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## **Introducing intercultural education. An American project implemented in the school of Opole region. A case study**

Educational system, as the part of socio-political reality mirrors all the phenomena that appear in the public sphere. The element of this reality, which is more and more visible in the last years, is the rising wave of xenophobic and nationalistic tendencies that spreads both in Europe and in Poland. In this situation, the school systems in democratic and multicultural societies face the challenge of familiarizing students with cultural diversity as well as teaching them to appreciate and respect it. There is no simple and clear-cut response to such a challenge but reaching the ideas of interculturalism and intercultural education might be inspiring for these looking for diversity-friendly education. Interculturalism itself, is defined by the Council of Europe as follows:

Different cultures, national, ethnic, religious groups living in the same territory, being in open relations of cooperation, exchange, mutual respect for own and other values and lifestyles. Interculturalism is the process of active tolerance and maintaining equal relations where everybody is equally important, there is no division into higher and lower culture, there are no better or worse people<sup>1</sup>.

The authors of the above definition emphasize the need of open relations between different cultures and getting to know diversity which is the only way of deconstructing stereotypes and prejudices toward minorities. This diversity, as Grzybowski notices, can be understood in its broad sense, not referring only to national and ethnic groups, but also to such categories as region, profession, age, ability/disability, systems of values, political views, communication codes,

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<sup>1</sup> *All Different, All Equal. Education pack*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg 1995, p. 27.

customs, traditions, races, ways of raising children, sexual orientation, etc.<sup>2</sup> In this context, intercultural education is “a model of social, cultural and educational activity aimed at mutual recognizing, understanding and enriching cultures and particular people creating these cultures”<sup>3</sup>. He also adds that the particular feature of such education is “opening toward *Others/the Different* and their problems”<sup>4</sup>.

At the same time, although intercultural education does seem the relevant approach to teaching tolerance, combating prejudices and preventing discrimination, the recent research reveals that schools are not prepared to tackle this task in an effective way. The analysis of the system of teachers’ training, the content of official curricula and textbooks as well as various elements of the hidden curriculum present the educational reality that is far from promoting real intercultural education<sup>5</sup>. Both teachers and educational authorities often lack knowledge of the examples of good practices, used in other countries and applicable in Polish educational practice. I hope this text will contribute to raising the awareness of innovative methods focused on intercultural dimension of education.

The model I am describing below is based on the experiences of the American educational center (the Lowell Milken Center) whose method of the project work has been so far applied in one of the high school of Opole region, the 1<sup>st</sup> Lyceum in Kędzierzyn-Koźle.

### The Lowell Milken Center<sup>6</sup>

“Schoolgirls from rural Kansas, USA and their teacher discovered the Polish heroine who saved more children during WWII than Oscar Schindler” – such

<sup>2</sup> P. Grzybowski, *Edukacja międzykulturowa – przewodnik*, Kraków 2008, p. 11. See also Z. Jasiński, *Od pedagogiki narodowej do pedagogiki międzykulturowej. Refleksje na progu Eurointegracji*, in: *Edukacja międzykulturowa w Polsce na przełomie XX i XXI wieku*, A. Paszko (ed.), Kraków 2004; J. Keast (ed.), *Religious Diversity and intercultural education: a reference book for schools*, Strasbourg 2007; T. Szkudlarek, *Pedagogika międzykulturowa*, in: *Pedagogika. Podręcznik akademicki*, vol. 1, Z. Kwieciński, B. Śliwerski (ed.), Warszawa 2003; Z. Jasiński (ed.), *Szkoła i nauczyciele wobec problemów edukacji międzykulturowej*, Opole 2010.

<sup>3</sup> P. Grzybowski, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> See M. Abramowicz (ed.), *Wielka nieobecna – o edukacji antydyskryminacyjnej w systemie edukacji formalnej w Polsce. Raport z badań*, Warszawa 2011; A. Teutsch, *Analiza oferty placówek doskonalenia nauczycieli*, in: *Wielka nieobecna – o edukacji antydyskryminacyjnej w systemie edukacji formalnej w Polsce*, M. Abramowicz (ed.), Warszawa 2011, p. 89.

