial of the existence of social inequalities instead of deconstructing their cultural background; and (4) the risk of strengthening intercultural barriers by essentialising, exoticising and foreignising cultural differences.

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1 Introduction: Multiculturalism in the Polish Context

When speaking about multiculturalism, interculturalism and cultural diversity, we often follow the viewpoint of Western countries and think mostly about the postcolonial processes, cultural and demographic transformations that took place during the last decades, subsequent waves of migration from former colonies or other non-European countries, co-existence or conflicts of residents of different ethnic roots and most recently about the inflow of refugees from Middle East and Africa. Although the last topic is the subject of intense public debate in Poland, Poland's experience with multiculturalism is definitely different (cf. Mucha 2015, 2016).

First of all, since the mid-twentieth century until recently, it was difficult to find a European country more homogeneous in ethnic and linguistic terms than Poland. For the last few decades, the German minority, which was the largest minority group in Poland, has accounted for a fraction of the percentage of the Polish population and has been concentrated in a small area of our country. Poland has hardly been a destination of economic migration, and during the last few years, we did not witness a wave of refugees from the Middle East or Africa. In 2015, the handbook for teachers "Multi-culturalism at school" ("Międzykulturowość w szkole"), based on data from the Central Statistical Office of Poland and Eurostat, provided information that representatives of national and ethnic minorities accounted for 2% of the population of Poland and foreigners represented only 1.5% (Białek et al. 2015: 9). Representatives of ethnic minorities have been strongly concentrated, mainly found in localities where "old minorities" have survived (e.g. near the borders with Russia and Belarus and in the Opole Region), in the vicinity of centres for foreigners and in large cities.

Nonetheless it should be emphasised that the situation has rapidly changed during the last 2 years due to migration from Ukraine. In accordance with official data, the number of migrants from Ukraine reached 150,000 per year; however, it is estimated that the number may be several times higher. In consequence, although the number of refugees is very small in Poland, for the last 3 years Poland has witnessed a steady growth of the number of stay permits issued (Table 1 and Graph 1).

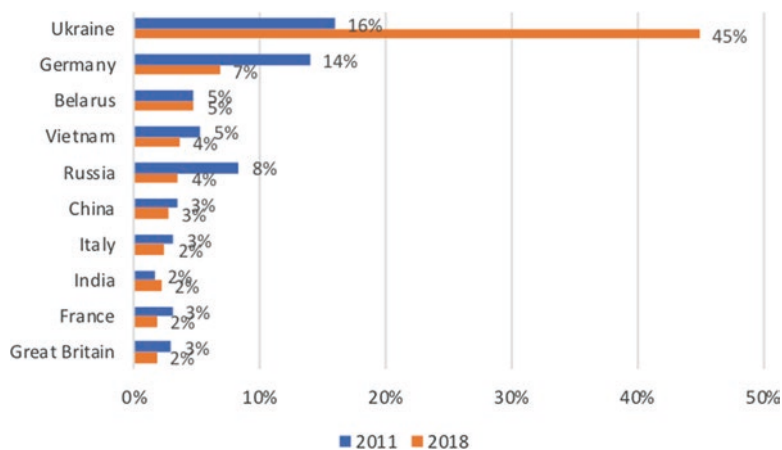
Secondly, Poland and, more generally, Central and Eastern Europe have a long but lost history of multiculturalism, traces of which can still be found. For the last 20 years, it was one of the most important impulses for activities in the sphere of cultural education.¹ The ethnic homogeneity of Poland is a relatively new

¹ Cf., e.g. activities of the "Borderlands of Art, Cultures and Nations" Centre (Ośrodek "Pogranicze – sztuk, kultur, narodów") in Sejny (<http://pogranicze.sejny.pl/>), Krzyżowa dla Porozumienia Europejskiego Foundation (Fundacja Krzyżowa dla Porozumienia Europejskiego <http://www.krzyzowa.org.pl/>), Centre for Civic Education in Warsaw (Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej w Warszawie <http://www.ceo.org.pl/pl/slady/news/materialy-edukacyjne-z-wielokulturowosci>), One World Association (Fundacja Jeden Świat) based in Poznań (<http://jedenswiat.org.pl/>, http://www.hfhr.org.pl/wielokulturowosc/documents/doc_79.pdf) and many others.

