Joanna Kapica-Curzytek
The University of Zielona Gora

Education and migration – European experiences and dilemmas towards integration

Abstract: Poland is about to face social changes caused by a huge number of refugees and immigrants heading towards Europe. Not all of them come from societies whose culture is close to ours. The crisis of the peaceful idea of coexistence of cultures (*Multikulti*) inspires us to analyse the European experience in the process of building integrated society and to draw conclusions. In this way, we can avoid repeating some mistakes of other countries. In this situation, education must be a strong foundation of State policy.

The migration crisis in Europe, which accelerated after 2015, has grown to unprecedented dimension. Its causes – mainly of economic and political nature – are complex and multiple. It is yet impossible to identify and predict all the consequences of the process. However, one thing is certain, namely that the flow of immigrants to Europe has caused a number of fundamental changes in almost all areas of life. These include – and will include – changes in the educational systems of European countries that will have to be adapted to new challenges.

Also the educational system in Poland will have to confront the new social reality in Europe. However, it is still generally believed that Poland is as yet not affected by the migration crisis, and the problems associated with it do not apply to our country. The number of students of different nationalities attending Polish schools does not seem high compared to Western Europe. Apart from ethnic

minority students in borderland regions, students of non-Polish origin in schools across the country are still quite few.

However, it should be noted that Poland is, for many reasons, gradually becoming an attractive place for immigrants from different countries and cultural circles – even if our country is still more of a stopover on the road towards Western Europe. The number of international students in Poland is growing at a faster rate than is generally believed. The Polish school is about to become multicultural, in the full meaning of the word, and then, it will be confronted with the same problems as other States that receive high numbers of immigrants. Given the scale of immigration to Europe – it will be one of the major challenges for the Polish educational system after 1945. All the stakeholders of education will have to deal with it: teachers, educators, therapists, advisors.

In 2008, it was noted that Polish teachers were generally left to themselves to deal with the presence of foreign students in schools. They had to rely on their own intuition, sometimes supported by experiences from other areas of education and their own interpersonal skills. There were no tools or procedures to help schools cope with the new challenge in Polish education (Stelmach, 2008: 82).

In 2014, the Ministry of Education published on its website "Information on the education of foreigners in the Polish educational system". It contains legal framework, instructions and basic information relevant to the education of foreigners in schools as well as suggested materials that teachers may use in teaching Polish language to foreigners[1].

The 2010 research report "Foreigners' children in Polish educational institutions – school perspective" shows "growing cultural differentiation among students" – which means arrival of students with migration background. The report says that identification of the phenomenon affects the resulting, multiple problems of schools and a growing sense of helplessness and incompetence in teachers. At the same time, it is reported that awareness of the needs associated with adapting Polish schools and acquiring competencies to more effectively work with students with "migration background" is also growing (Błeszyński, 2010: 9).

Thus, it is being acknowledged that the presence of foreign students in schools is a complex phenomenon and requires a completely different approach than working with students who speak Polish. Language problems of foreign children are but a tip of the iceberg. Teachers and the Polish educational system are confronted with an unprecedented scale of complex and multiple problems, resulting from

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[1] *Informacja o kształceniu cudzoziemców w polskim systemie oświaty*, Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, https://men.gov.pl/wspolpraca-miedzynarodowa/ksztalcenie-cudzoziemcow/informacja-o-ksztalceniu-cudzoziemcow-w-polskim-systemie-oswiaty.html (accessed on: 1. 06. 2016).

cultural, religious and racial differences that until now were almost non-existent in Poland. Moreover, since the presence of foreign children in Polish schools is poorly rooted in Polish educational relations, we should rely on the experiences of other countries with many years of experience in having foreign students in their schools.

In recent years, the perception of integration itself as well as the idea of multiculturalism has been changing in those states. Heinz Buschkowsky, former mayor of the Berlin district of Neukölln, says that the idea of *Multiculti*, backed by wrongly understood political correctness, the idea of peaceful coexistence of cultures and their symbiosis – supposedly leading to hybrid (intertwined) forms of culture – failed to work in Western Europe (Buschkowsky, 2013: 71). Similar is the opinion of the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who says that "the attempts to create a multicultural society in Germany definitely failed"[2]. Irrelevance of the idea of multiculturalism, which is "losing its credibility", is also mentioned by A. Szahaj (2010: 66). "Multiculturalism should not be about tolerating the intolerance of another culture" says Ayaan Hirsi Ali (2016: 37), an immigrant from Somalia, intellectual and expert on the reality of Islamic religions.