<sup>6</sup> Most information in this part of the text comes from in-depth interviews and archive research I conducted at the Lowell Milken Center during my fellowship tenure in November 2012. My interviews were Norman Conard (Executive Director) and Megan Felt (Program Director).

were the headlines of a lot of newspapers and magazines in Poland in 2001. This woman was Irena Sendler, a Polish social worker who rescued 2,500 children from the Warsaw Ghetto – the person forgotten and unknown at that time both in Poland and in the world. Today, I. Sendler is a permanent element of our social memory, we have tens of schools named after her, there are films, books and various school projects devoted to her.

But, it was not until 1999 when students from Uniontown High School in Kansas, led by their teacher, Norman Conard, found a magazine clipping with information about Irena Sendler. Amazed by her activity during the war, they prepared a touching performance based on her rescuing experiences. Soon, fame of the play, called *Life in a Jar*, spread beyond the borders of their small community: hundreds of presentations all over North America and in Europe, over 1,500 media outlets and the film, *The Courageous Heart of Irena Sendler* produced for CBS, made the project and its heroine known worldwide. The quotation below illustrates well the outreach of the enterprise:

With this project the students [...] are extending the classroom into the world community in the following ways: publishing the interviews, performing before large audiences, sharing letters from Irena with students and educators, (copies have been requested and sent to over 250 schools) and interviewing with local and national press. This project has created ongoing interactive communication with families in our community and communities across the country<sup>7</sup>.

I. Sendler herself, commenting on the *Life in Jar*, said that it changed both Poland and the USA, enriching the two countries memory and deepening the reflection on the universal values<sup>8</sup>. Nowadays, it is considered one of the most important projects that influenced American education – the other ones are *The Blue Eyed*, *the Brown Eyed* and *Paper Clips*. What is worth mentioning though, all these projects came from tiny towns in rural America outside the main centers. Still, their impact crossed the borders of the states and of the country<sup>9</sup>. The performance presenting I. Sendler story inspired Lowell Milken, an American businessman and philanthropist, famous for supporting educational reforms. Together with Norman Conard, an award-winning educator and a present manager of the Lowell Milken Center (LMC) they worked out the idea of the educational center which would “bring to light unsung heroes such as Irena Sendler”<sup>10</sup>. As

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<sup>7</sup> *Life in a Jar: the Irena Sendler Project*, [www.irenasendler.org/thestory.asp](http://www.irenasendler.org/thestory.asp) [access date: 17.09.2013].

<sup>8</sup> Interview with M. Felt, November 5, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with N.Conard, November 5, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> *About the Center. History of the Lowell Milken Center*, [www.lowellmilkencenter.org/about.taf?section=history&pid=4&title=History-of-the-Lowell-Milken-Center](http://www.lowellmilkencenter.org/about.taf?section=history&pid=4&title=History-of-the-Lowell-Milken-Center) [access date: 17.09.2013].

a result, in 2007 an international non-profit organization, the Lowell Milken Center, was established. The two major objectives of the institution are: “1. Teaching respect and understanding through project-based learning, 2. Telling inspiring stories of unsung heroes to change behaviors and attitudes”<sup>11</sup>. More detailed explanation of the mission of the LMC consists of the following statements:

The Lowell Milken Center discovers, develops and communicates the stories of unsung heroes who have made a profound and positive difference on the course of history. Through student-driven project-based learning, people throughout America and the world learn that each of us has the responsibility and the power to take actions that „repair the world“ by improving the lives of others. [...]. The recent resurgence of anti-Semitism and racial conflict present evidence of the need for education dealing with tolerance and respect. Supporting projects teaching respect within schools is a cornerstone of the Center. **Life in a Jar** is a perfect example of students causing change. We believe that **children can reach over walls of bias that adults can never hope to, reaching out and changing lives**. Young people can take the lead in inspiring others to repair the world<sup>12</sup>.