Table 1 The number of documents related to the stay in Poland filed in 2011, 2013, 2015 and 2017 by the subject thereof

	2011	2013	2015	2017
Temporary stay	31,154	36,624	64,352	166,642
Registration of the stay of EU citizens	32,757	47,275	62,738	71,602
Permanent residence	21,703	24,922	36,786	60,205
Stay of EU long-term residents	2649	3637	6942	11,912
Permanent residence of EU citizen	4259	5535	6711	7923
Subsidiary protection	3457	2953	1964	2039
Humanitarian residence	0	0	1032	1947
Refugee status	1077	1031	1269	1347
Residence of a family member of an EU citizen	395	425	550	773
Tolerated residence	1034	1559	260	301
Permanent residence of a family member of an EU citizen	29	47	61	78
Total	98,514	124,008	182,665	324,769

Source: Polish Office for Foreigners (Urząd ds. Cudzoziemców), <https://migracje.gov.pl/statystyki> [11/01/2018]



Graph 1 The number of documents issued to foreigners in Poland filed in 2011 and in 2018 by nationalities: ten nationalities with largest share. (Source: Polish Office for Foreigners (Urząd ds. Cudzoziemców), <https://migracje.gov.pl/statystyki> [11/01/2018])

characteristic of the country, the effect of World War II, the Holocaust and the shifting of borders. This tradition is often referred to in Poland also on ideological and political levels. The idea of a tolerant and culturally-diversified country is cherished, even though the actual image of the past is much more complex (cf. Pasięka 2012).

Thirdly, the appearance of the topic of cultural diversity in the awareness of the population mainly resulted from the opening of borders after 1989 and the subsequent joining of the European Union and mass migration to the west. As a result of economically driven migration, Poles quickly became the largest ethnic

minority group in Ireland (approx. 120,000/more than 2% of the population), in Norway (approx. 100,000/almost 2% of the population) and in Iceland (approx. 10,000/3% of the population). They are still one of the largest minority groups in the UK (approx. 1 million /1.5% of the population) and for a long time now have been an intensely assimilating minority group in Germany (0.5–1.5 million/0.6–2% of the population). Such a considerable migration brought the topic of multiculturalism to the limelight, but it also introduced it “through the back door” – through behaviours, reflections, objects, texts, skills or discussions sent or brought to Poland by migrants (see, e.g. Garapich 2016) and by numerous mixed-nationality marriages (see, e.g. Magdalena and Krystyna 2017). This has considerable consequences for the conceptualisation of multiculturalism in Poland (Grzybowski 2011: 65–83).

Fourthly, a small extent of ethnic and linguistic diversity obviously does not mean that Poland is a culturally homogeneous country. Class, regional and gender differences as well as differences in outlook may be equally important to the everyday interactions of people as ethnic differences (even though the latter often mask them when they overlap). It is these nonethnic differences that often cause strong political conflicts and social divisions in Poland and have become the subject of educational and community arts projects in Poland. Some of these differences echo vivid cultural differences dating back to the nineteenth century when the current territory of Poland was divided between Austria, Prussia and Russia and that are still expressed in daily life (e.g. some marriages between the residents of two sides of the border, which has not existed for a century, see: e.g. Schmidt J. 1997), results of parliamentary and presidential elections (Skobrtal 2011; Zarycki and Nowak 2000; Zarycki 2015) and the type of participation in the communal life of the local society (Bartkowski 2008; Peisert 2017).

As a result of all the phenomena described above, even though Poland is (or was until recently) a mono-ethnic country, it also has several types of cultural borderlines (Pasięka 2012: 46–48): those on which the local culture created by various ethnic groups (e.g. Polish and Belarussian) survived; those that cherish and reconstruct the memory of the lost multiculturalism (e.g. Bieszczady Mountains, Masurian Lakes, former Jewish districts in cities); those which have been radically changing as a result of the transition to a liberal democracy and subsequent joining the EU (especially Polish-German border); and, finally, the invisible borders dividing the former partitions and the still important differences between the German, Austria-Hungary and Russian cultures.

However, even though the Polish perspective of multiculturalism is different from that of the French, German, English or Danish ones so that applying ideas born in the Western cultural context without prior adaptation may be risky (cf. Buchowski 2004; Pasięka 2012), one can easily find significant papers referring to the western and global discussions on multi-, inter- and trans-culturalism. There are, for example, numerous papers for the topic of the intercultural communication (e.g. Burszta 1996; Kempny et al. 1997; Buchowski 2004), although most of them are hardly read in the West (cf. Mucha 2015, 2016). Numerous handbooks and guidebooks on multi-cultural education can also be found and referred to their Western counter-

parts. They are based on the assumption that, despite its specifics, Poland already is a member of global, multi-cultural circles and/or that Poles encounter multiculturalism in the previously discussed contexts (borderlines, memory, economic migration). The second part of the text is devoted to these handbooks and assumptions or educational methods proposed in them. Based on the analysis, I have formulated a set of problems faced by multi-cultural education which seem to be universal and go beyond the Polish context.

