

MIĘDZY INNYMI – AMONG OTHERS

Elżbieta Kielak, Michael Kimmig, Anna Szlęk, 2013

A joint initiative between the Polish National Agency of the Youth in Action Programme and the German-Polish Youth Office for qualifying as International Youth Work multipliers and for developing awareness and competence for intercultural encounters.

Między Innymi. The idea

The world nowadays is filled with diversity, mobility and constant change. Intercultural competence proves vital in various contexts - travelling, migration, exchange programs for younger and older people (studying and volunteering abroad), or working in an intercultural environment.

But how can we define intercultural competence? In our team we understand intercultural competence as a combination of knowledge about intercultural similarities and differences and how it influences people's behaviour and actions. This includes the ability to build positive intercultural relations and the ability to communicate and interact effectively and appropriately. Essential for this is an attitude of tolerance for ambiguity, cognitive curiosity and willingness to learn and change one's perspective. All competences mentioned here are becoming indispensable the world that we live in now.

In Poland we observe a great need to raise awareness and train skills for intercultural and multicultural encounters. To realise this we wanted to start with a group of future teachers, youth workers or cultural animators who will have a great impact on youth in the future and we thought that their studies were the right moment to implement this. In that way, incorporating non-formal learning into a formal academic education system became also a very important aspect of our project.

Między Innymi. The project

Our project started in 2010 as a joint initiative between the Polish National Agency of the Youth in Action Programme (<http://www.mlodziej.org.pl/>) and the German-Polish Youth Office (<http://pnwm.org/>). The idea for this stemmed from the need which both institutions recognized to start qualifying multipliers for International Youth Work and developing awareness and competence for intercultural encounters at a different angle. That's how Między Innymi („Among others“, <http://www.miedzyinnymi.org.pl/>) was born.

The main focus of Między Innymi is to provide future teachers and youth workers with basic knowledge and skills of Intercultural Education and Non-Formal Education. For this we developed a programme for students of pedagogy - i.e. future teachers or social workers. This programme consists of five modules (Introduction to Intercultural Education, Intercultural Communication, Stereotypes, Intercultural Project Management and Intercultural Competences), as well as an introduction to non-formal learning and a presentation of programmes and activities of both organisations.

We cooperate with various educational institutions and universities. Every year we are able to cooperate with 5 to 7 different institutions. To realise our programme we have a group of eight trainers, supported by the Polish National Agency of the Youth in Action Programme and the German-Polish Youth Office. Both institutions also finance the overall costs of this programme.

Między Innymi. Our experience

The first workshops took place in October 2011. Since then we have cooperated with 12 Higher Education Institutions in Poland, e.g. Warsaw University, Łódź University, University of Social Sciences and Humanities. Whereas in the first years we focused more on bigger cities, we are now spreading our activities over the whole country. We have already worked in Warsaw, Łódź, Poznań, Szczecin, Poznań, Biała Podlaska and Włocławek.

Since 2011 almost 300 students have taken part in our workshops. Every workshop is evaluated by participants and the feedback is very positive. We get reassurance especially regarding two following aspects:

The importance of intercultural competence

Participants of our workshops stressed the importance of intercultural competence for themselves and for their future work as a teacher or youth worker.

"I noticed how important it is to make contact with other people and to get to know their culture, and not only rely on what I already know."

"I learned that there might be different perspectives in interpreting other people's behaviour."

"Intercultural communication is not only between two cultures, but begins between two persons."

Classes on this topic are seldom offered at universities and for some students it was their first time having classes on such topics. Although Intercultural Education is becoming more and more popular, this has not been reflected in the curriculum of teacher and youth worker education. Knowledge about other cultures as well as the ability to establish intercultural relations and communicate effectively really needs to be present in the Polish education system.

Non-formal Education within Formal Education

Our engagement at the Universities clearly revealed that approaches to learning and education applied in Polish Higher Education Institutions do not embrace non-formal learning activities at all. Most of the classes are based on lectures or other ex cathedra methods. Only few classes introduce experiential and non-formal learning activities that actively involve students.

"I opened myself and started to talk and share my experiences during the workshop."

"I thought about myself and my attitudes; I knew before that every person is different and therefore should be seen differently, but the workshop increased my awareness."

"I take with me practical exercises that I can use in the future as a teacher."

Again it seems that offering our workshop met the need for a broader variety of pedagogical approaches and methods, especially when it comes to future teachers and youth workers who are going to work with young people.

Między Innymi. Some ideas and plans for the future

We would definitely like to continue the project and organize workshops at different Polish universities and other institutions of higher education. One of the main conclusions from the last evaluation meeting was that it is worth spreading the idea and our activities in smaller cities and towns of the country. While for the bigger universities our workshops may be just one part of many that are available, for smaller academic centres we may provide a very fresh attitude when it comes to both intercultural education and our methodology. It gives us a chance not only to provide knowledge and skills regarding intercultural education but also to promote non formal education by showing it can function well and effectively within the frame of formal structure.

Another idea for the future is to use the Internet as an educational tool. As e-learning and blended learning become more and more popular and present in Polish educational institutions, we are considering the possibility to create an Internet platform. It could serve as a means of communication and exchanging experiences between students, but also as a library where they could find various materials and articles devoted to different aspects of intercultural education. Finally, we could organize an online learning module which could be a great addition to traditional workshops.

Our project and its effects provoked a great interest and appreciation of German staff of the German-Polish Youth Office. They are considering the possibility of organising similar workshops at German universities, which would give the project an international dimension.

Contact

Email: miedzyinnymi@frse.org.pl

Web: www.miedzyinnymi.org.pl

Source: SALTO YOUTH (2013): Reinforcing links. Experiences of cooperation between the formal and non formal sector in training youth workers; SALTO-YOUTH Training and Cooperation Resource Centre, Bonn, pp.22-26 [PDF Download](#)