In practice, the LMC is a student and teacher think-tank, helping in the project development on every stage. This function includes advising on choosing the hero of the project, the mode of presentations (performance, website, documentary, exhibition or essay), teaching the participants the project-based learning methodology, revising and commenting on the projects being realized (eg. analysis and the critical review of the performance or documentary scripts, helping with resource selection, advising on technical requirements of the projects). One of the incentives for students and teachers is annual Discovery Award, an opportunity for students develop their own performance, website or documentary and win a prestigious award. As for teachers, the Center runs Fellowship and Intern Programme which gives them an insight into LMC philosophy, their activities as well as project-based learning methodology. Equipped with this knowledge, after the fellowship tenure the teachers develop the unsung heroes projects in their communities.

As for the quantitative dimension, the Center has now reached over 5,300 schools and over 625,000 students. Visitors from 50 countries have been to the Lowell Milken Center in Fort Scott. LMC website visitors were from 49 states and 45 countries, the Center has worked with students in all 50 states and over 25 countries<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> *About the Center. Mission statement*, [www.lowellmilkencenter.org/about.taf?section=mission-statement&pid=28&title=Lowell-Milken-Center-Mission-Statement](http://www.lowellmilkencenter.org/about.taf?section=mission-statement&pid=28&title=Lowell-Milken-Center-Mission-Statement) [access date: 17.09.2013].

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>13</sup> N. Conard, personal communication, January 14, 2012.

## Unsung heroes projects as the means of intercultural education

A friend of a black student during segregation time, a boy who decided to share confinement with his country enemies, a conscientious objector during World War II, the Native American tribe in difficult and unfair times, a Roma woman building in local community bridges between her group and the rest of the society – all of them have been found by students and chosen for their unsung heroes projects both in the USA and Europe. The chosen ones, not widely known or appreciated, are the example of change done by an individual, very often in unfriendly environment, against mainstream opinions and attitudes. Their actions embody the Hebrew phrase, *tikkun olam* (“repair the world”), show the young people the importance of resistance and the ability of every individual to work for social inclusion even if it means being outsiders. Different as they are, all the unsung heroes teach the respect and tolerance regardless of the religion, race or origin. This way, they embody the ideals of intercultural education in many ways, in its broad sense.

The unsung heroes projects, originated in the USA, rely on American multiculturalism, openness, diversity and individualism. Nevertheless, they can be an interesting offer for European educators as an element enriching historic and civic education, promoting the values of interculturalism. They seem particularly relevant nowadays when the researchers point out that in some parts of Europe (German-speaking and East European countries) it is the ethnic, not civic identities (typical for the USA, for example) that dominate public discourse and this phenomenon contributes to xenophobia and exclusion<sup>14</sup>. The projects of the Center let students look for heroes from different paths of life, belonging to various minorities and sharing the whole range of political ideas: a hero can be both somebody who lost his life in a war and a conscientious objector as long as they are people who authentically defend their personal beliefs. This variety of potential heroes makes the students appreciate human diversity and perceive it as a value, not a threat to the society. Another striking feature of the projects is the fact that they embrace different visions of patriotism and sometimes challenge the traditional ones. In European education much too often schoolchildren are taught the history of their country as the history of the innocent land and patriotism means presenting one-sided, flawless and always positive image of the homeland. By contrast, some of the unsung heroes projects confront this view, by presenting the people who opposed to their own country injustice or cruelty. As a result, the projects give students the opportunity to deal with controversial issues and provide space for critical

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<sup>14</sup> J.G Janmaat, N. Mons, *Promoting Ethnic Tolerance and Patriotism: The Role of Education System Characteristics*, “Comparative Education Review” 2011, no 55 (1), 58.

opinion and open discussion. Such an approach seems still underappreciated in European education. Another worth highlighting feature of the projects is the perception of *bravery* they convey. The chosen unsung heroes sometimes show the “daily basis bravery” that consists of apparently unimportant “everyday” gestures or words. At the same time, it is the kind of bravery young people can identify with as they can practice it in their lives here and now. Last but not least, the projects focus on individual acts as the ones which can be powerful and transformative. This feature permeates the projects and leads to something which is fundamental in American education, not present enough in European school reality. That is the concept of *role models* – the people who set standards, the ones young people can look up to, whose additional value is the fact that they were found and accepted by young people themselves without being imposed by anyone.

