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## **OTHERNESS, TOLERANCE, SOCIAL INTEGRATION – MULTICULTURALISM IN POLISH PRESCHOOLS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Abolition of borders within EU, high accessibility of the labour market, and thus migratory flows caused the inflow of foreigners to Poland. Although only 1% of the population of Poland declares to be of a different nationality, Poland becomes a multicultural country. The world has been multicultural since people started travelling, taking their ideas, inventions and discoveries with them.

How is “multiculturalism” understood? It is a complex notion. A. Sadowski says that multiculturalism is “a theoretical concept, a specified theoretical category (conception), also an idea, an ideology, a tool used to examine transformations of culturally diverse societies (...) it is closely related to the society”<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, P. Sztompka says that “multiculturalism needs to be considered in two respects. The first presentation describes it as plurality and variety of cultures in both historical and contemporarily co-existential dimensions”<sup>2</sup>. “The second approach is understood as an ideological stance emphasizing the right of societies to different lifestyles, and even promoting a thesis about full distinctness of all cultures”<sup>3</sup>. According to J. Nikitorowicz, contemporary multiculturalism is multifactorial and multirange. It can be described in a territorial way, in the context of settlement, or in a processual way, in the perspective of revealing distinction, restoration of ethnic and national movements, creation of new, independent countries, and in the context of migration

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<sup>1</sup> A. Sadowski, *Socjologia wielokulturowości jako nowa subdyscyplina socjologiczna*, „Pogranicze, studia społeczne” 2011, vol. 18, p. 18–19.

<sup>2</sup> P. Sztompka, *Socjologia*, Znak Publishing House, Cracow 2005, p. 146.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 146.

and ongoing democratization processes”<sup>4</sup>. Multiculturalism creates the need of greater openness, tolerance, understanding of tradition, customs, appearance, and lifestyle. Going abroad, we expect acceptance from the natives; similarly, foreigners coming to our country expect our respect and acceptance. It is especially important if our foreign neighbours’ children attend, for example, the same preschool or school as our offspring. Children are open to the world and that is why it is so important that adults provide them with positive behaviour models. “Tolerance” is a concept inseparable from multiculturalism. According to M. Czyżewski, “the meaning of the word tolerance comes from Latin *tolerare* – to endure, to bear, to stand”<sup>5</sup>. Most of all, tolerance means acceptance of other people freedom, thoughts, lifestyle, ideas and opinions. It is an attitude which we adapt in various social and cultural situations, and also an attitude combining linguistic and non-linguistic values of different cultures<sup>6</sup>. Tolerance means treating other people the way we would like to be treated. Tolerance and respect are the fundamental values of the UN. The concept of tolerance is also included in the Preamble of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights starts with the statement that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” The content of the United Nations Millennium Declaration confirms that tolerance, freedom and equality are the fundamental values essential in international cooperation. In 1995, during 28<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference of UNESCO, the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance was proclaimed. It was caused by growing intolerance, violence, nationalism, racism, and antisemitism, which are accompanied by marginalization and discrimination of minorities. The promotion of tolerance and respect is essential in creating favourable conditions for accepting cultural diversity.

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<sup>4</sup> J. Nikitorowicz, *Tożsamość międzykulturowa jako efekt edukacji w społeczeństwie wielokulturowym*, „Europejczycy” 2001, no 1, p. 63–73.

<sup>5</sup> M. Czyżewski, *Tolerancja i nietolerancja: pojęcia i postulaty*, „Etyka” 2011, vol. 44, p. 62.

<sup>6</sup> K. Stefanowicz-Zawiszewska, B. Panagiotopoulou, *Wielokulturowość w “polskiej” szkole w Grecji (na przykładzie Zespołu Szkół im. Zygmunta Mineyki przy Ambasadzie RP w Atenach*, [in:] H. Czakowska, M. Kuciński (Ed.), *Idea wielokulturowości jako wyzwanie*. Dyskurs religijny, kulturowy i społeczny, KPSW Publishing House, Bydgoszcz 2015, p. 222.

Article 1 of the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance reads: "Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty, it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace"<sup>7</sup>.

