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Folk songs from Warmia and Mazury in the work of early education teachers in developing regional identity of pupils in classes I–III

Abstract

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Warmia and Mazury are distinct historical regions whose traditions are used in early school education as carriers of regional culture, e.g. fairy tales and folk songs. The aim of this study was to establish what role do folk songs play in shaping students' identity in the experiences of early childhood education teachers? Qualitative research was based on individual, partly guided, problem-focused interviews. Interviews were conducted with seven early childhood education teachers from the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship.

The respondents point to a specific organization of the educational process with the use of folk songs and identify specific elements occurring in the process of implementing folk songs, which play an important role in shaping the regional identity of students in grades I–III: information about folk heroes, songs and dance games; the stories of the works' creation; rhyming and easily catchy phrases.

The development of identity in children is reinforced by the acquisition of the ability to be rooted culturally and to adapt the elements of regional songs to the present reality in which they function. The regional identity developed in this manner is stronger if the process of stimulation by the local culture – children in contact with the local tradition and history – is longer. Fairy folk songs should be permanently embedded in the education process in classes I–III.

Keywords

regional education; early school education; cultural identity; regional identity; Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship

Introduction

Mazury and Warmia are two distinctive historical regions which make up the main area of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship (Lisowska, 2019, p. 155). Mazury was the name originally given to the north of Poland, inhabited by Mazovian peasants in the 14th and 17th centuries. Mazurians are regarded as inhabitants of the southern part of Eastern Prussia from the early 19th century. They were descended from the Polish population who settled the southern and partly the eastern area of the Duchy of Prussia. As a rural population, Mazurians mixed over the centuries with Prussian people, colonists from the German Reich, and people from other countries of Western Europe (Toeppen, 1998, p. 13). Their attempts at defining their national identity started at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries with the national movements (Jasiński, 1994, p. 19).

Warmia is an area whose name comes from the tribe of Prussian Warmians (Oracki, 1980, pp. 14–15). Its southern part was inhabited by Catholics from the 13th/14th century. Initially, those were colonists from Thuringia and Upper Saxony, and the next group of settlers included the residents of Poland, who had migrated into the Teutonic state (Lewandowska, 2018, p. 138). The population of Mazovia migrated into Warmia after the 'Thirteen Years' War. From the Second Peace of Thorn until the Partitions, these lands were part of Royal Prussia and the so-called Warmian Dominium (Achremczyk, 2000, p. 45). As a result of the first partition, these lands were incorporated into the Eastern Prussia and its population was secularised. Residents of the county of Olsztyn and of the southern part of the county of Reszel were regarded as being of Polish origin. Prayers were said, and songs were sung in Polish until the end of the 18th century (especially in the rural areas). Many German officials, teachers, and military men settled in Warmia in the 19th century, which put the Polish language into disuse (Achremczyk, 1997, p. 20).

Warmia and Mazury are multi-cultural lands, diverse in terms of nationality, ethnicity and religion. Their history is linked with Poland, the Teutonic Order, the Kingdom of Prussia, the Weimar Republic, the German Empire and the Third Reich. The struggle for the Polish language and culture reinforced the folk tradition and care about passing them on in the form of folk songs. This is a factor which shapes the regional identity of the community of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship, including children in classes I–III.

Folk songs in Warmia and Mazury

Warmian folk songs were first documented in the 19th century: religious and lay songs in *Xiążka uczebna dla szkół biskupstwa warmińskiego* [Handbook for schools in the bishopric of Warmia] (1822); religious songs in *Katechizm wiary i obyczajów chrześcijańsko-katolickich* [Catechism of Christian and Catholic faith and customs] (1844); handwritten Warmia and Mazury diocesan songbook with melodies composed by Mateusz Grunenberg (1834). *Suplement melodij do Zbioru pieśni nabożnych dla dyecezyi warmińskiej* [A supplement of melodies to the collection of pious songs for the Warmian diocese] was published in the second half of the 19th century. Folk artists and composers of Warmian religious and lay songs included book publishers from Gietrzwałd and members of the Warmian clergy. Efforts of the *Gazeta Olsztyńska* resulted in the publication of a collection of folk songs entitled *Śpiewnik ludowy* [Folk songbook] in 1904 (Rondomańska, 2004, p. 94).

Scholars studying this part of folklore in the first half of the 20th century include Augustyn Steffen, Feliks Nowowiejski and teachers in Polish schools. Work in this regard was continued by journalists in the *Gazeta Olsztyńska* in the series entitled "Biblioteczka Pieśni Polskich" [Library of Polish songs], which presented *Wybór polskich pieśni ludowych* [A selection of Polish folk songs]. A vast collection of folk songs is included in the five-book set entitled *Warmia i Mazury*, whose preparation started in 1950 and was completed in 2003. These are songs recorded during the national Action of Collecting Musical Folklore conducted in 1950–1954 (until 1958 in Warmia and Mazury) by the State Institute of Art together with Polish Radio (Rondomańska, 2004, p. 92).

