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Intercultural Education in Schools of the Polish-Czech Borderland: Experiences – Problems – Prospects

Abstract

What is explored in the presented text, in reference to the results of authorial studies conducted in 2005/06 and 2012/13 on teachers working in kindergartens, primary, lower- and upper-secondary schools, are the issues of the implementation of intercultural education in the Polish-Czech borderland. This is done in reference to the levels of the work of school and the teacher, outlined by Jerzy Nikitorowicz, within three major tasks of intercultural education. The empirical data based on questionnaire surveys, observation and document analysis allowed for characterizing contemporary chances and barriers of education towards interculturalism in the environment of both urban and rural school.

Keywords: *multi- and intercultural education, Polish-Czech borderland, borderland school, European Union*

Introduction

The historical development and the current state of education in the territory of Cieszyn Silesia have been extensively discussed in expert literature. For twenty four years, regular studies in this field have been carried out also by the Department of General Pedagogy of the University of Silesia at the Faculty of Ethnology and Education in Cieszyn. The Department started its activity by undertaking cooperation with Polish educational environments in the Czech part of the Southern borderland (in Zaolzie) and by conducting the first diagnostic group studies among learners attending primary schools with Polish as the teaching language. These

undertakings resulted in some papers presenting, among other things, an attempt at personality diagnosis, the order of values, life plans, as well as determinants of life paths of the young from Zaolzie or their social functioning and educational problems on the Polish-Czechoslovakian and later Polish-Czech borderland. These publications gave birth to the series ‘Intercultural Education,’ which has been issued since 1992 (Lewowicki, 2012, pp. 15-46; Lewowicki, 2013, pp. 19-37)¹.

Both in the Polish part of Cieszyn Silesia and in Zaolzie, attempts have been made (especially after 1989) at enlarging the infrastructure of the existing schools and creating new ones along with non-school educational and cultural institutions. The following institutions functioned in Cieszyn in the school year 2012/13: 17 kindergartens (including 6 non-state ones), 9 primary schools (including 3 non-state ones), 5 lower-secondary schools (including 2 non-state ones), 17 upper-secondary schools (including 3 non-state ones) and 4 higher education institutions (including 2 non-state ones)². In the Polish part of the borderland, both Catholic and Evangelical religion lessons have been taught since 1991 in all kindergartens and all types of schools with the weekly assignment of two lessons.

School education of the Polish national minority in Zaolzie is subordinated to the laws and responsibilities of the Czech school system with the possibility to implement the curricula in the native language. The analysis of the network of Polish education institutions allows for confirming the steady decrease (since the middle of the 20th century) in the number of both kindergartens and schools, as well as in the number of learners attending education institutions with Polish as the teaching language (Table 1).

Education of the Polish minority takes place in two districts – Karvina and Frýdek-Místek. In the school year 2012/13, the network of Polish school education in Zaolzie consisted of 33 kindergartens, 25 primary and 2 secondary schools. In September 2012, 2871 learners (including 829 pre-school age children) started education in these institutions.

¹ 55 papers of the series “Intercultural Education” have been published so far. Moreover, the journal “Intercultural Education” has been also published in the Cieszyn academic centre since 2012. The issues explored by both the series and the journal are presented in interpretations appropriate for pedagogy, psychology, sociology, philosophy, linguistics, theology, cultural studies, history (and other disciplines of the broadly understood humanities). The category of “borderland” has been treated here in Bachtin’s approach – as the borderland of cultures, societies, religions (and not mainly the borderland of states and nations). Methodological research is carried out with a lot of thought and attempts to improve the study methodology and ways of research results interpretation.

² The data collected by the Department of Education and Culture of the City Office and the Department of Education of the District Office in Cieszyn.

As concerns primary education, two types of schools can be distinguished: schools with a smaller number of grades (1-5) and with all grades (1-9). The most comfortable conditions occur in schools in Czech Cieszyn (15 classes, 310 learners) and Jablunkov (11 classes, 197 learners). Among secondary schools, the leading position has been occupied for decades by the Polish Secondary School (Gimnazjum Polskie), in which a four-year education is carried out. 328 learners in 12 classes are educated in its main seat in Czech Cieszyn.