2 Multi-cultural Education in Polish Handbooks and Its Universal Challenges

Multi- and intercultural education is pursued in Poland largely through governmental organisations or is inspired and supported by them, just like cultural education projects. Their work methods are also best clarified and commonly available due to the fact that they usually put considerable emphasis on the presentation of their achievements and publication of their proposals on the Internet. For these reasons, I find it interesting to analyse their educational proposals. Having read numerous papers of this kind, I have decided to choose an in-depth analysis of three of them which seem to represent three different environments of educators associated with three different cities (Białystok, Warsaw, Krakow) and also serve as auxiliary materials for teachers and for daily education at schools:

- *Przygody innego. Bajki w edukacji międzykulturowej (The Adventures of the Other. Fables in Inter-cultural Education)*, Anna Młynarczuk-Sokołowska, Katarzyna Potoniec, Katarzyna Szostak-Król (eds.), Fundacja Edukacji i Twórczości i Fundacja Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, Białystok 2011, hereinafter: “(Przygody... 2011)”
- Adam Bulandra, Jakub Kościółek, *Lekcje tolerancji. Pakiet edukacyjny dla nauczycielek i nauczycieli (Lessons of Tolerance. Educational Package for Teachers)*, Stowarzyszenie Interkulturalni, Krakow 2017, hereinafter: “(Lekcje... 2017)”
- Marta Brzezińska-Hubert, Anna Olszówka et al., *Edukacja międzykulturowa, Pakiet Edukacyjny Pozaformalnej Akademii Jakości Projektu, Część 2 (Inter-cultural Education. Educational Package of Non-formal Academy of Project Quality)*, Fundacja Rozwoju Systemu Edukacji, Warsaw 2008, hereinafter: “(Edukacja... 2008)”

The analysis of these papers concerns the following aspects. I am interested, firstly, in how they understand multi- and/or interculturalism and how they justify their value (Sect. 2.1); secondly, what concepts of culture and cultural diversity they use (Sect. 2.2); and, thirdly, how they try to convey these concepts and justify the tensions and dilemmas that appear in the process for their recipients (Sects. 2.1 and 2.2.).

2.1 *Observed and Postulated Multiculturalism and Its Justifications*

As proposed by Janusz Mucha (2016) in his reinterpretation of the paper by Andrzej Sadowski and Małgorzata Bieńkowska, multiculturalism may be treated as (1) a characteristic of societies, gradable and/or characterised by additional variables; (2) a postulate, or thesis, that multiculturalism has positive value; and/or that (3) the state should strengthen multiculturalism. The analysed handbooks are usually based on the first type of understanding (1). Therefore, they inform the reader that:

In the shrinking world, contact with different cultures has become a daily standard (Edukacja... 2008: 6); [in the] era of globalisation, in the constantly uniting Europe, the ability to cope in a different culture has become important and a needed competence. (Edukacja... 2008: 8)

Polish society is becoming increasingly diversified and multi-culturalism is inherently incorporated in the daily existence of the average Pole. The closeness of a multi-cultural experience and its influence on humans cannot be ignored anymore. (Przygody... 2011: 9)

Multi-culturalism (contemptuously referred to as multi-culti) is not an ideology but a state of reality. It requires efficient tools of managing social life in such a manner that the differences in the perception of social phenomena arising out of different cultural experiences do not cause conflicts. (Lekcje... 2017: 66)

A vast majority of the most popular Polish handbooks and educational scenarios focused on multiculturalism contain a similar justification of the topic (e.g. intensive exchange, globalisation, migration, accession to the EU, sometimes – memory of the multi-cultural past), just like the recurring definitions of culture and multiculturalism, stereotypes and prejudices, along with reasons for their emergence and functioning. Emphasis is placed on showing the scientific grounds of proposed tools and definitions and their neutral character, not only by referring to numerous scientific studies and papers but also straightforward statements like:

We attempted to avoid ideological disputes or a unilateral presentation of problems so as not to impose a specific view of the world. (Lekcje... 2017: 8)

However, a more thorough analysis of content suggests that the understanding of multiculturalism as an “objective” phenomenon is always supplemented with understanding 2 (or possibly 3). A positive attitude to multiculturalism is justified in analysed papers in various recurring ways. Why are multi- and interculturalism positive?

1. Firstly, for ethical reasons, considering human rights, e.g.:

- “[The purpose is] the awareness of the right of every human being to be Different, emotional readiness to come into interpersonal contact with Strangers/Others, and the ability to respect the rules of equal treatment of all people” (Przygody... 2011: 25).