Individuals who studied folk songs in Mazury included: Gustaw Gizewiusz (1810–1848), Józef Gąsiorowski (1853–1901), Wojciech Kętrzyński (1838–1918), who published one of the better-known volumes entitled *Pieśni gminne ludu mazurskiego w Prusach wschodnich* [Country songs of Mazurian people in East Prussia] – in the form of 54 songs without a clear theme (Rondomańska, 2019, p. 294).

Folk songs in Warmia include (Table 1): annual songs and those sung at weddings, ballads, social, flirtatious and love songs, family and dance songs, and religious and popular songs. Jan Karol Sembrzycki classified folk songs in Mazury into: songs of love and flirtation, soldier's songs, frivolous, drinking songs, tale songs (telling stories from everyday life or about extraordinary events), harvest songs, weddings songs, sad songs (about being an orphan and about unhappy love) and legends (Gębik, 1960, p. 12).

Table 1*Characterisation of folk songs in Warmia and Mazury*

Type	Title	Specificity
ceremonial	“Plon niesiem plon” [We are carrying our yield] – Warmia	during harvest
	“Pola już białe, kłosy się kłaniają” [Fields are already white, cereal spikes are bowing] – Mazury	
social	“Na dzień św. Marcina” [For St. Martin’s Day]	for the settlement of all-year work by household servants with their master
	“Pojedziemy na łów” [We’ll go hunting] “Siedzi sobie zając” [There’s a hare sitting]	at hunting
	“Oj lenku, lenku, wiele ty kosztujesz, wiele ty ludzi często fatygujesz” [O, flax, you cost us a lot and you require a lot of work]	during flax spinning
	“Stała nam się nowina, pani pana zabiła” [Something happened – a lady killed a master]	social relations
	“Zielenio się lasy, zielenio się pola” [Forests and fields are becoming green]	soldier’s songs: increasing awareness, didactic
love and flirtation songs	“U mej matki w ogrodzie” [In my mother’s garden], “Moja dziewczyno, bądźże mi rada” [My girl, show me that you like me], “Porównaj Boże góry z dolami” [God, compare mountains with valleys]	When a young man is courting a girl
family songs	“Miałem ja ci zonkę Ankę – krakoziankę” [I had a wife, Anka, from the Kraków region]	about relations in a marriage
	“Cas do domu” [Time to go home]	about mother-daughter relations
	“Poszedł ojciec do karczmy po syna swojygo” [Father went to the inn to bring his son back home], “Ojciec pome, a ja zostół” [Father died and I’m left]	about father’s duties and his relations with son
nursery rhymes	“Koci, koci łapki”, “Włazł kotek na płotek i mruga”, “Muchoreczek z dambu spadł”, “Gdzieżeś ty bywał czarny baranie” [Where were you, black ram], “Dwa gołębie żyta namłódyły”	during children’s everyday play and youth meetings
dance songs	pofajdok, szot, kosejder, baran, wilk, żabka, zajączek, hejduk	sung to accompany plays and fun
	“A nogami drap, drap, drap” [Scratch with your legs], “Zabawa w kozia” [Playing a goat], “Adam zrodził siytm synów” [Adam fathered seven sons], “Pódziem owsu zuńć” [Let’s reap some oat], “Talar, talar chodzi wkoło” [Talar goes round], “Siejym, siejym mak” [We are sowing poppy]	during music and dance plays
	“Miszko, miszko pryndko zmikaj”, “Poniedziałek, wtorek” [Monday, Tuesday], “Pódziemy kónopki rwać”, “Kiele zimny wody” [On the cold stream], “Genś, genś na stawku plwała” [A goose was swimming in a pond], “Do dury miska”	at children’s play and fun

written for fairy tales	“O dwóch córkach i diable w rasztubie”, “O sierocie LencySKU i czarownicy” [About Lencysek the orphan and a witch]	solemn, complementary form
religious	“Jutrznia na Gody” – Mazury songs to the Holy Mary Lady of Gietrzwałd – Warmia	Protestant (hymns); Catholic (Christmas carols, pilgrims’ songs)

Source: prepared by the author (based on Gębik, 1960).