Integration should be understood as a long-term process, covering more than just one generation – the more so that not all immigrants in Europe come from culturally similar societies. The integration of newcomers depends to a large extent on the condition of education – the quality of the educational system and openness to the problems of international students. Thus, the educational system should be the first and most important pillar of integration. Its inefficiency has serious consequences, not only social but also economic. Heinz Buschkowsky notes that "nothing is more expensive than an individual not integrated with the society" (Buschkowsky, 2013: 99)[3]. Thus, expenditures on education must not be regarded as useless "cost generation", but rather as necessary and undisputable investment in the quality of social life in a State and its social cohesion.

In Sweden, every third Swede with "migration background" does not graduate from secondary school, compared to one in five native Swedes dropping out of school at this stage (Traub, 2016: 12). In 2011, only 22% of immigrant children in Germany passed secondary school graduation examinations, compared to 42% of children of native Germans (Buschkowsky, 2013: 45). These numbers will undoubtedly change, given the growing population of refugees in Germany, by 126% in 2015 compared to 2014 (Bloed and Masur, 2015: 37). However, behind those

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[2] R. Wróbel, *Imigranci się nie asymilują – mówi kanclerz Merkel*, http://www.rp.pl/artykul/550482-Imigranci-sie-nie-asymiluja---mowi-kanclerz-Merkel.html (accessed on: 7.06. 2016).

[3] quotation translated to Polish by the author of the article.

numbers and statistics stand complex problems that the parents and caretakers of foreign children encounter. Most often, they concern their social and economic status, their attitudes, past experiences, views of life and concepts of professional career. These are the problems that the educational system of the host country must tackle with.

Developing an educational model for newcomers is particularly difficult. Undoubtedly, the major reason for difficulties in integration is educational gap. Those who arrive in a new country usually lack thorough education in the target language, and upon arrival – do not assimilate any elements of the culture or social norms of the new country (cf. Kelek, 2015: 94). Although children and youth go to schools, the gap is rarely bridged for adults. They remain for good in a situation of exclusion and have problems with finding employment, with social mobility and with establishing relations with anyone from outside their own community.

As a result, parallel societies develop (*Parallelgesellschaften*), also called "ethnic colonies" or "asymmetrical societies" (Buschkowsky, 2013: 62-63). These are separate, hermetic worlds and day by day, they isolate themselves more from the majority of the society; they show no signs of interpenetration, no attempts to start a dialogue or step outside the cultural borders. On the other hand, a network of internal links is built in order to be able to stay among one's kind, observe one's own cultural and religious standards, protect children from "harmful influence" – the European lifestyle and social principles. This phenomenon is called cocooning (Hirsi Ali, 2016: 26).

In a parallel society, all energy is spent on maintaining isolation, integrating only internally and building close links with other people from the same ethnic and religious group (Buschkowsky, 2013: 110). Its members are "citizens of the Western countries, where they live, but their hearts and minds are in another place" (Hirsi Ali, 2015: 15). In extreme cases, isolation is so strong that some districts of European cities seem to be beyond State control: for example Molenbeek in Brussels or Saint-Denis in the suburbs of Paris.

Unfortunately, parallel societies also intensify another undesirable phenomenon that European public schools find it hard to cope with, namely gender discrimination. In many families with "migration background", boys and girls are brought up differently. This is mainly associated with a different attitude to education. Educational chances and perspectives are strongly limited for girls, or even they are entirely deprived of any – due to the traditional perception of a woman's role in the family. Since parents intend to have their daughter married when she turns 16, what is the point of investing in education and what is the point of her taking the examinations or planning to go to university? Girls are

brought up in an – incredible from the perspective of the European civilisation – submissiveness and obedience, and they cannot be independent or self-reliant. Constantly subjected to the strongly hierarchical family and controlled by older men – they are practically their property (Kelek 2015: 25-26), in the exact meaning of the word.