Table 1. Number of learners and educational institutions with Polish as the teaching language in Zaolzie in 1950-2013 (districts of Karvina and Frydek-Mistek)

Year	1950		1980		1990		2010		2013	
	NI	NL	NI	NL	NI	NL	NI	NL	NI	NL
Type of institution										
Kinder-gartens	68	2417	54	1549	40	1048	33	762	33	829
Primary schools	88	8414	33	3652	30	3344	25	1630	25	1660
Secondary schools	16	702	11	909	5	758	2	488	2	382
Total	172	11 533	98	6110	75	5150	60	2880	60	2871

NI – number of institutions; NL – number of learners

Source: self-reported study based on the data collected by the Pedagogical Centre for Polish Minority Schools in Czech Cieszyn

Another relatively well-ranked school is the Business Academy (Akademia Handlowa) in Czech Cieszyn, where a four-year programme is also implemented and where additionally classes with Polish as the teaching language are conducted. Except for schools with a smaller number of classes in Kosariska, Ropice and Stonava, which are subordinated to the Czech administration, the other schools act independently as most of them have the status of an autonomous administrative and economic unit³.

Polish school education, as the only minority education system in the Czech Republic, provides education in the full educational cycle and it faces problems typical of each education system in the countries of developing market economy.

³ www.pctesin.cz (accessed: 5th August, 2013).

Implementation of intercultural education in schools of Cieszyn Silesia – authorial research results

The authorial studies on the implementation of intercultural education in schools in the Polish-Czech borderland have been conducted twice. In the school year 2005/06 the studies involved teachers working in the Primary School with Polish as the teaching language in Czech Cieszyn as well as kindergarten tutors and teachers from Polish primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary schools in urban (Cieszyn, Skoczów, Ustroń) and rural environments (Bażanowice, Brenna, Golezów). The research comprised 1066 teachers, including 220 kindergarten tutors, 470 primary school teachers, 141 lower-secondary school teachers and 235 teachers from upper-secondary schools (general, vocational and technical ones) (Ogrodzka-Mazur, 2009, pp. 137-168)⁴. In 2012/2013, the studies were repeated in the same education institutions and they involved 988 people, including 188 kindergarten tutors, 425 primary school teachers, 150 lower-secondary school teachers and 225 teachers from upper-secondary schools (general, vocational and technical ones). Altogether, 2054 teachers working in kindergartens and schools in the Polish-Czech borderland took part in the studies and the data was collected with the help of a questionnaire survey, observation and document analysis.

In reference to the levels of the work of school and the teacher, outlined by Nikitorowicz in regard to the implementation of the tasks of intercultural education, the undertaken issues allow for answering the questions concerning:

- inheriting, consolidating and deepening indigenous values – (a) the occurrence and significance of elements associated with regional education in teaching the young at different educational levels, (b) the range of teaching contents aiming at familiarization with Cieszyn Silesia, (c) the applied methods, means and forms of transmission of regional contents in education, (d) the implemented and currently prepared regional education curricula;
- acquiring and shaping European integration and supra-local values on the basis of indigenous ones – (a) activity of school and cross-school European Clubs, (b) international exchange of teachers and youth within EU educational programmes, (c) education and training of teachers within Polish-Czech projects subsidized by the European Union – the European Regional

⁴ Some research with the application of the method of observation, questionnaire survey and document analysis was conducted by participants of seminar groups supervised by the author, as well as full- and part-time pedagogy students of the Faculty of Ethnology and Education (University of Silesia), who were interested in the investigated problems and who came from Cieszyn, Czech Cieszyn and the surroundings.

Development Fund, the Programme Interreg IIIA Czech Republic-Poland and the Microproject Fund in the Euroregion “Cieszyn Silesia”.

I. Inheriting, consolidating and deepening indigenous values is implemented by teachers through introducing regional contents to regular daily classes. Both in 2005/06 and in 2012/2013, the conducted observation allowed for confirming the application of contents associated with the “Little Homeland” in school topics, especially at the level of pre-school education and integrated education in lower classes of primary school. At this educational stage, teachers working with small children are interested in regular implementation of regional and intercultural education (Figures 1 and 2) and they engage parents and eminent representatives of local environments in this activity. In the opinion of these teachers, regional education allows for: (a) providing the child with a particular knowledge of the region by taking into account the geographical, social, cultural aspects and the broadly understood tradition, (b) extracting (in the process of education) various values occurring in one’s own region in the context of national and general human values, (c) preparing the learner for receiving, selecting and creating values by the acquisition of different types of information and experience, (d) developing the need for and skill of expressing an evaluative attitude to the surrounding reality and presenting various systems of values (cultures) and the consequences of applying them by man and society, (e) shaping the so-called pluralist identity (Bednarek, 1999; Królikowski, 2001), understood not as the attitude of separation, but as the basis for creating attitudes of openness and tolerance which are oriented at the pluralism of different human cultures and their understanding.