Regional identity

The identity in psychological science is combined with an individual’s consciousness and self-consciousness. In metaphysics, it is identified with the permanence of being, its specific nature and essence (Jeszka, 2022). From a sociological perspective, this concept takes into account a sense of separateness and uniqueness acquired in the course of life and interaction with Others. In this regard, one can define the individual and collective identity. In an individual sense (I), a person defines characteristic sets of ideas, judgements, and convictions (Zellma, 2002, p. 420). An individual finds differences between themselves and people (Piechaczek-Ogierman, 2019, p. 159), and they acquire patterns on which contacts with Others are based. A person interprets themselves in relation to Others, and a sense of separateness is embedded in their biography and experience (Jeszka, 2022). A collective identity (We) is then constructed, with a collective system of values and norms, customs and language. Members of a cultural structure identify the same: a continuum of space and time, reference to historical events (of value in the life of a community), collective memory and perception of the world (Lisowska, 2022, p. 173).

The nucleus of the identity structure is unchanged. Its peripheries undergo transformations following the dynamically changing reality. Stagnation denotes the end of identity, which should be treated like a constant and yet a variable, partly given but also constructed (Jeszka, 2022).

Shaping an identity is determined by culture, which is a carrier of universal and timeless values. It is the base of the collective cultural identity, often identified with a sense of being rooted/having one’s place in the world. The formation of cultural competence takes place in the family, local community, and school (Piechaczek-Ogierman, 2019, p. 160).

Regional identity is a characteristic kind of social/collective identity. It is based on the regional tradition, i.e. on specifically defined and delimited terri-

tory or on its specific features: social, cultural, economic and topographic – created by “professional approaches”. An individual becomes attached to specific places and spaces and is sensitive to cultural legacy, defining and deciphering meanings and symbols of material culture and derivatives. It also has a sense of bond with the history of the region, local heroes and historical institutions (Szczepański, 2003).

Józef Nikitorowicz (2011) regards the development of identity as a multidimensional process that takes place without interruption in three areas: inherited, shaped individually, and conditioned socially. Being aware of their cultural legacy, an individual orients towards a multi-identity being. Therefore, an analysis of identity depends on a processual, diachronic, dialogic, and narrative approach, as well as on the dynamic nature of the cultural, economic and political changes. At the same time, following an open identity is the seeking of a regional identity, as well as a familial, local, parochial, cultural, national, continental and planetary identity (Nikitorowicz, 2011, pp. 24–26).

The study method and assumptions

The aim of the study was to answer the following questions: what role do folk songs play in shaping students' identity in the experiences of early childhood education teachers? i.e., how do teachers define and perceive a sense of regional identity?; how do early school education teachers organize the educational space with the use of folk songs, enabling the formation of regional identity of students in grades I–III?; Which elements present in the process of implementing folk songs are the most important in shaping children's identity in teachers' experiences? The research was based on a qualitative method of collecting data using problem-focused and semi-guided interviews (Rubacha, 2016, p. 154). The study group consisted of early education teachers who participated in the education process at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Warmia and Mazury and were selected to cooperate in the study by the Faculty of Social Sciences UWM stakeholders (an invitation to the study was sent to 30 educational institutions); obtained the professional title of master and have been working for at least three years as early education teachers in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship (Table 2). The sample was selected by identifying individuals who met the criterion included in the research question. The sample selection was not randomised, and it was purposive (Rubacha, 2016, p. 320).

Table 2*Characterisation of the study group*

No. of the individual under study	Sex	Age	Town	Duration of employment	Class being taught
I	W	33	Olsztyn	7	2
II	W	29	Lidzbark Warmiński	3	3
III	W	36	Braniewo	7	2
IV	W	31	Szczytno	4	1
V	W	40	Ostróda	6	3
VI	W	31	Mragowo	5	2
VII	W	41	Giżycko	8	3

Source: prepared by the author.

Interviews (consisting of ten dispositions with a tag and an instruction) were conducted as meetings at the place of work of the individuals under study, in rooms that enabled free discussion (Palka, 2006, p. 56). The interviews were recorded (each about four hours with a break) and transcribed in an electronic form. The study was conducted in November-December 2023.

During the interviews, the following questions were focused: how do the respondents understand the sense of regional identity?; What are the reasons for the selection of works in the respondents' work?; what types of songs are introduced into the educational space, taking into account their sources?; What are the ways of presenting and using songs that make it possible to activate children's sensitivity to regional culture and traditions?; which elements present in the process of songs implementation are considered by the respondents to be the most important in shaping the regional identity of children?; What changes do they notice in the students' identification with the culture and traditions of the region in the time perspective? (from class I to class III).