### **Project-based learning and impact of the projects**

All the projects promoted and supported by the LMC rely on Project-Based Learning (PBL) – the approach rooted in the American ideas of pragmatism and progressivism. The philosophy of pragmatism, influenced by the experiences of early settlers in America, emphasizes the ability of an individual person to transform the environment<sup>15</sup>. In education, the ideas of pragmatism were materialized in creating open, collaborative, process-oriented learning environment where young people experiment, solve problems and construct their knowledge<sup>16</sup>. At the same time, education plays an important socio-political role as it is treated as the key to development of democratic citizenship<sup>17</sup>. Another trend, progressivism, is associated with W.H. Kilpatrick and the project method as one of its most famous symbols. Kilpatrick believed that this approach had not only got educational goals but also contributed to constructing democratic society based on constant negotiating and collaboration<sup>18</sup>. The project method is also linked to the theories of socio-constructivism with its emphasis on involving the environment of the learners in the learning process as well as using students’

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<sup>15</sup> S. Sztobryn, *Pedagogika Nowego wychowania*, in *Pedagogika. Podręcznik akademicki*, vol. 1, Z. Kwieciński, B. Śliwerski (ed.), Warszawa 2008, p. 315.

<sup>16</sup> L.G. Gutek, *Filozofia dla pedagogów*, Gdańsk 2007, p. 82-109.

<sup>17</sup> H.S. Broudy, *Philosophical Foundations of Education*, in *American Education: Diversity and Research*, H.J. Walberg (ed.), Washington 1979, p. 19; S. Kijaczko, *John Dewey i idea filozofii pragmatystycznej*, Opole 2009.

<sup>18</sup> L.G. Gutek, op. cit., pp. 302-308.

past experiences and acquired information in building new knowledge. Last but not least, projects based learning has a lot in common with critical theory which stresses the importance of empowerment and strives to increase the individual awareness of a person's rights in changing the social reality<sup>19</sup>.

All the features of PBL mentioned above can be found in the Lowell Milken Center-supported projects. They offer learner-centered approach where students select the topic (the unsung hero), the resources and the mode of the presentation. The participants' task is always related to the "real" world as they explore "issues of race, class, gender, religion, ethnicity and language by studying the stories of their hometown, highlight portraits of individual communities, [...] study the religions of [...] local community, with emphasis on different faiths"<sup>20</sup>. It is interesting that a lot of LMC projects (similarly to *Life in a Jar*) come from places with little diversity where people often do not have opportunities to meet "the other". In such environment, teaching tolerance seems more challenging than in a multicultural setting and as N. Conard puts it: "the projects nurture the environment of school"<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, they change the community because during the research work and then presenting the results of their projects the students and teachers become real, active investigators. As a result, they gather knowledge and experience related to the community past, culture, minority groups and by displaying it publicly, change the common perception of the place they live in.

To sum up, the beginnings and the development of the Center show the potential of small and apparently homogenous communities to be the source of inspiring projects whose impact goes far beyond their borders. At the same time, these projects, involving possibly wide range of community members, contribute to creation inside and outside schools the "nurturing environment" based on tolerance, inclusiveness and openness.

### **American and Polish cooperation – the unsung projects in Polish reality**

The pilot phase of introducing the LMC projects in Poland was conducted in the 1<sup>st</sup> Lyceum of Henryk Sienkiewicz in Kędzierzyn-Koźle between December 2012 and June 2013. The school, with very active School Group of Amnesty International, rich experience in running projects and location in culturally

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<sup>19</sup> J. Spring, *American education. An introduction to Social and Political Aspects*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, New York and London 1989, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with N. Conard, November 5, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

diversified environment seemed a perfect target to verify the method in Polish reality. The project was realized according to the rules and goals established by the LMC (see above) and consulted by the management of the Center throughout all the stages of its realization.