Any attempts made by teachers to break the model and compensate the severe lack of educational aspirations are strongly resisted by parents: "My daughter is to become a good wife and mother, so why would she need a school?". The democratic values, openness and liberalism – fundamental for the European school and educational system, are contrary to the anti-democratic, archaic structures of the families of many students. It is a civilisational conflict, because parents who come from "parallel societies" and have a drastically low cultural capital do not prepare their children for modern education in a modern State (Hirsi Ali, 2015: 244). "The rational, secular and individualistic values of modernity have a destructive impact on traditional societies, especially those that are hierarchically based on gender and age relations and hereditary succession of positions" observes A. Hirsi Ali (2016: 25).

For girls from "parallel societies", it is unthinkable to think independently and plan their own future, not to mention professional career. In those families, everything is done to discourage them from it (Buschkowsky, 2013: 111). Consequently, because of lack of female education, the educational gap becomes stronger and low sociocultural status is maintained, which is to a large extent the main reason for the reinforcement of "parallel society" structures. Uneducated mothers are not able to prepare their own children to be successful members of modern Western societies (Hirsi Ali, 2015: 19).

The costs are huge: crime rates, social welfare, social benefits, etc. According to a German research, only every third immigrant child manages to move to a higher sociocultural status than that of their parents (Bloed and Masur, 2015: 42). The problem is acknowledged by the Dutch government, whose policy of increased efforts towards integration covers – apart from mandatory civic courses (language and knowledge about the society) – promoting emancipation of female immigrants (Buschkowsky: 2013: 162).

Schools – as the foundation and strongest pillar of the process of integration – should set positive examples and give hope for a better future to students, especially girls, with a background of "educational poverty". Certainly, it is not an easy task for educators. A teacher from Denmark I know says that Dutch teachers who work in schools with international students must focus on a number of things, not only teaching itself. Because of that, many Dutch parents remove their children

from schools with too many foreigners, because the level of education in those schools deteriorates significantly.

In the school where my acquaintance works, international students have additional language and culture lessons in grades from I to IV. Also, teacher education studies include a course in "Dutch language for children from different cultural circles", so educators who work in schools are aware of the problems that may arise in such situations. However, a major obstacle is the fact that foreign language families do not speak Dutch at home and children do not know basic vocabulary, even if they were born in Denmark. "There is a girl in our class (...) who has problems not only learning Dutch grammar but is also unhappy, because she cannot play with classmates after school. Those children are as if 'trapped' between two cultures", observes the Dutch teacher[4].

Recently, it has been often raised that a particular challenge to European education may be the second generation of migrants. The mechanism is the following: "first generation" immigrants, when they come to a new country, are usually busy working and ensuring dignified living conditions for their families. They do not seem to be a threat to the internal security of the countries where they live. On the other hand, the "second generation", as has already been mentioned, may experience various forms of rejection in school, like the case described in the above letter. Young people are much more sensitive to discrimination and mental discomfort associated with low self-esteem and self-evaluation. At the same time, they have much more time than their parents to think about what to do with their lives – e.g. look for their "true" identity, or return to their "root" culture, deserted by their families (Strachota and Pięciak, 2015: 42). This is perhaps the major challenge for the European educational system: to integrate in order to prevent radicalisation, to win the battle for the "control of souls" and to better educate people – not so much "uprooted" from their own culture but respecting and understanding the social norms of their country of residence. A. Hirsi Ali emphasises the particularly pending need for civic education (Hirsi Ali, 2015: 274, see also: 277).

According to H. Buschkowsky: "without the school and through education, social barriers will not be removed. This fact has been known to us for 150 years" (Buschkowsky, 2013: 258). Aziz Al Azmeh is a fierce advocate of integration-oriented education: "If we allow enclosed communities to maintain the primacy of blood bonds over citizenship, a disaster will only be a matter of time" (Al.-Azmeh and Rosiak, 2015: 15). Also A. Hirsi Ali emphasises the importance of public edu-

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[4] Lene Juel R., private letter to the author of the article, June 2009.

cation in the process of overcoming "tribal" attitudes of isolation and self-exclusion (Hirsi Ali, 2015: 22).