- “(...) the educational activities undertaken by a teacher (...) with an open-minded attitude to multi-culturalism (...) may fundamentally affect the development of positive social attitudes. (...) Inter-cultural education at the kindergarten level and in early primary school should be based on the development of the child’s awareness that everyone is Different and has a right to be so. This will help (...) change a child’s attitude to a disabled peer, to people with lower material status, to people of a different religion or from other cultures” (Przygody... 2011: 10–11).
 - “Respect for people of a different race, nationality or religion is the core of humanism and the contemporary social system based on respecting human rights. In accordance with Article 32 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, no one may be discriminated against in social life for any reason (...)” (Lekcje... 2017: 7).
2. Secondly, because one should strive to establish an objective and honest picture of intercultural relations and avoid unjustified generalisations, for example:
- “Fundamental attribution error appears in debates on the consequences of migration. The reluctance to integration is attributed to the migrants, whereas the main obstacles to the process are mechanisms of social exclusion, racism towards migrants, the economic and social model of western societies, and the shape of a community’s migration policy. The system of accepting refugees is a long-term and excluding procedure” (Lekcje... 2017: 70).
 - “The basic weapon of those who use racist or xenophobic rhetoric is referring to negative phenomena in minority communities (...). People who recall such stories use generalisations and project problems of a small group onto all the representatives of a given community, turning local incidents into global issues” (Lekcje tolerancji, p. 61); “The majority of information on migrations presented in the media is based on simplifications, generalisations and the use of unjustified fears” (Ibidem, p. 69); “When speaking about people of different races or cultures, one should be careful in his or her views and should base opinions on general and reliable knowledge of a given phenomenon” (p. 71).
 - These meetings made it possible for us to go beyond the negative stereotypes and biases, and to develop a positive attitude to those who are Strangers/Different through direct interaction (Przygody... 2011: 16).
3. Thirdly, multi- and interculturalism has a utilitarian justification.
- Inter-cultural competence primarily is an individual asset, e.g.: “Individuals with inter-cultural competence are more and more appreciated in the labour market. Contemporary enterprises function in the international environment and they often employ representatives of different cultures who must communicate and cooperate every day” (Edukacja... 2008: 5).
 - When it comes to the handbook by Stowarzyszenie Interkulturalni, it is additionally indicated that ... racism “does not pay”, both on an individual level (e.g.: “[...] in Polish law there are real grounds for imposing penal liability on fans of racist riots and behaviours. Such matters may be decided under

expedited procedures, which means that perpetrators may be convicted for the committed offences within 24 hours of the charges. Teachers should make students aware of the possible consequences of racist behaviours during sports events [Lekcje... 2017: 72]) and on a community level (e.g.: “It should also be remembered that footballers of a different race who play for Polish teams usually make these teams stronger” [Lekcje... 2017: 73]; “[Racism] does not protect local, national or ethnic groups against threats from other groups. It does quite the opposite (...)” [Lekcje... 2017: 66]). Also, the argument of the community development is raised: “It should be remembered that ethnic diversity and the resulting cultural diversity do not pose a threat to Poles’ national identity but prove the richness of our heritage. The cultivation of these differences and distinctness may only bring benefits and exercise influence on the social and cultural development of the nation” (Lekcje... 2017: 56).

The co-existence of the understanding of multiculturalism as an objective phenomenon and as an ethical postulate, and the three justifications identified above, brings to attention several problems faced by multi-cultural education.

First, There Are Tensions and Contradictions Between Different Ways of Understanding and Justifying Multiculturalism In particular, treating it as a value and postulate and the resulting pressure on the ethnic dimension (faith in common human nature and the value of communication, human solidarity, fair treatment, anti-discriminatory policy) may be in contrast to utilitarian arguments (e.g. aforementioned foreign players’ impact on the success of the local football team), and mixing both in the same studies may evoke scornful remarks (you cannot be racist, especially if that black footballer plays so well...).

Second, the Consistent Use of the Proposed Justification of Multiculturalism Is a Challenge to Educators If it is the avoidance of unjustified generalisations and stereotypes that is recommended, it is risky and dubious to replace them with positive counterparts or anecdotal and individual cases. This might be the trap “Lekcje...” falls into:

The Pakistani and the Indians belong to hard-working and gifted nations with some of the highest economic development ratios. Many Indians are registered in lists of the richest people worldwide (...). They are presidents, social activists, presidents of the United Nations,² grand directors, painters, artists, scientists, IT specialists, creators of economic and social innovations. [Lekcje... 2017: 65]

It should be remembered that ethnic diversity and the resulting cultural diversity do not pose any threat to the national identity of Poles but prove the richness of our heritage. The cultivation of these differences and distinctness may bring only benefits and influence the social and cultural development of the nation. (p. 56)

²This probably refers to presidents of the United Nations General Assembly.

