

National best practice compilations for CEURES project

Multicultural lessons: Learning about the beauty of difference and similarity beyond boundaries. A project run by the Multicultural Center in Warsaw



Institute of Geography
and Spatial Organization
Polish Academy of Sciences

you need to plant a tree first for it to provide shade in the future

Abdulcadir Gabeire Farah (1955-2015)

Title of Best Practice: Multicultural Lessons

Pillar: Migration

Category: education and social integration

Place of best practice: Warsaw, Poland

Coordinated by: Multicultural Center & Initiative Open House Foundation

Methods of financing: funded by the city of Warsaw budget (also, additional funding e.g. Norwegian funds)



Interdisciplinary Approach:

urban social integration and education

Approach for data collection:

use of open access information, connecting with the organizers, surveying and documenting their activities, interviewing the coordinator, the educators, and (if possible) the participants

For whom

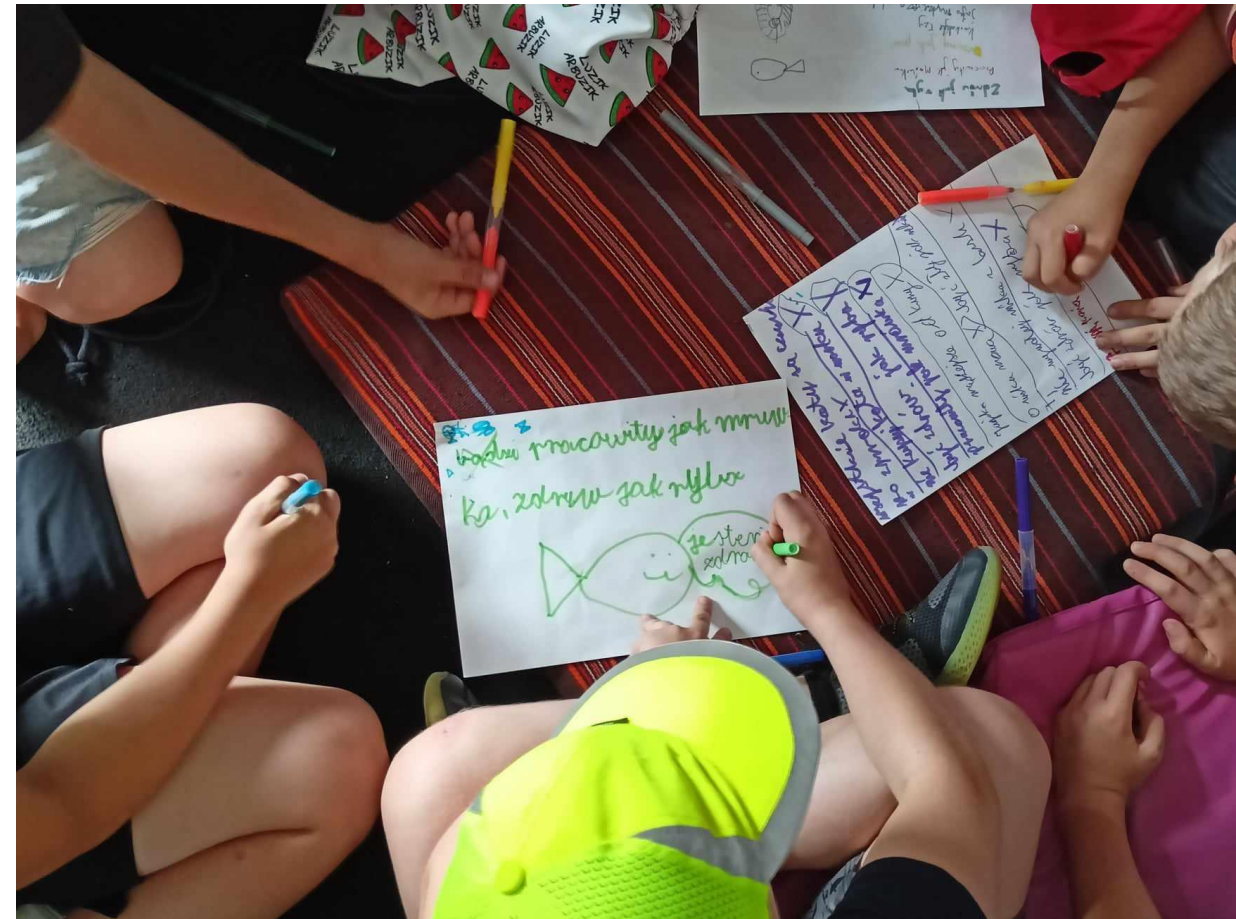
Children in elementary and high schools, including those with voluntary or forced migration experience