Another word related to the concept of multiculturalism in "otherness." Dictionaries define "otherness" as "difference", "dissimilarity", "distinction". Nevertheless, it is not about every type of distinction and diversity. "We will find many differences between an apple and a tennis ball (although there are also similarities) and yet we will not name these differences as otherness. This word is reserved only for describing objects of the same group. Most of the dictionaries do not indicate this difference and explain the meaning of the word "other" (like in the biggest Polish dictionary by W. Doroszewski) by listing the meanings: "not this, (...) not the same, second, other, another, unlike the other, different, contrary, changed, new." But the new dictionary by Mieczysław Szymczak, apart from the identical adjectives describing "other", also gives the definition of "otherness": "having features distinguishing it from a set of the same type"<sup>8</sup>. Otherness is therefore a broad concept relating to various aspects of life. It may refer to an individual or to a social group which is somehow different from the general or accepted canons. Otherness can be motivated in various ways; therefore, its motives may also be different. It is often related to intolerance. The appearance, views or behaviours of certain people may determine otherness or distinction. Otherness can be a manifestation of individualism, a conviction of own superiority or excessive aspirations. Moreover, it can be an expression of ideological rebellion, negation of the conventional system and good manners. A concept that is also associated with "multiculturalism" is "integration", especially "social integration". Social integration is the inclusion of various social groups that are not specified in the aspect of categorization into larger communities. This integration allows representatives of the groups whose members are often refugees,

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.unic.un.org.pl/dyskryminacja/tolerancja-poszanowanie.php>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.khg.uni.wroc.pl/files/bednarekt.pdf>

emigrants or representatives of the national minority to gain access to rights, goods that previously were beyond their reach. It is a complex process requiring the co-operation of more than one community in which cultural, social and economic differences exist. They both must also accept certain terms of the agreement, which often creates obstacles that are difficult to imagine. The process of social integration relies on friendly behaviour, based on the conducted discourse and the participation of units identified at the same level. Social integration is the transformation of freely operating communities into one larger community.

### MULTICULTURALISM IN POLISH PRESCHOOLS

The presented concepts indicate the need for children to learn integration, tolerance and acceptance for any kind of dissimilarity – racial, physical or intellectual from an early age. These values are the basis of the modern world. The preschool age is considered the most important because it is the time when identity awareness is formulated in the child. For a small child, being different is something natural. The child thinks that even if someone is different, it does not mean that they are worse. A child who meets various disabilities or children of other cultures from an early age, perceives such situations as something natural. At the later age the concept of tolerance and acceptance is already deeply rooted in such person. Preschoolers are very eager to learn about other cultures, watch films about children from other countries, listen to stories about remote lands and their inhabitants. Activities like these prevent children from being prejudiced while perceiving others. Therefore, it is important to introduce children into the multicultural world. The easiest way to learn about the world are pictures, books and films on which children from other, remote countries, with a different skin colour, living in different homes, dressed in different clothes are presented; but although they look different, they do not really differ from us. They laugh and play the same way we do, they have brothers and sisters, sometimes they cry, and when they are happy- they jump in joy. From conversations with adults, children learn that there are good and bad people in the world, but they can be met anywhere in the world. The value of a person is not determined by race, nationality, language, gender or appearance. The place where individualism is respected, differences are eliminated, is a properly organized preschool group. In such a group,

the child feels good and, above all, safe, recognized and respected. Each child with a different cultural background brings a significant value to the preschool community. "Cultural matters in preschool should be used as often as possible. They can be related to the following areas of life:

- who are we;
- what we believe in;
- what we eat;
- our traditions and holidays;
- our perspective;
- our way of learning"<sup>9</sup>.

"Another good idea for raising understanding of other cultures is the organization of festivals, during which children learn traditional songs, dress up in characteristic clothes and taste the cuisines typical for different cultures. This method enables pre-school teachers to acquaint their pupils with new holiday traditions in an active way"<sup>10</sup>.

Children can be acquainted with multiculturalism by means of excursions to places where the representatives of other cultures can be met. Trips abroad create the possibility to meet native inhabitants and often are an opportunity for children to interact with their foreign peers. The lack of common language is not an obstacle for children of different nationalities to play together. Currently, in Polish kindergartens, pupils of foreign nationality are not uncommon, especially in big cities. Therefore, the earliest possible interaction with children from other countries makes it easier for a child to adapt to the group.