A very interesting example of the "removal of barriers" is the Rütli campus in the Berlin district of Neukölln. In 2006, teachers from that school wrote an open letter to the educational authorities, asking them to close the school, because they could no longer cope with the high level of violence and aggression among students. At that time, 87% of students were non-German nationals[5]. However, the decision was to provide more financing for and develop the school, rather than close it. Three years later, it transformed into multidimensional social space. It now consists of post-primary school, nursery school, preschool, free time centre, youth club, job counseling office, healthcare facility, music and folk school (extra classes) and playground. The project costs 35 million euro and is to be completed by 2016 (Buschkowsky 2013: 328). The school is still attended by almost 90% of immigrant children, and some of them come from families with criminal record (Buschkowsky, 2016: 274).

The Rütli campus, which used to be a "problematic" school – is now an exemplary institution, which serves as a proof that investing in education is vital. It shows that expenditure on education should never be treated as "necessary evil", but that it is an important aspect of improving the quality of social life. The educational space that houses 20,000 people is also an attempt to reconstruct and reformulate the Neukölln district. It used to be an area equally enclosed and dangerous as Molenbeek in Brussels or Saint-Denis, but it has turned into an optimistic symbol of integration through education that the whole Europe looks at. This part of Berlin is now even considered to be a fashionable artistic district. This example shows that "inability" is not an excuse and that attempts to remove barriers in integration are not destined to fail. It is necessary to be proactive in every situation, always looking for new ways to reach the goal, solve problems, overcome obstacles. Education is an "exit ticket" from the ghetto of a parallel society (cf. Tyszecka, 2016: 112).

Another similar example is the integration project for children from refugee families through sport, which has recently been actively developed in Germany[6]. The project seems invaluable. Participation in a sport programme – in an atmosphere of shared fun – activates young people, develops their social competencies and gives them a sense of goal and a sense of agency. Importantly, language skills develop through this project, too; children and youth learn language much better

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[5] Rütli School, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C3%BCtli_School (accessed on: 7.06. 2016).

[6] *Integracja przez sport*, http://www.integration-durch-sport.de/fileadmin/fm-dosb/arbeitsfelder/ids/images/2014/Flyer_Sportverein_POLNISCH.pdf (accessed on: 15.06. 2016).

in informal situations rather than in classes – spontaneously and almost effort-lessly. Being together in sport activities and events is also an opportunity for the newcomers and their hosts to meet: not in an atmosphere of hostility and suspicion, but in trust and a sense of a shared goal. This way, refuges and immigrants learn the rules of their hosts' world, whereas the latter learn to overcome barriers in encounters with newcomers.

Education must also address the society that receives immigrants. One of its most important objectives should certainly be to overcome the fear of *Überfrem-dungsangst*, i.e. too much foreignness in the nearest environment. H. Buschkowsky claims it is not hostility towards specific individuals, and, moreover, the anxiety is not caused by an experience of a specific situation. Rather, it is an atmosphere of fear, when someone asks himself a question: "Where am I? Is this still my city? My country?" (Buschkowsky, 2013: 124-125). This feeling may be illustrated by the words of P. Bieler from the anti-immigrant Swedish Democrats party, who fears that "Sweden will lose its identity, a sense of living in a community that is also the family home" (Traub, 2016: 12-13).

This fear definitely may – and should – be overcome. Before London mayor elections, in which one of the candidates was a Muslim politician of Pakistani origin, Sadiq Khan, 30% of Londoners said that they "would feel uncomfortable with a Muslim mayor" (*Brytyjczycy sobie…,* 2015: 37). But after he was elected, there were no negative reactions[7], no anxieties were expressed that a "foreigner" could do harm to the native community. In terms of creating the model of education, it is worth remembering in particular the following dependence: the level of fear of foreignness drops significantly once the native community comes into real and personal contacts with "the others". This is proven, for example, by the results of elections in Germany: in those Lands, where relatively few refugees live – in the latest elections (in the spring of 2016), the largest percentage of voters voted for anti-immigrant groups[8].