Social inequalities are created only by culture and the social system of a given place. (p. 71)

Not only does the first of the above quotes recall tensions between ethical and pragmatic justifications (you must not discriminate...especially that many of them are wealthy and important figures), but it also indicates problems resulting from the substitution of negative generalisations with positive ones. Does it matter if we do not find grand directors, scientists or the president of the UN General Assembly among the representatives of a different culture? The second and third quotes are equally high-level generalisations as these they are opposed to. If multiculturalism is to be understood pragmatically, and its effects are to be analysed in relation to the cultural context, everyday life and functioning of social institutions, then it is necessary to note that each kind of cultural difference and each conflict may bear both innovations and new challenges (cf. Coser 1956; Simmel 2008). Each new way of thinking and acting may both bring new quality and new values and increase the adaptive potential of complex systems, such as great cities or enterprises, but also increase “transactional costs” (e.g. create problems with communication resulting from incompatible ways of thinking and acting, require more time to reach a consensus or solve certain problems). If a social system has not been offered many new challenges or impulses from the outside, it may not tolerate change well and may be unable to transform differences into innovation and adapt to the new situation. In other words, cultural diversity brings both opportunities and challenges (Page 2007; Garapich 2016). If this bilateral nature of intercultural contact is omitted, and the negative stereotypes are replaced with positive ones, and there is no space for the expression of negative emotions and fears, it may increase the risk of rejecting the multi-cultural message and treating it as being unreliable, alien, imposing or excessively educational. The educators often have to face people who express their doubts about the value of multiculturalism or are afraid of it, have a range of justifications for negative attitudes towards it or are simply young and critical of the message.

The Third Threat to Multi-cultural Education Involves Pointing at Manifestations of Discrimination Mechanisms Rather Than Their Causes One example is treating pieces of informations which are seemingly unfavourable for a person of a different skin colour is considered to be racism, even if this information is true, instead of learning the ability of critical deconstruction of such messages and finding reasons why some people have greater odds of behaving in a manner which makes them be perceived negatively. Illustrative example:

One example of false information on people of different races may be the dissemination of information on the spread of HIV by Africans or a higher crime rate among black people in the USA. (p. 60)

Both of the above phenomena may be supported by empirical data: residents of African countries are transmitters of HIV definitely more frequently (e.g. Jade et al. 2014), while black citizens of the USA may be definitely more likely to go to prison

than white Americans.³ This absolutely does not absolutely mean that Africans or black US citizens spread HIV or perpetrate crimes due to their skin colour or racial or ethnic affinity. The educator's duty should not be to deny such phenomena but to demonstrate their causes, probably rooted in differences in affluence and activity of healthcare services between the countries, differences in the average social class of white and black residents of the USA or the discriminatory nature of education and of the justice system (see also Harris et al. 2009).

The three challenges presented above are handled much better by the authors of "Edukacja międzykulturowa..." than by the authors of "Lekcja tolerancji...". In several places the former discusses the risks related to intercultural contact and the dependence of its outcomes on the form of contact and educational work. For example:

International exchanges of the youth may (...) enable dialogue but they may also function as empty slogans, and in unfavourable circumstances and when the proper inter-cultural training or diversity training is not used during them, they may even strengthen the existing bias. (p. 41)

Prevention of discrimination and racism requires the use of proper tools as it is often approached with suspicion as an ideological activity and/or activity "against" something. (p. 46)

The study published by FRSE is the only one of the three analysed titles to contain advice on good and bad practices resulting from educational activities, advice or solutions based on these activities and problems frequently appearing in this kind of work (pp. 86–92). Additionally, this handbook clearly shows that multi-cultural education requires "empathy with an ethnocentrist":

If confrontation reveals any doubts as to the importance and weight of one's culture, one may feel uncertain in his or her identity. It is important in pedagogical practice to notice the emotional and existential importance of culture. (p. 37)

Certain elements of this approach also appear in "Lekcje tolerancji" where there are exercises that allow one to express negative feelings or feelings which are not assumed beforehand, e.g. by preparing anonymous lists of associations with a given ethnic group (p. 48), even though the "[teacher's] presentation that follows is aimed at breaking certain myths and stereotypes on the discussed group". The success of educational activity seems to depend on whether the educator will guide the participants to notice and deconstruct the stereotypes and data misinterpretations themselves while taking into consideration that defending one's views and the fear of change are natural mechanisms of the functioning of the human psyche.

³ See for examples: <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2016/crime-in-the-u.s.-2016/topic-pages/tables/table-21> [accessed on August 20th 2017].