In comparison to the first research stage, tutors working both in urban and rural kindergartens and teachers in grades 1-3 currently declare more frequent use of authorial curricula and school programmes of moral education⁵, they also take part in different forms of training in intercultural and regional education more often.

Teachers working in secondary schools both in Poland and in the Czech Republic use regional contents in teaching the young within a still lesser range than in the comparable studies carried out in 2005/06. References to the idea of regionalism in their educational undertakings are declared mostly by teachers of Polish, history and geography. The teachers’ lack of readiness for such activities is

⁵ These are, e.g., the following programmes implemented in Cieszyn, Skoczów and Ustroń, and used within the interdisciplinary path “Regional education – cultural heritage in the region”: *Knowledge of the Cieszyn Silesia region; Ustroń – my town; My Little Homeland – Cieszyn Silesia; What is dear to my heart*. In Czech Cieszyn, owing to the activity of the Pedagogical Centre for Polish Minority Schools, teachers can use authorial textbooks and two journals “Jutrzenka” and “Ogniwo”, in which subjects associated with Cieszyn Silesia are presented.

Figure 1. Intensity of introducing regional contents to the teaching process by teachers – the 2005/06 school year (percentage data).

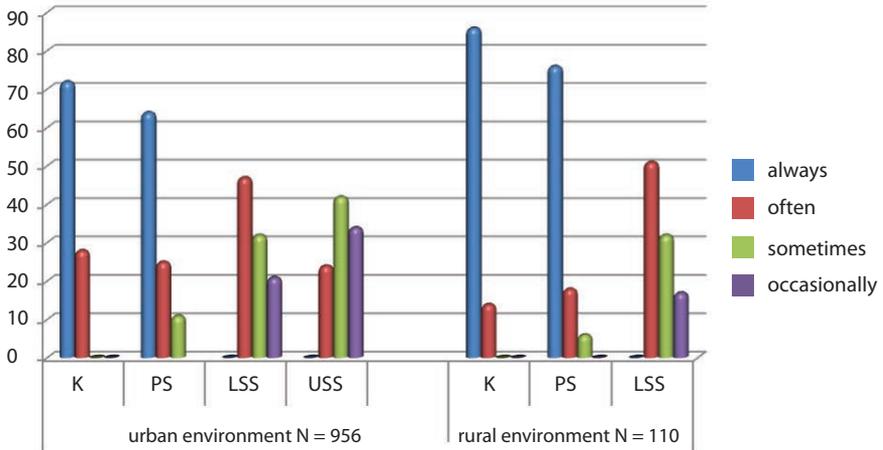
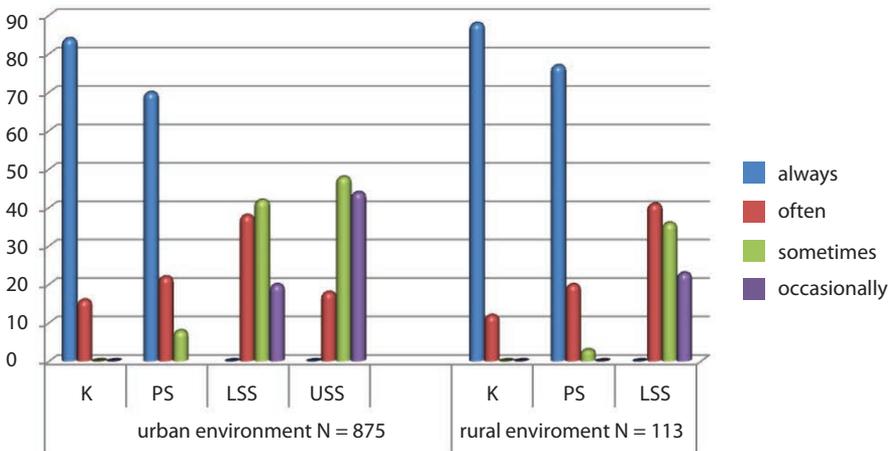