Work on the projects started in December 2012 with workshops for the students and teachers. The students got to know the activities of the Lowell Milken Center with the examples of websites and documentaries realized by American students, *Life in a Jar* project and unsung heroes features. During regular meetings two groups of students came up with their own ideas for the heroes. One of them was Maria Mikusz (the rescuer during WWII living in our area) and Inga Mirga (the Roma woman and a teacher assistant from Kędzierzyn-Koźle primary school, who has been working for years to bridge the gap between Roma and non-Roma society in the area). The students also decided on the mode of presenting their project which was website devoted to Maria Mikusz and titled *Under the seagull's wings* ("Seagull" was Maria's nickname during the war). Another group working on the story of Roma assistant decided to create a documentary titled *Call me Auntie* (school children, regardless of their origin, call Mrs. Inga Mirga "auntie"). After the initial phase, the research work began – the students started looking for the primary and secondary sources, visiting libraries, museums, archives and doing interviews. The students' interviewees were Mrs. Maria Mikusz (for the "Jewish" group) and for the "Roma" group: Mrs. Inga Mirga, school management, school counselor, pupils belonging both to Roma and non-Roma community of the primary school, a local officer and a court officer. One of the most important part of the research was the field trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum with collecting data both in the camp area and in the archive of the place (photographs, certificates, letters related both to Roma and Jewish community imprisoned in the camp). The research phase with gathering information lasted about 3 months and gave the students necessary background to create the final product. This background consisted of the knowledge concerning historical and cultural context of their activities (the history, including the Holocaust, culture, traditions and contemporary situation related to – depending on the group – Jewish or Roma minority). The final stage of the project consisted of creating a website and a film which involved mastering advanced technical skills and the selection of extremely rich material they had gathered. The final products of the project were located on the internet platforms and became publicly available (the website: *Under the seagull's wings* [www.undertheseagullswings.org](http://www.undertheseagullswings.org), the film in Polish version: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=FWko-JxONQc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FWko-JxONQc) and in English version [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rm0QZnynpRY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rm0QZnynpRY)).



Evaluation of the project, conducted through questionnaires and personal interviews, during after its realization revealed both opportunities and challenges related to accomplishing the project goals. Summarizing the evaluation findings, I will point out the ones related to intercultural dimension of the enterprise.

Thus, a collection of 7 in-depth interviews (the number of project participants) showed the following common benefits of the project, related to students' knowledge, skills and attitudes:

- strengthening the awareness of local community heritage and its intercultural component;
- gaining knowledge related to Jewish and Roma history, traditions and culture as well as contemporary negative phenomena: anti-Semitism and discrimination of the Roma people;
- strengthening the relations between schools and the community by involving different actors (students, teachers, parents, other family members, local community members, including minority groups);
- increasing appreciation for cultural diversity and tolerance towards marginalized groups, other points of view and values;
- change of attitudes and behavior – making students and local community more sensitive towards injustice and discrimination and undertaking tolerance-related activities;
- developing the intercultural social skills<sup>22</sup>.

The exemplary illustrations of the above conclusions are the students' opinions expressed after the interviews with the rescuer: "Mrs Mikusz have met us, young people and showed everyone a tangible evidence that the heroism exists. She also makes us understand that everyone has the right to live and to be free"<sup>23</sup>. Having talked to the Roma woman, one of the participants noticed: "I really think Mrs. Mirga changes the world. She changes the way the Roma people are perceived and makes us get rid of the stereotypes passed down from generation to generation"<sup>24</sup>. One of the students described her impressions after a field trip and visit to school where Ms. Inga Mirga works:

I used to be afraid of Roma people before. After the visit I finally realized they are the same people as me and all my fears are groundless! When I smiled to them they responded with the same. Nothing in their behavior made me uncomfortable. At school where she works there is no division into "we" or "they" or "normal" and "others". All children learn and play together. Thanks to Mrs. Inga they know that all people are the same and deserve respect regardless of who they are, what color of the

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<sup>22</sup> Interviews and evaluation questionnaires gathered between January 2012 – August 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Interviewee 1, evaluation questionnaire.

<sup>24</sup> A. Zdobyłak, personal communication, January 20, 2012.

skin they have or where they come from. Moreover, thanks to our hero Roma children can educate and find their place in the society. The visit at that school changed me. It gave me hope for better and stereotypes-free society<sup>25</sup>.