Why

to build an open society aware of cultural and social diversity and capable of functioning in this diversity

How

education via play; teaching multicultural communication using various forms such as discussions, workshops, and lectures tailored to the age of the audience. The overarching principle is not to tell the audience what to think but to equip them with knowledge and tools to form their own opinions



Fot. MCC archive (shared via private message by Natalia Gebert – project coordinator)



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The number and topics of lessons depend on the availability of educators, who are usually professionally engaged in work for migrants, bringing their professional perspective to the sessions. Given the diverse experiences and backgrounds of the educational team, the entire team has been trained in workshop methods, and voice training has also been provided

Introducing a new lesson requires consultation with the team leader, presenting the lesson plan, and mutual lesson visits for learning and identifying shortcomings, which are often more visible from an external perspective. Discrimination or hate speech is not tolerated, both from facilitators and participants



Methods of involving the local community

Current lesson offerings are regularly sent to schools, and upon choosing a lesson of interest, the school makes a reservation. As a rule, lessons take place at the Center, although there are exceptions to this rule

The lessons generate considerable interest both during the school year and in the summer (during the "Summer in the City" campaign). The summer campaign allows for longer formats, such as outdoor games



Fot. MCC archive (shared via private message by Natalia Gebert – project coordinator)

Achieved Results

In the period of Jan-Oct 2023 (the Open House Initiative Foundation has been co-leading the Center and is responsible for education since the beginning of the year)

184 lessons were conducted

with the participation of 4,377 students of Belarusian, Chechnyan, Russian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Nigerian and other nationalities) from Warsaw schools

Natalia Gebert: „It is challenging to measure the change occurring, but we carefully listen to teachers' opinions and suggestions and try to implement proposed improvements. Most opinions are positive. For example, in an external project in the frame of which we conducted lessons at the Center, only 6% of teachers gave a negative evaluation, and the feedback provided was analyzed and mostly implemented by the team”

Challenges, Limitations, Side Effects

Availability of Educators - limited due to their everyday responsibilities related to working with migrants;