Figure 2. Intensity of introducing regional contents to the teaching process by teachers – the 2012/13 school year (percentage data)



K – kindergartens; PS – primary schools; LSS – lower-secondary schools; USS – upper-secondary schools; N – number of examined teachers

Source: self-reported study

invariably excused by the necessity to realize overburdened curricula at this stage of education and by the more important need to prepare learners for competence tests and secondary school leaving exams. What is most often indicated in the respondents' statements concerning the implementation of regional education is the organization of quizzes at the region and dialect competitions. They also mention document analysis, which comprises formal documents or written personal statements, and the analysis of source and literary texts. What also (apart from various publications) seems, to the respondents, an important source of knowledge of the region, particularly in reference to modern times and contemporary cultural life, is oral information passed by residents associated with the region because of their activity or life experience. In the opinion of the examined teachers, the specificity of the collected materials about the region strengthens learners' bonds with their environment and naturally shapes their feeling of pride and belonging to the regional community, as well as satisfaction from its achievements. This specificity also creates an appropriate climate for experiences, which enhances undertaking one's own activities for the local environment. The awareness of the need for regional education, presented in the teachers' declarations, translates into practical actions to a very small degree.

II. Acquiring and shaping European and supra-local integration values is implemented, according to all the examined teachers, at each stage of education. In kindergartens, tutors introduce the basics of the knowledge concerning the European Union (symbolism, terminology). Within regular classes, they also undertake activities which educate towards tolerance, openness, respect or sensitizing children to Otherness and towards strengthening their self-esteem, safety and self-acceptance.

What functions well in primary schools and lower- and upper- secondary schools are school or cross-school European clubs. They mainly aim at broadening learners' knowledge of Europe (in different aspects: geography, history, culture, economy), European institutions (their structure, goals, methods of acting), and the challenges facing contemporary Europe. An additional opportunity to familiarize (in a direct way) with European countries and their cultural specificity is offered by international youth exchange, implemented by schools within EU educational programmes. Exchange programmes with schools in England, Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Wales, Italy and Hungary are invariably the most popular. Owing to them, participants get acquainted with socio-cultural determinants of their foreign peers' life and, first of all, learn and improve their competence in foreign languages. Learners from Polish upper-secondary schools also actively participate in selected actions of the EU programme *Youth*.

The examined teachers (71%) present a positive attitude to the process of European integration. However, this standpoint is declared by fewer teachers than in the comparable studies in 2005/06 (82%). More respondents (19% contrasted with 13% in 2005/06) express a negative attitude and claim that the European Union has changed nothing and is unable to help either Poland or the Czech Republic. Yet, more respondents (10% contrasted with 5% in 2005/06) declare an indifferent attitude to this issue. As at stage I of the studies, while specifying notable benefits from the EU membership, the examined teachers most frequently indicate:

- possibility of benefiting from various EU programmes, including educational ones;
- possibility of learning foreign languages and studying in EU countries, acknowledging university diplomas;
- international exchange of teachers and learners from various types of schools within EU countries,
- establishing Euroregions, e. g. Cieszyn Silesia (Śląsk Cieszyński – Tesinské Slezsko);
- abolishing borders between Poland, the Czech Republic and the European Union, which contributes to increasing tourism in these countries, as well as to the increasing number of Poles and Czechs visiting tourist destinations in EU countries.

Teachers in Poland and the Czech Republic participate in many educational projects, co-financed by the European Union and organized by Departments of Education in the Cieszyn district, the Pedagogical Centre for Polish Minority Schools in Czech Cieszyn or the Congress of Poles in the Czech Republic. From the perspective of their own training and development, the examined teachers enjoy most the following projects:

- *Śląsk Cieszyński: historia i współczesność we wspólnej Europie /Cieszyn Silesia: history and modern times in the common Europe/*, implemented by Związek Komunalny Ziemi Cieszyńskiej /Municipal Association of the Cieszyn Area/ and Regionální Rada Rozvoje a Spolupráce /Regional Council for Development and Cooperation/ from Trinec, subsidized from EU resources. The new source texts resulting from the project and concerning the events associated with the history of Cieszyn Silesia are used in teaching history in both neighbouring countries;
- *Śląsk Cieszyński – mała ojczyzna w Europie /Cieszyn Silesia – a little homeland in Europe/*, implemented since 2003, currently its second edition is introduced. The project helps to work out some methodological materials for teachers, both in Polish and Czech;