Another project participant noticed: “My opinion about Roma has changed. Now I know that they are like us.[...] We are to blame for weak results of this battle with stereotypes because we can’t see real personality when we believe in stereotypes and judge people superficially”<sup>26</sup>. The group that worked with the Holocaust rescuer focused on a deep human dimension of the act rescuing. They pointed out disappearance of the question of the origin, religious or racial differences in performing such heroic acts<sup>27</sup>.

As a coordinator of the project I had a unique opportunity to observe the process of implementing the American project into Polish ground. Before I present my conclusions, it is worth mentioning that projects, as the educational method, have been known and present in Poland for a century. After the World War I, A. Stevenson’s book *The Project Method*, as the only work devoted to this topic translated into Polish, was the main source of information about projects<sup>28</sup>. Although the method was known and appreciated, it was not widely used in school practice. In the years 1945-1989, Polish education was far from promoting students’ autonomy, independence or resourcefulness. Thus, the project method was presented rather in the textbooks for history of education or didactics than introduced in schools<sup>29</sup>. After the transformation of 1989 expectations regarding education changed and Polish school system was expected to evolve into a more democratic, creative and innovative sphere. In such circumstances, the project method could definitely materialize and develop. However, constant political changes affected education and contributed to inability of working out consistent educational policy with preferable methods of teaching. The reform of education from 1999 drew some attention to pupils’ social activating, which resulted in some intensified interest in the

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>26</sup> K. Grabska, personal communication, January 20, 2012

<sup>27</sup> Interviewees 1-4, evaluation questionnaires.

<sup>28</sup> H. Rowid, *Szkola twórcza*, Kraków 1931, pp. 325-340; W. Dzierzbicka, S. Dobrowolski, *Eksperymenty pedagogiczne w Polsce w latach 1900-1939*, Wrocław 1963, p. 303; F. Bereźnicki, *Hasła “Nowej szkoły” w dydaktyce drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Toruń 1998, pp. 130-135, M. Szymański, *O metodzie projektów. Z historii, teorii i praktyki pewnej metody kształcenia*, Warszawa 2000, Wydawnictwo Akademickie “Żak”, pp. 44-46.

<sup>29</sup> See Wołoszyn, Stefan, *Dzieje wychowania i myśli pedagogicznej w zarysie*, Warszawa 1964, p. 419; K. Sośnicki, *Dydaktyka ogólna*, Wrocław 1959, pp. 206-208; B. Nawroczyński, *Dzieła wybrane. Zasady nauczania*, vol. II, Warszawa 1987, pp. 316-320.

project method<sup>30</sup>. Another moment the project method received more appreciation was connected with working out the new core curriculum, particularly in the part devoted to the school subject *Knowledge of Society*. According to the core curriculum for middle schools, one of its general aims is focused on “Cooperation in public matters (The student cooperates with others – plans, divides tasks and carries them out)”<sup>31</sup>. As for the specific requirements, the core curriculum includes the paragraph devoted to teaching young people how to participate in public life. This objective is to be achieved by working out – individually or in the team – the students’ project that should focus on solving one of the problems of the local environment<sup>32</sup>. The authors of the core curriculum also explained the stages of the projects with their research and presentation phases and stressed that in middle schools about 20% (10% in high schools) of teaching content should be realized through projects<sup>33</sup>. In additional resources for teachers that accompanied the new core curriculum and were prepared by educational authorities, Dewey’s ideas and progressivism appeared directly in relation to the features of the learning process, cooperation and activity in social groups and the changing role of a teacher<sup>34</sup>.

Still, in spite of the theoretical and legal support of the project method, it would be difficult to conclude it became a standard in the system of formal education. At least the project method, understood as the way of learning based on students’ cooperation, closely related with social environment, respecting the autonomy of a student/a researcher. In Polish reality, the project method is often limited to preparing the presentation of the subject (chosen by a teacher, usually irrelevant to students’ experience and needs) where the complex research work as the whole process of gaining knowledge and skills or modifying attitudes, is omitted.