From the perspective of school education, the mechanism proves to be very similar. Krystyna Starczewska, a long-time head teacher of the "Bednarska" Community General Education Secondary School in Warsaw, says that refugees have been admitted to the school since the 1990s. Currently, one-fifth of all students

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[7] *Wygrał po „gorzkiej i brutalnej walce". Światowe media o nowym burmistrzu Londynu,* http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiata,2/swiatowa-prasa-komentuje-wybor-nowego-burmistrza-londynu,641796.html (accessed on: 14. 06. 2016).

[8] *Abstimmungen in drei Ländern: Die Ergebnisse der Landtagswahlen im Überblick* http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/wahlen-2016-die-ergebnisse-der-landtagswahlen-im-ueberblick-a-1082093.html (accessed on: 14. 06. 2016).

are foreigners (immigrants and refugees). This is the school's conscious policy of openness to diversity. It was assumed that the presence of refugees from different parts of the world "would be some kind of a teaching aid for (...) children, and would teach them about different cultures, about tolerance and acceptance of diversity" (Starczewska and Winnicka, 2015: 26-27). The many years of practical experience in "Bednarska" school (examples of which are quoted in the interview) show that this indeed is possible.

Even though the school dropped in rankings (which is always the fear of head teachers), according to Starczewska, this is not the most important criterion of the quality of education. Besides, she suggests that this problem could be easy to solve, if the results of students who had been in Poland for less than three years were not included in the school's average performance, or if foreigners were allowed to receive some help in examinations: for example, if they could use dictionaries to make sure they understand exam instructions correctly (ibidem: 27).

The experiences presented by Krystyna Starczewska convince us that the presence of foreign children in a class is a special form of intercultural education. It takes place in a natural environment, in direct contact with representatives of other cultures and languages. Like in real life, there are difficult, problematic situations that require a special ability to solve them.

To sum up, the Polish educational system faces a number of challenges associated with developing procedures and activities relevant to accepting students of different nationalities in Polish schools. The right perception of those issues should be developed from now on, and it is worth drawing on the experiences of other countries. Education that provides for the "migration background" should cover two interconnected groups: it must not only focus on newcomers, but also include the societies that receive immigrants – persons who study, live and work alongside the new settlers.

The most important person in the process is the teacher, whose role of a cultural mediator involves the need to create positive, unbiased and unprejudiced conditions for intercultural communication (Kapica-Curzytek, 2010: 99-101). School education, often too formal and interested only in achieving the best results in rankings, must promote attitudes that would eliminate stigmatisation, xenophobia, intolerance, egocentrism, aggression and racism.

We do not think it is necessary to reformulate the goals of such education: the challenges defined by the four pillars of education remain valid, but they acquire a special significance in the new school reality:
   – Learning to know;
   – Learning to do;

– Learning to live together;

– Learning to be (Delors, 1998: 11).

It would also be a good idea to give more significance to European and civic education, and more emphatically accentuate the goals: to develop a modern and democratic society of justice and progress, supported by the wealth of cultural diversity. It is important to raise the awareness of belonging to a community and a sense of solidarity (Nikitorowicz, 2009, 237). There are at least two goals involved here: to integrate the newcomers and to overcome nationalist, extremely right-ist and populist attitudes among host societies. Their source is escalated fear that turns into verbal or even physical aggression. According to the British journalist S. Kuper, the only key to this problem is thorough education (Kuper, 2012: 7).

J. Nikitorowicz emphasises the fact that "we are (…) at the beginning of the road of the Europenisation of Europeans" (Nikitorowicz, 2009: 238) and visible results should not be expected to happen straight away. They will become evident at the earliest after several dozen years. This is the time that Europe needed to change its shape more than 70 years ago, when World War II ended. Then, the situation was equally or even more difficult: the continent was divided into two hostile political camps (zones of impact) and suffered from economic problems, with the infrastructure in ruin and mass migration in the aftermath of the war.

Thus, it is worth focusing on educational objectives, bearing it in mind that consequent, long-term activities always yield their results. European integration is a process – and its success depends mainly on the condition of education. Without education that focuses on specific goals, there will be no integration and without integration, the economy will not function properly and the society will be neither coherent nor open, which is fundamental for democracy.

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