- *Edukacja Interkulturowa On Line /Intercultural Education Online/*, implemented within the programme Socrates Comenius 2.1., aiming at preparing teachers and learners from Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany for dialogue and cooperation in shaping the Europe of many cultures, for teaching tolerance and respect for human rights. In this project, owing to the application of modern computer technologies, new pedagogical methods and the WebQuest method, teachers are offered possibilities of broadening their knowledge about partner regions (Kubiczek, 207, p. 161);
- *Dziedzictwo kulturowe jako klucz do tożsamości pogranicza polsko-czeskiego na Śląsku Cieszyńskim. W 1200-lecie Cieszyna /Cultural heritage as the key to the identity of the Polish-Czech borderland in Cieszyn Silesia – at the 1200th anniversary of Cieszyn/* – in October and November 2009 a cycle of workshops took place for secondary school youth from both sides of the border. This was dedicated to cultural differentiation, transmission of values in family and identity shaping. Polish and Czech youth participated in the workshops conducted by students and graduates of the University of Silesia – of the Faculty of Ethnology and Education in Cieszyn (Rusek, Pieńczak, Szczyrbowski, 2010);
- *Kolorowe ścieżki Euroregionu. Doskonalenie zawodowe nauczycieli w zakresie edukacji regionalnej i międzykulturowej /Colourful paths of Euroregion. Teacher training in regional and intercultural education/* – implemented in 2010/2011, aiming at kindergarten tutors and early school teachers and comprising 6 educational paths: historical path; path of tradition; path of tales, fables and legends; Cieszyn path; contemporary path; ecological path, and intercultural workshops “We learn together”⁶ (Gajdzica, Kubiczek, 2011).

The teachers’ awareness of the need for European education, which is clearly manifested in their responses, gives rise to the application of various forms of work with the young in this respect (school European clubs, international exchange, participation in EU educational programmes) and aims at triggering learners’ interest

⁶ The grant *Kolorowe ścieżki Euroregionu. Doskonalenie zawodowe nauczycieli w zakresie edukacji regionalnej i międzykulturowej /Colourful paths of Euroregion. Teacher training in regional and intercultural education/*, Registration number: CZ.3.22/2.3.00/09.01504, was implemented in 2010/2011 within the Operational Programme of Cross-border Cooperation Poland – the Czech Republic. The University of Silesia, Faculty of Ethnology and Education in Cieszyn, took part in the project as a partner of the Pedagogical Centre for Polish Minority Schools in Czech Cieszyn.

in European issues and developing their knowledge of the role of the region, Poland and the Czech Republic in the process of European integration.

Conclusion

The presented discussion on implementing intercultural education by teachers in various types of educational institutions in the Polish-Czech borderland allows for indicating characteristic tendencies in this respect. It also reflects current chances and barriers of education towards interculturalism in the conditions of a typical school.

- The contents associated with Cieszyn Silesia are taken into account by teachers in educating mostly pre-school and early school children, which enhances shaping their feeling of regional identity and broadens the knowledge of their own “little Homeland”.
- Teachers working in lower- and upper-secondary schools apply regional contents in teaching youth rather sporadically. Referring to the idea of regionalism is declared mainly by the teachers of Polish, history and geography. Therefore, it might seem that discontinuation of regional and intercultural education at these educational stages in most taught subjects substantially “weakens” the feeling of cultural identity of the young, who – owing to modern information technologies – are involved in national, European or global issues more frequently than in regional ones.
- Material, symbolic and societal culture of one’s own region is presented to learners in rural schools systematically and more frequently than to their urban peers, who in this way take lesser part in the building of “man-oriented” education, in contrast to global or “world-oriented” education, in which the social system becomes the superior category (regionalization of education) (Kossak-Główczewski, p. 118).
- Authorial courses aiming at popularization of the idea of regionalism and interculturalism are designed only by pre- and early school education. At higher education levels, teachers do not undertake such attempts, always excusing this with the necessity to implement over-burdened secondary school curricula. Therefore, what requires no further justification is the thesis on the need for orientation change in the ranking of tasks for contemporary school and on the necessity of substantial restructuring of teachers’ way of thinking. The effectiveness of education in acquiring competences for

the implementation of intercultural education depends on teachers' expert and methodological preparation at universities and their self-training.

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