Playing with children at home also allows us to provide various information about games in other countries, e.g. by using a video from the Internet, showing children in foreign preschools. We encourage children to try to imitate their peers, to dance their traditional dance, and at the end- to tell or draw an imaginary adventure that they could experience with a "new" friend from another country.

Very interesting educational and didactic activities aimed at teaching tolerance are tasks undertaken on the occasion of the International Chil-

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<sup>9</sup> J.H. Bodley, *Cultural Anthropology. Tribes, States, and the Global System*, MountainView, Calif. 1994.

<sup>10</sup> A. Klim-Klimaszewska, E. Jagiełło, *Znaczenie wychowania przedszkolnego dla edukacji wielokulturowej*, [www.project.omep.org.pl](http://www.project.omep.org.pl)

dren's Day. Human rights issues and their observance are discussed, as well as there are discussions about various environments and differences between people. At the beginning of each school year, the children together with the teacher create codes of proper behaviour towards their school-mates and then follow them throughout a year. Any improper behaviour or manifestations of discrimination are analysed with the whole group. In order for the activities carried out in the kindergarten to be effective, it is necessary to have the support of parents.

“Some advice for parents:

- even if we do not have foreigners in our immediate neighbourhood, it is necessary to talk to our children about other cultures, countries and nations,
- focus more on what we have in common than on what makes us different,
- teach our children to respect and tolerate every person, regardless their origin, appearance and social status,
- in a situation of conflict, focus on solving a specific problem, not on the nationality of a person involved in the conflict,
- if we want to be treated with openness, kindness and respect, treat others in the same way,
- remember that people can only be divided into the good and the bad”<sup>11</sup>.

An interesting approach to teaching tolerance and acceptance of “others” is presented by the preschool network *Tuptusie*, operating in the area of the Tricity: Gdańsk, Gdynia, Juskowo, Puszcza Gdański, Rumia, Sopot and Wejherowo. These preschools are organised into groups of 10 to 25 children, aged 3 to 6. Together with healthy children there are some pupils with diagnosed disabilities. These preschools also accept children of foreign nationalities. The main purpose of these kindergartens is to stimulate the development of both able and disabled children as well as to teach them social sensitivity and how to overcome their fears. Employees of these institutions try to show children how many meanings integration has, that it is not only the tolerance, but also recognition for someone else's work, tastes and emotions. Pupils also know how diverse and rich the surround-

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<sup>11</sup> [https://czasdzieci.pl/domowa-akademia/rodzice-artykuly/id,980-inny\\_ale\\_taki.html](https://czasdzieci.pl/domowa-akademia/rodzice-artykuly/id,980-inny_ale_taki.html)

ing reality is. The headmaster of the preschool chain says, “The quality of working with children has been very important for us since the beginning. We were trying to create an alternative to large kindergartens. We focus on providing education in small groups, diversity of educational and social experiences and involving parents in the process of education. The idea of integration was born in the meantime. We noticed that our idea for the kindergarten, on one hand, proved to be effective in preparing children for further education and on the other hand, it allows disabled pupils to function effortlessly among their peers – often to the extent that a casual observer may even not notice the disability”<sup>12</sup>. Integrated preschools make their pupils sensitive to the most important values of the contemporary world. It is achieved by special educational projects, for example, there is “Reading for lunch” in Gdynia – workshops for children and their parents but also other inhabitants of Gdynia (both children and adults) that aim at reading books together, watching pictures and playing games related to theatre, plastic art and music. In Spot, there are “Breakfasts from the four corners of the earth” – owners or chefs from restaurants with national cuisine are invited to the preschool and cook and talk about breakfast that is usually prepared for children in their country. Integrated preschools *Tuptusie* also cooperate with preschools from other countries, thus create a network of partner kindergartens. Children send their peers illustrations presenting their preschool, their childhood, Poland. Such contacts facilitate exchange of experience, smooth the progress of learning about the foreign culture and show how children in other countries live, learn and play. All institutions participate in the “PorcuPine”, the aim of which is to help animals and learn about the necessity of taking care of the environment. Children in these preschools learn while playing, which allows them to develop skills like independence, ability to cooperate and work in a group, learning and observing social norms and rules, openness to new things, activeness and willingness to cooperate.