2.2 *Deconstruction vs. Essentialisation of Borders Between Cultures*

The second fundamental aspect of intercultural education is the manner of understanding the culture and its relationship with the nation. When speaking about multiculturalism, we often think of the existence of numerous distinctly distinguished and describable beings – cultures. Thus, educational activities concerning multiculturalism understood in this way are often about transmitting knowledge concerning other selected cultures and attitudes towards them. Numerous studies (including those analysed here: “Lekcje... 2017” and “Przygody... 2011”) contain separate parts devoted to each culture and separate scenarios of classes for each of them. On the one hand, this may be treated as an expression of the cultural differences that actually exist and require attention. On the other hand, such treatment of cultural differences implies the application of a rigid notion of culture, which resembles those used by early anthropologists and treat it as a “distinctly separated, complex whole” (E. B. Taylor) related to a specific territory:

We tend to reify ethnic and national groups, and talk about <<Serbs>>, <<Croatsians>>, <<Estonians>>..., as if they were internally homogeneous and externally determined groups or even unitary collective actors with the common goal in mind. (Burszta 2010: 27, quoting Roger and Hall 1998: 292–293)

First of all, nowadays such a way of thinking about culture seems slightly anachronistic, not fitting the world in which trans-culturalism, global flows and cultural hybridisation are so strongly present (cf. Appadurai 2005; Barker 2005; Burszta 2010), and, secondly, just like any essential category, it may reproduce stereotypes we want to overcome. In other words, educational activities on multiculturalism need to face the dilemma: speaking about other cultures and promoting multiculturalism can essentialise cultural differences as if the ethnic identification was a clearly distinguished and most important human trait. The basic question concerning multicultural education is the relationship between ethnic differences and differences based on other criteria. This is particularly important in the sphere of school education where every kind of difference (class, wealth, subculture, gender, etc.) can be easily transformed into stigma but also basis for resistance against the school system (cf. Grzybowski 2011: 43–45). This is summarised in an excellent manner by Agnieszka Pasięka (2012: 50):

The most problematic issue is the fact that the multi-cultural discourse presents the vision of the social reality as a dialogue between representatives of various cultures, as if they were the main variables mediating in human relations. People often establish relationships with neighbours, colleagues or classmates, and such interactions are about discovering what we share rather than exploring what divides us. This does not mean that ethnic origin or religion do not play any role in relationships of this kind; depending on the context, they may be more or less important, just as social status, education or opinions. However, it is beyond any doubt that [in everyday life] there is no space for a reified, substantive and ahistoric vision of the individual’s “cultural” tools. What is more, such interactions put into question the legitimacy of the maps of cultural divisions, and prove a wide array of supra-ethnic, inter-ethnic and religious phenomena.

The European multi-cultural education practice is well familiar with such dilemmas. One can even speak of the anti-essentialistic shift which occurred a long time ago on the conceptual level:

The *second paradigm shift* implies that the definition of education should not focus merely on the cultural difference but on a complex set of differences that may be encountered in a classroom and a school, exactly as is the case in any larger group of persons. That is, there are differences in culture, language, religion, social and economic position, and gender, to mention some differences of the collective kind; but there are also differences basically related to the individual, such as psychological or the character or physical features, opinions, sexual orientation, health, and social behaviour. All of these contribute to make groups in most schools heterogeneous in many respects, and not only when and because migrant or other minority students are present. (Allemann-Ghionda 2008: 12)

There is, however, a discrepancy between the official educational policy and the school reality, observed in many countries, e.g. in Germany, France, Switzerland or Italy, where the paradigm of assimilation and equalisation of the “culture deficits” of migrants is predominant in the everyday functioning of many schools and, at the same time, migrants are defavoured by school selection systems in various ways (Allemann-Ghionda 2008).

In the case of the Polish handbooks analysed here, first of all, there are considerable differences in the perception of this problem, and secondly, there are differences in the methods of translating it into educational practice. In general, there are two competing models. The first one which understands culture as “distinctly separated, complex whole” sees cultural relativism as an idea of tolerance which means understanding and *accepting* or *tolerating* those who are radically different from. This is an example taken from a scenario of a school lesson (p. 27):

Then say that you want to talk with the children about that Different person. Ask the children the following questions: Who may be called Different? Have they ever met anyone Different? Do they know who that Different person may be? Continue asking questions: Who is that Different person to you? What does it mean to be Different? When can we say that someone is Different? (...) Make the children aware that in certain circumstances each of us may be Different (e.g. when staying in a country where people have a different skin colour; when living in the housing estate where the majority of the people are of a different religion than ours, etc.).