Under these circumstances the project realized by the school in Kędzierzyn-Koźle seems exceptional. The main features that could summarize its uniqueness are as follows:

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<sup>30</sup> See J. Królikowski, *Projekt edukacyjny. Materiały dla zespołów międzyprzedmiotowych*, Warszawa 2001; K. Chałas, *Metoda projektów i jej egzemplifikacja w praktyce. W poszukiwaniu strategii edukacyjnych zreformowanej szkoły*, Warszawa 2000; J.H. Helm, L.G. Katz, *Mali badacze. Metoda projektu w edukacji elementarnej*, transl. E. Pulkowska, Warszawa 2003; Szymański, op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> *Podstawa programowa z komentarzami*, t. 4: *Edukacja historyczna i obywatelska w szkole podstawowej, gimnazjum i liceum*, Warszawa 2008, p. 85.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 86.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, p. 110-111.

<sup>34</sup> A. Mikina, B. Zając, *Metoda projektów w gimnazjum. Poradnik dla nauczycieli i dyrektorów gimnazjów* (Warszawa: ORE, 2009), p. 66.

- emphasis on the research work with collecting primary and secondary sources, field trips and interviews;
- the process of selection of sources;
- processing the sources in the form of *Annotated Bibliography* and the *Process Paper*<sup>35</sup>;
- supremacy of the process (research work) over the products (a website and a film);
- constant group cooperation as the indispensable condition of the successful project;
- rooting the project in the local environment;
- attitude-transforming potential of the project as far combating intolerance and exclusion is concerned;
- emphasis on the value of an individual act even if it means personal sacrifice and being “outsider” or performing against unfavorable conditions.

### **Final comments**

Realizing the project based on American know-how turned out to be a success that can be measured both by its influence on the participants and wider community as well as receiving the 1st and 2nd prize of the LMC project competition. However, work on this kind of projects also revealed some weaknesses of Polish education. First of all, the students were not used to cooperating which means constant negotiating, exchanging information, dividing work and communicating their needs. I found this one of the most serious difficulty in the initial stage of the project. Another thing was the need of accustoming students with the basics of real research work. Working with the students, I could not help the impression that the common skill Polish school equips them with, is a copy-and-paste function, whereas developing the investigative skills or teaching critical selection of the sources is commonly neglected.

As shown above, the pilot program of unsung heroes realized in the school of the Opole region indicated a significant transformative potential of such enterprises regarding their intercultural dimension. At the same time, it should be remembered that the success of the project lies largely in the preparation and engagement of the coordinating teachers. This preparation involves the knowledge of the project based learning but also openness to intercultural experiences. Having this condition in mind, I deeply believe, the experiences

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<sup>35</sup> *Annotated Bibliography* is the description of the sources used in the research work with the explanation of the way they were applied; the *Process Paper* is written at the end of the project to summarize its goals, stages of realization, conclusions and participants’ motivation to take up a particular issue.

gathered at the school presented above might be a real inspiring idea for those willing to promote tolerance and cultural diversity in their environment.

KU EDUKACJI MIĘDZYKULTUROWEJ.  
REALIZACJA AMERYKAŃSKIEGO PROJEKTU W SZKOLE REGIONU OPOLSKIEGO.  
STUDIUM PRZYPADKU

Streszczenie

Tekst dotyczy problematyki edukacji międzykulturowej w kontekście współczesnych wyzwań związanych z nietolerancją i dyskryminacją różnych grup mniejszościowych. Mając na uwadze nieefektywność systemu edukacji w podejmowaniu tej tematyki, autorka odwołuje się do doświadczeń i dobrych praktyk amerykańskich i pokazuje możliwości ich zastosowania w polskiej rzeczywistości edukacyjnej na przykładzie jednej ze szkół regionu opolskiego, która wzięła udział w projekcie amerykańskiego centrum edukacyjnego Lowell Milken Centre. Większość informacji zawartych w tekście pochodzi z wywiadów i kwerendy archiwalnej przeprowadzonej przez autorkę w siedzibie Lowell Milken Centre podczas pobytu stypendialnego w listopadzie 2012 roku. Część danych pochodzi z wywiadów pogłębionych przeprowadzonych z koordynatorami i uczestnikami projektu oraz ankiet ewaluacyjnych zrealizowanych po zakończeniu projektu.