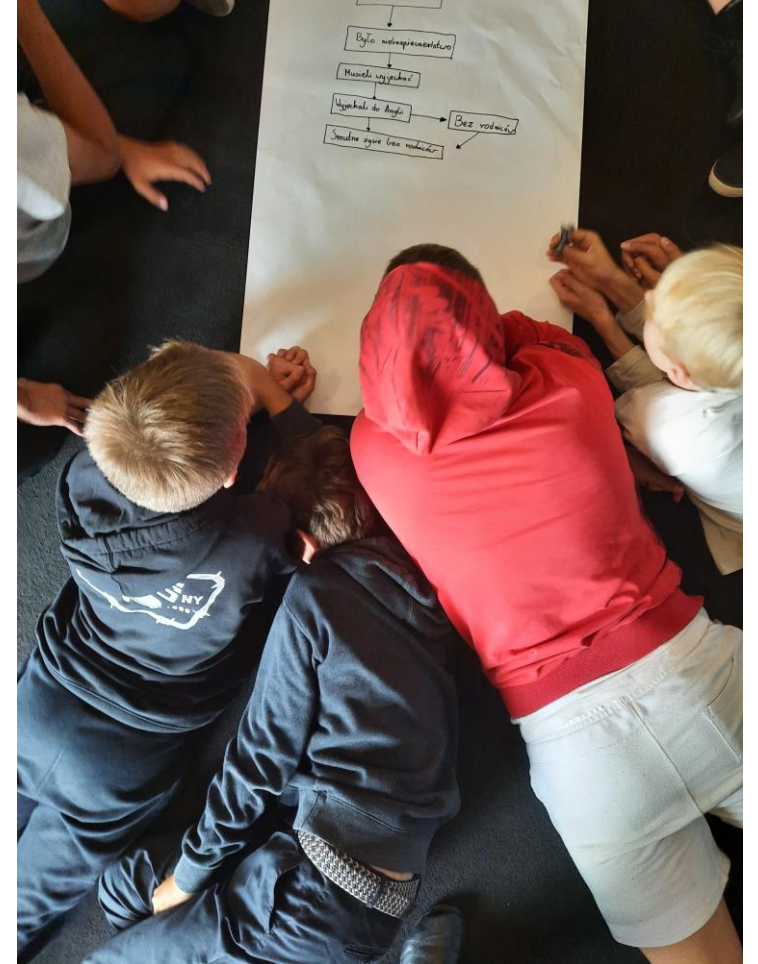
Time constraints - from an educational perspective, the most important limitation is that building and changing attitudes are processes that should be monitored for longer than a single lesson. However, schools, burdened by the curriculum, usually cannot afford to cut more school hours to dedicate time to multicultural education. The Educators try to convince teachers that further work on this process is needed;

Financial constraints - there are always more interested participants than possibilities to conduct lessons. This is addressed by seeking external grants, but it is not a stable source of funding

Risks, Threats to Implementation or for Implementation

According to the project Coordinator, there are no obstacles to implementing multicultural education throughout the project. Another organization or consortium with a different idea for such education might, however, be more competitive in the future and take over. This is not a risk or threat in itself.

Still, there is a risk that multicultural education will focus too much on easily observable manifestations of culture without delving into the beliefs, values, and convictions behind them.



What is the 'Excellence' of the Project, What is its Greatest Achievement

The long-perspective of integration education

Is the Project Considered Innovative, or Is It Modeled After Other Examples (Which Ones?)

It is difficult to consider cultural education in the form of lessons as innovative. It is a widely used and well-established tool. Similar activities take place in many different institutions throughout Poland.

Possibilities for Implementation in Other Cities and communities (e.g., in small towns, and other countries)

Conducting multicultural education is possible in other cities and communities. Such activities can take place in external institutions or schools. There are many materials available for educators who want to enhance their workshop skills or develop lesson plans. The concept of multicultural education is broad, and when undertaking such activities, it is important to consider how participants can benefit from the lessons. This helps narrow down the topics of individual lessons.

Limitations of Implementation in other locations (e.g., scale, culture, geographical location, climate, political issues, etc.)

„the larger the institution offering such lessons, the more likely schools are to trust it and allow students to participate. However, even an individual, if presenting a compelling offer, should have the opportunity to conduct lessons”


„there are no cultural limitations in Poland. Cultural limitations may exist in other countries. An essential aspect of equality education, including multicultural education, is the respect for all participants”

„the only limitation is the concern for the participants themselves – for example, one should not tell someone with refugee experience what it is like to be a refugee, as this risks re-traumatizing the person, not to mention that they usually know much better than us what it is like”


„geographical location and climate do not affect the possibility of conducting lessons. However, considering that migration, integration, and multiculturalism are politically sensitive topics, it may turn out that some topics are considered too risky by schools (for example, the issue of the humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border)”

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KONTAKT
Adres: Jągiellońska 54,
03-463 Warszawa
Telefon: +48 22 648 11 11

Godziny pracy Centrum:
Pon-Pt: 9:00 - 20:00
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**INFOLINIA DLA MIGRANTÓW
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