In this model multi-cultural education is often based on reflecting on different kind of others. One of its common methods involves meetings with people of different ethnic or religious affinity. Rather than showing the multidimensionality of cultural identities, they tend to show the other as fundamentally different. Intercultural communication involves negative emotions towards such otherness demanding one to repress his or her negative emotions. This model is most clearly seen in the handbook “Przygody innego” in which the essentialisation of otherness is materialised in several teaching methods. Here is an exemplary exercise:

Introduce a puppet named Other/Different (...). Say that the Other/Different is 12 years old. Then take the puppet and approach each child with it so that the child can give his or her hand to it, touch it and greet it in his or her way. Ask the following question: Why do you think everyone calls him Other/Different? Summarise the children’s statements (without evaluating). Say that the Other/Different puppet will come to classes (kindergarten/school)

with them. They will have an opportunity to get to know it and find out why the puppet has such a name. (p. 28)

The essentialisation of otherness and the opinion that it is unpleasant but it should be tolerated are also expressed in statements of children who participated in the project (p. 17):

I have also learnt that if someone is Different, we should not laugh at them just because somebody has, for example, dark skin. If I see a different person of a different nationality, I will know that I should not laugh at them.

I have learnt that others should be respected rather than rejected. They should be respected just like us. Everyone should be respected, and we should make friends with them. I think that this will be useful because in this way we have learnt politeness towards others and that everyone should be liked and that we may not dislike someone just because the person is different.

We have talked about different nationalities – that they should be liked, even if they come from different countries. Children from Chechnya spoke about what it is like in their home country and what legends, dances or traditions they have. In general, I was very fond of the programme with the different person.

I have learnt that it is not important if someone is well-dressed or looks nice or whether they have a speech defect – the person should be accepted as when we get to know the person better, it may turn out that he or she is really good at something. I have also learnt that we should not gossip about the person just because he or she is from a different country or is strange.

This is how the educator summarises her educational activities (p. 16):

The statements by children and drawings prepared by them indicated considerable extension of their ability to perceive the otherness and the awareness of related problems. Children started to notice, for example, problems of people with obesity, blind people and refugees which they had not noticed in many groups before the programme started. Also, greater readiness and willingness to establish friendly relations with Different people/ Strangers were observed.

The following activities seem to belong to the model described above:

- Conversations aimed at reconstructing the representations of the “different person” and reaching a conclusion that “despite the existing differences, each of us is a precious human being and all people are equal” (Przygody... 2011: 27)
- Stories of social rejection of figures of negative characteristics that are finalised with a moral lesson presenting ethical defectiveness of such attitudes (presented multiple times in “Przygody...”)
- Presentation of knowledge on different cultures, multi-cultural migration, including deconstructing false beliefs and myths about them, e.g. self-analysis with the use of questionnaires that measure the dimensions of cultural differences (Edukacja... 2008: 62); finishing statements and stories about foreigners (Lekcje... 2017:25–26, 31–34, 48–49, 132–133); reconstructing cultural borrowings in one’s culture (Lekcje: 27–28, 105–106), critical analysis of press

articles (Lekcje... 2017: 51–52); presentations of the rituals of other cultures and teaching respect towards them (Przygody... 2011: 40–42)

- Developing empathy towards different people, e.g. simulations aimed at reconstructing the situations where a person does not understand the language of their surroundings (Edukacja... 2008: 59, Lekcje... 2017: 136–137), has a negative trait (Lekcje... 2017: 29–30) or has to leave their home country immediately (Lekcje... 2017: 134–135)
- Exchanges of the youth with predominant folk presentations of their own culture

Apart from the risk of essentialisation of cultural diversity, the model based on the tolerance towards a “different person” is also associated with the risk of foreignisation and colonisation of otherness. The other is allowed to exist in a place which is strictly prescribed for him or her and in the role of the reverse of one’s own dominance. In this case self-foreignisation can be the only chance for existence in the public sphere and real profit for the minority (sometimes motivated partially by economic grounds, e.g. a willingness to attract tourists or obtain EU funds). As is rightly noted by Pasięka:

(...) the multi-cultural discourse may hinder social dialogue and integration. Ethnic music festivals, cooking shows, and folk-art exhibitions play an important role in the process of the pluralisation of the Polish public sphere. At the same time, they also lead to situations in which the debate on pluralism is reduced to such events and leaves aside the matter of social and political representation of the minority, pursuance of legally guaranteed provisions, and their place in the Polish society *beyond* the sphere of culture. Furthermore, the vision of the social reality as a collection of different cultures does not lead to more inclusive recognition of the Polish culture and going beyond the framework of Polish and Catholic identity. (Pasięka 2012: 49)