The material was analysed: the raw text was shortened, the analytical categories in line with the main study problems were sought, and a layered selection of individuals was introduced to enable the seeking of the important elements in the texts, creating the context of the data. The data were then verified by analytical induction by confronting a hypothetical statement with all the cases in a specific area (Rubacha, 2016, p. 320).

The coding procedure consisted of: (1) multilateral analysis of the text and finding as many analytical categories as possible; (2) selection of the categories most representative of the research problems posed; (3) creation of theoretical codes;

(4) assigning meaning to codes according to the five foci: causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, action and consequences. The following theoretical codes were used: teachers identify the sense of regional identity with students' knowledge (its acquisition) about particular elements of the history and tradition of Warmia and Mazury; the choice of works depends on social tendencies and professional experience; Teachers choose songs that are lively and very catchy to children – then students are more likely to participate in these types of lessons; the use of musical works is biased and results from the verifiability of individual educational activities for the development of cultural identity of children in grades I–III; the presentation of the works and the way they are used refers to the space of abstract and creative thinking of children; The following are considered valuable elements in the process of implementing folk songs: heroes, short catchy rhymes/phrases, information about the creation of the work; Educational activities using folk songs play a role in the process of shaping students' cultural identity, but they must take place over a longer period of time: it is up to the children to change to acquire a sense of community.

Sense of regional identity – the perspective of the surveyed teachers

The respondents identify regional identity as knowledge of elements of local culture and history. Among them, the following stand out:

- 1) regional heroes, creators of folk songs, regional artists
 “If a child gets to know people connected with their region/environment, they will build their sense of belonging to it” – III/W;
- 2) the most important public buildings that have made their mark in the history of a given locality
 “Showing children that there is a building next to their house where important events took place or making them aware that the church they go to «remembers the times» of the last century – connects students with the history of their town” – II/W;
- 3) paintings, sculptures and other works of art and folk products created in the region of Warmia and Masuria or associated with artists from the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship
 “I like to go to the museum with my children and also show them some photographs on the projector. They look with fascination at these beautiful paintings and sculptures made by artists from Warmia and Mazury” – I/W;
- 4) creativity in the form of fairy tales and folk songs – both their individual elements and the sensitivity that can be shaped among students through them

“The best way to work with students in grades I–III in the field of regional education and to awaken regional identity in them is the use of fairy tales and folk songs. Through them, children are transported into the world of previous generations” – VII/W,

“There’s no way to teach children a funny counting-out game or a lively song. Then I hear them singing words in the corridor that have historical significance” – V/W;

- 5) intangible culture: regional customs and beliefs that make it possible to bind children to the region and to sensitize them to the need to take care of local traditions and pass them on to future generations

“It is important to use in teaching what cannot be touched, it opens children to regional values” – VI/W.

The respondents emphasise that the sense of regional identity of pupils in grades I–III is best shaped by elements of local culture, enabling children to be transported to a different space-time. In their opinion, this can be done with the use of artistic messages, among which they mention folk songs.

Educational space with the use of folk songs in the work of early childhood education teachers – a study analysis

The study participants chose songs for their work, which are now the most important elements of the culture of Warmia and Mazury. Their decisions are affected by the place of residence and educational facility operation and depend on the trends among teachers of primary schools in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship, arising from:

- a habit – both of the study participants and the tendency present in the school environment
“My friends used such songs, so I stayed with them” – III/W;
- experience – usability of specific songs in the process of education
“It’s worth basing on what’s lively and catches the ear of children. It’s always been that way” – VI/W;
- availability of texts and melodies
“We use texts that we have on various media, from folk bands or from old collections of folk songs” – I/W;
- new methods of presentation of songs proposed in local communities/by local scholars/regional publishing houses; used in propositions of regional musicians and folk ensembles; supported by foundations and associations acting for the benefit of Warmia and Mazury, and local governments

“In working with songs, publishing houses dealing with the protection and multiplication of the cultural heritage of the region are helpful. In Warmia and Mazury, there are socio-cultural organizations and associations operating in this area. They bring out interesting lyrics and melodies” – VII/W.

Among the folk songs (Table 3) used in educational work, the respondents indicated primarily dance songs accompanying games and plays, musical and children's games, as well as counting-out games and songs. Songs that are lively and can attract children's attention are introduced. In schools in Warmia, children are taught the hymn “O Warmio moja miła”, which tells about the beauty and history of the region.