“Educational multicultural projects can be presented in various forms, for example:

- providing information about selected cultures and cultural diversity in the local community, in your country, in the world,

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<sup>12</sup> <http://trojmiasto.wyborcza.pl/trojmiasto/1,35612,19073319,tolerancji-dla-innych-trzeba-uczyc-od-przedszkola.html>

- emphasizing elements that are similar, common and universal for various national and cultural groups – especially for “the own” and “the foreign” groups,
- showing common, i.e. accepted by the majority, values,
- organizing meetings and entering into cooperation with members of different social, national and cultural groups.

The goal of such activities should be to limit the anxiety and fear of alienation as well as to create the atmosphere of closeness and to facilitate contact between people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds”<sup>13</sup>.

### CONCLUSIONS

Preschool is a good place to practice multicultural education. This is a place where children spend the biggest part of the day, they perceive the teacher as a role model, often more important than parents, and thus the information provided by the teacher are happily acquired and the taught models are eagerly implemented. The peer group acts in a similar way, thanks to which the identity of the individual is shaped and the child has a possibility to develop.

Multicultural education should be an integral part of education in general. Cognition and verbal interactions within various cultures carry an undeniable personality-forming value, shape the spirit of tolerance, acceptance of others and themselves, silence aggression and destruction<sup>14</sup>.

“To develop personality towards tolerance it is necessary to:

1. Find time to play and talk together every day.
2. Try not to dominate, allow children to make various, even painful, mistakes – this is the only way they can develop.
3. Not to give unclear or contradictory instructions.
4. Consistently exercise requirements adjusted to the age of the child – not too big in the early childhood, not too small when the child is older but always made in a way of mutual agreement and ne-

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<sup>13</sup> B. Weigl, *Dylematy edukacji wielokulturowej dziecka przedszkolnego*, [in:] *Afryka dla najmłodszych – materiały dla nauczycieli*, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> J. Górniewicz, *Idea tolerancji w edukacji międzykulturowej: (na przykładzie międzynarodowego Centrum Edukacyjnego Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego w Olsztynie)*, „*Wychowanie na co dzień*” 2003, no. 1–2, p. 16–18.



gotiation; the requirements should never be imposed on children because their resistance and lack of responsibility in such situation will be fully understandable.

5. Award more often and with greater effort than punish.
6. Respect each other, do not underestimate, do not ridicule and do not hurt children's self-esteem in any other way.
7. Do not grumble too often and for too long – children stop listening to what is boring. Nagging and complaining is ineffective.
8. Give children time for thinking when you want them to express their opinion.
9. Do not create the impression that the world is falling apart when some rules are broken – everything can be discussed.
10. Give children the same right to make mistakes like adults have.
11. Do not pretend to be perfect and infallible. Admit your own mistakes.
12. Learn to tell the children that you are sorry.
13. Do not blow off children's questions.
14. Avoid negative judgement like "you are bad", "you are silly" – bad or stupid can only be a deed, not a child.
15. Be children's friend, not an enemy.
16. Do not pretend to like and love children but really like and love them."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> K. Kamińska, *Zjawisko wielokulturowości w wychowaniu przedszkolnym*, „Wychowanie w przedszkolu” 2002 no. 5, p. 259–266.

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## SUMMARY

The world is multicultural, and this has been happening from the moment when people started travelling, taking their ideas, inventions and discoveries with them. Multiculturalism creates the need of greater openness, tolerance, understanding of tradition, customs, appearance, and lifestyle. Most of all, tolerance means acceptance of other people freedom, thoughts, lifestyle, ideas and opinions. Another word related to the concept of multiculturalism is “otherness.” It may refer to an individual or to a social group which is somehow different from the general or accepted canons. The next concept related to multiculturalism is social integration. The process of social integration relies on friendly behaviour, based on the conducted discourse and the participation of units identified at the same level. Social integration is the transformation of freely operating communities into one larger community. Presented concepts indicate the necessity for children to learn about integration, tolerance and acceptance for any type of otherness – racial, physical or intellectual. Preschool is a good place to practice multicultural education.

**Key words:** multiculturalism, tolerance, otherness, social integration, integrated preschool.