This does not mean that the model presented above is improper or unneeded. In the course of multi-cultural education, not only is it uneasy to avoid using labels applied in everyday life labels, but it would also not make sense to disregard their existence. In each of the analysed handbooks, one can find exercises which help to learn about other cultures – their specific character, recurring tendencies and typical (but not universally appearing!) ways of experiencing the world and activity. In “Edukacja wielokulturowa...” the objective of educational activities is to, for example, learn about such dimensions of cultures as mono- and polychronicity, task-based vs. relation-based actions, ceremonialisation vs. informality, expressiveness vs. restraint and individualism vs. collectivism. My thesis is that some of the activities proposed in the analysed programmes are at the same time successful in avoiding essentialisation and folklorisation of otherness and the risk of replacing certain generalisations with others while other aren’t. This approach can also require the educator to give the educated space to express his or her negative emotions, associations and stereotypes and be able to work with them.

The second model of the conceptualisation of multi-cultural education occurring in the analysed handbooks is based on the belief in the contextuality of cultural

differences and the resulting group identifications (crossing of different dimensions of differences and similarities between people, as indicated by Pasięka and Allemann-Ghionda). This model is, in my opinion, expressed in three kinds of exercises: (1) those which are supposed to deconstruct the concept of a uniform, unchangeable and coherent human identity and demonstrate multiple dimensions that join and divide people; (2) those which require to approach well-known cases, people and objects in a different manner than on a daily basis, to deconstruct the differences and make the divisions and categories used every day not that obvious anymore; and (3) those which show how arbitrary divisions and differences between people are and how easily created and petrified they are.

At least some exercises of these types can be found in each of the analysed works, e.g.:

- Perception exercises with polysemantic drawings (Edukacja... 2008: 58)
- Categorisation exercises which demonstrate the multitude of possible group identifications, e.g. “Bar podobieństw” [“Similarities bar”] (Przygody... 2011: 31), “Poznajmy się lepiej” [Let’s get to know each other better], “Wielorakość tożsamości” [Multiplicity of identities”] (Lekcje... 2017: 19–20, 103–4)
- Exercises which involve demonstrating the process of creating group identification and stigmatisation
- Exercises which involve negotiating what our worlds have in common and establishing bridges between the worlds, e.g. “Kolory kultury” [“Colours of culture”] (Edukacja... 2008: 21–5), “Zbudujmy idealny świat” [“Let’s build a perfect world”] (Lekcje... 2017: 23)

Two models of multi- or intercultural education described above do not seem to exclude one another. Each of them seems somehow present in each of the three analysed works but in various proportions (the first model is predominant in “Przygody innego”, while the second model is in other handbooks, but mostly and most consistently in “Edukacja...”) and with a varying degree of reflexivity associated with their presentation and application. In this regard, the handbook published by FRSE stands out; it articulates straightforwardly the educational dilemma described earlier.

When confronted with other cultures, we discover both differences and similarities. It is a natural process of considerable importance which emerges while learning about oneself and from each other. During intercultural meetings excessive attention is often paid to emphasising differences. At the same time, that what is common, what joins people and what could help build a bridge between them remain unnoticed. There are also situations when for the sake of harmony, attention is focused on denying differences or on the so-called folklore, e.g. eating, greeting rituals, etc.

The process of inter-cultural teaching means developing sensitivity both towards one’s own and foreign culture. There is a danger that we will start perceiving everything and everyone as driven by culture. In this case, the inter-cultural conduct is about being able to notice individuality beyond culture, noticing something untypical of a given culture or individual “cultural mix” arising from it. (Edukacja... 2008, p. 39)

The aim of the “Przygody innego” seems to be similar: to face the daily differences and similarities between people, e.g.:

Therefore, it is hard for children to accept those who come from a different culture if they have problems accepting themselves or their overweight peer (...). (p. 11)

Ask children what characteristics they have in common with those who are presented in drawings. Talk to them about similarities that connect people and let them establish friendly relationships (p. 27).

The question that must be faced by the educator is whether the methods and exercises proposed in such a programme as the one presented in “Przygody...” do not indeed strengthen boundaries between people. The basic assumption of this handbook is that “the basis of inter-cultural education at the kindergarten level and the lower grades of primary school should be to develop this belief that everyone is Different and has the right to be so” (p. 11). Even though this is surely guided by the care for individual’s dignity, it seems to lose sight of the relation between otherness and similarity as well as the positive and bond-forming aspect of differences and similarities.

It should be added that the tensions described above and the risk that activities aimed at supporting, emancipating and advocating will simultaneously strengthen social barriers and stigmatisation are more general dilemmas of the activities in favour of groups that occupy peripheral positions in the social system and relatively low positions in its hierarchies or are somehow discriminated, e.g. economically excluded persons (cf. Rakowski 2009) or women (cf. Krzyżanowska 2015).

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