Table 3

Types of folk songs used by the study subjects

Type	Title	Author
local anthems	“O Warmio moja miła” [O, my lovely Warmia]	lyrics – Maria Paruszevska music – Feliks Nowowiejski
associated with rite cycle	“Plon niesiem plon” [We are carrying our yield]	folk origin
nursery rhymes, short songs	“Wlazł kotek na płotek i mruga” “Koci, koci łapki” “Muchoreczek z dambu spadł” “Gdzieżeś ty bywał czarny baranie” [Where were you, black ram]	
dancing songs to accompany games and fun	pofajdok szot kosejdor żabka wilk	
dancing songs to accompany music and dance play and at children's play and fun	“A nogami drap, drap, drap” [Scratch with your legs] “Zabawa w lisa” [Playing the fox] “Zabawa w kozła” [Playing the goat] “Poniedziałek, wtorek” [Monday, Tuesday]	

Source: prepared by the author.

This analysis shows the use of fairy tales and folk songs in educational work:

- in school performances, including school and regional ceremonies;
- in workshops conducted in the school, including to celebrate special days;
- during plastic arts and music lessons;
- during lessons devoted to literature and plastic arts, when the teacher focuses on children's reflectiveness.

The respondents point to the organization of such an educational space in which songs stimulate the abstractness and creativity of students through visual and auditory transmission. The teachers present the students with recordings of performances of folk groups, where the children can observe the way of dancing to songs and play music in order to sensitize them to the beauty of folk songs. Thus, rooted in local culture and tradition. Learning the song is preceded by a short story about the history/legends related to the creation of the piece.

The importance of elements occurring in the process of implementation (educational) of folk songs in shaping the identity of pupils in class I-III in teachers' experiences

The image of such teaching work is reflected in the experience of the study participants with respect to the importance of fairy tales and folk songs in developing the regional identity of pupils in classes I–III. The respondents indicate that the most important elements in the process of implementing folk songs, contributing to the development of regional identity are: information about folk heroes of songs and dance parties; the stories of the works' creation and rhyming with easily catchy phrases.

The study participants point to the fact that children identify themselves with characters in dancing songs which accompany games and fun. Before the dance is presented and steps and calls are taught, the story of the text and character origin is presented. For example, *pofajdok* denotes an immature boy, mocking but at the same time helpful and kind. Every child sometimes finds similarities in fairy tales to people whom they meet in everyday life.

According to the study participants, children remember short songs well, such as “Wlaził kotek na płotek i mruga”, which they later sing in school corridors and which, with time, take a form associated with a specific pupil group. This is a sign that the children are rooted in their local environment and that they identify with a specific community – a collective structure. This is also a carrier of elements/regional/cultural values, which comprise the autonomous/unique image of oneself – an individual structure.

Lexical items that belong to school children's reality include (according to the study participants) individual words found in folk songs. Typical ones used by pupils include: *szurek* – boy; *gałgan* – rascal; *gbur* – rich farmer. They are usually heard during playing in the playground or in the school corridor, becoming part of everyday culture.

The teachers working longer are in agreement with respect to an increase in their knowledge of the typical features of the region: historical and cultural. This is one of the elements which forms the sense of regional identity. "As the individual awareness of each child increases, this child discovers the cultural reality in folk songs" – V/W.

The teachers who had worked in a school for a short time had not had an opportunity to observe this phenomenon in their work. As they are at the beginning of their work, they can only indicate individual elements of the regional culture, which - with time - can become part of the regional identity. "I think that children get to know the region and its traditions the most if there is an interesting character in the song, and if there is a legend about the origin of the song/preferably dark, it arouses their interest" – II/W.

Regardless of the length of service, they agree that folk songs, by arousing sensitivity to the beauty of local culture – experiencing it in the space of abstract thinking and creativity – play a significant role in shaping the identity of children in grades I–III. This process must be carried out over a longer period of time, only then can a regional identity develop.

Conclusions

This study has shown that folk songs of Warmia and Mazury are present in the education process of pupils in class I–III in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship. They are the carriers of elements of the regional culture. The experience of the study participants shows that they are used in the process of formation of the regional identity of pupils and their roots in the local culture. They enable:

- showing pupils a path to identity choices – changing the peripheries surrounding the nucleus of identity;
- drawing on cultural elements while at the same time transforming them and adapting to the reality in which they function;
- creating individual identity structures which indicate the autonomy and uniqueness of an individual and building a community/group/society/regional structure in relation to the local culture and its other participants.

On the basis of the analysis of the studies, it can be concluded that the longer the contact with regional tradition and history (via song), the more intense the identification with its values. The stronger the *empiria* of elements of the regional culture (with the use of songs), the greater the chance for developing the regional identity – which – in the perspective of their experience – is stressed by the

study participants observing pupils in consecutive years of their functioning in the school space.

This study should be expanded to include a larger study group, diverse with respect to the duration of employment, and take into consideration the use of folk songs in the education of pupils in classes I–III in other regions of Poland.

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