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## „Culturally different” children in a school environment Research reports

### Dzieci „inne kulturowo” w środowisku szkoły Doniesienia z badań

**STRESZCZENIE:** Tekst dotyczy sytuacji dzieci odmiennych kulturowo w środowisku polskiej szkoły. Celem zrealizowanego w latach 2011–2013 projektu badawczego było zbadanie przebiegu procesu „zakorzenia” i „oswajania” dzieci z trzech zróżnicowanych grup kulturowych w Polsce: Czechenów, niejednorodnych kulturowo osób pochodzenia arabskiego (Arabów) i afrykańskiego (Afrykanów). W tekście przybliżamy założenia badawcze, definiujemy niejednorodną grupę dzieci innych kulturowo oraz wskazujemy na pedagogiczną perspektywę adaptacji i funkcjonowania dzieci „Innych kulturowo” w jedno- i wielokulturowym środowisku rodzinnym i szkolnym, w grupie rówieśniczej oraz w środowisku lokalnym.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** Dzieci-cudzoziemcy, dzieci z rodzin wielokulturowych w polskiej szkole, środowisko szkoły, badania jakościowe, czecheńskie dziecięce zespoły taneczne.

**ABSTRACT:** The text concerns the situation of culturally different children in the environment of Polish schools. The aim of the research project realized in the years 2011–2013 was to study the process of „rooting” and „adaptation” (foreign children becoming „familiar with” the host society/community and the host society/community becoming „familiar with” foreign children) of children from three diverse cultural groups in Poland: the Chechens as well as the culturally heterogeneous groups of Arab (Arabs) and African (Africans) origin. In the text we present research goals, discuss a heterogeneous groups of culturally different children and point at a pedagogical perspective of adaptation and functioning of „culturally different” children in a mono- and multicultural family and school environment, in a peer group as well as in a local environment.

**KEYWORDS:** Foreign children, children from multicultural families in Polish schools, school environment, qualitative research, Chechen children’s dance groups.

## Introduction

Compared to other European Union countries – due to the realities which have conditioned the space for multiculturalism in Central European states for years – Poland is inhabited only by a small percentage of foreigners. The majority of them come from countries which are geographically and culturally close: among others, from Ukraine, Belarus and Russian Federation, while the fewest have arrived from countries which are culturally distant (from Asia or Africa) (Januszewska, Pilch, Surzykiewicz et al. 2014). Due to this fact Polish people's knowledge about such groups as, among others, Africans, Arabs or Chechens still remains fragmentary. It is often limited to information included in media reports as well as stereotypical representations from fiction and popular literature or reports by travellers and missionaries or volunteers who realize aid and developmental projects in the so called „developing” countries (Ząbek 2006, 2009; Danecka, Jaroszewska 2013, pp. 157–184.). The unfamiliarity with, lack of knowledge and direct contact with foreigners are factors which increase social distance and can lead to marginalization and cultural disintegration, including the problems of functioning of culturally different children in the Polish school environment.

The process of adaptation (and rooting) of culturally different groups in Polish conditions is very difficult. In case of Africans it is the physical (above all: visual) nature of their otherness that determines these difficulties: their exposure to aggressive, discriminatory behaviour of Poles can be the strongest (Kornak 2009). On the other hand, since 2002 Arabs have been a group with the lowest level of sympathy from the Polish society (CBOS 2002–2008) while most Chechens treat Poland as a transit country and their numerical domination in centres for immigrants is an additional factor which hinders the process of integration or effective inclusion in the social life. Africans or Arabs are perceived by the Polish society as „exotic Others” – due to the geographical distance of Asia or Africa and cultural differences (Górak-Sosnowska, Markowska-Manista 2010). Thus, their perception can be dominated by a peculiar orientalism and cultural determinism according to which cultural norms (and not individual characteristics or situational factors) determine these people's behaviour and attitudes. The majority of Arabs and Chechens are followers of Islam which projects on a negative stereotype of a Muslim „terrorist” which functions in the Polish social awareness (Mikulska 2010) and which has been intensified following the atrocities of the self-proclaimed government of the Islamic State and the terrorist attack in Paris in early 2015.

In Poland, regardless of their legal status, foreign children are included in the compulsory schooling system. Due to a substantial diversity of this group little is known about their socio-cultural functioning in the majority educational environment, among the monocultural members of the school community. Until recently the literature on the subject of children's functioning in a school environment was modest.

There are three causes of such a state of affairs which must be indicated. Firstly, between 1991<sup>1</sup> and 2001 children who awaited refugee status together with their parents and who did not possess a certificate or another document confirming school attendance abroad, were not accepted to schools. Only children living in the Central Reception Centre in Dębak attended school. Children remaining in refugee centres could only attend Polish language lessons<sup>2</sup>. In 2001 the Ministry of National Education began collecting data concerning the number of foreigners learning in Polish schools. Secondly, the data have been collected by the Education Information System, which is included in the Ministry of National Education, only since the school year 2007/2008 and it is since then that they have been available also for researchers. Thirdly, in the school year 2006/2007 the percentage of foreign students attending school increased considerably, which was connected, among others, with the sanctions that could be imposed on refugee families which did not send their children to school (for instance: withdrawal of an allowance for the child). Moreover, the amendment to Education Act of March 2009 adopted on 1 December 2010 introduced three types of support for foreign children who do not know the Polish language or who know it at a level insufficient to benefit from education:

- 1) additional, free Polish language education in the form of supplementary lessons;
- 2) additional compensatory lessons in a given subject for the period of twelve months;
- 3) aid of a person speaking the language of the student's country of origin, employed as a teacher's assistant by the school principal for the period not longer than twelve months, whose task is, among others, to help a foreign child with homework, contacts with the student's parents, solving culture-based conflicts.

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<sup>1</sup> Since Poland signed the Geneva Convention and began accepting refugees.

<sup>2</sup> K. Gmaj, *Educational Challenges Posed by Migration to Poland*, a report prepared within EMILIE project: *A European approach to multicultural citizenship: legal, political and educational challenges*, (CIT5-028205), 2009, p. 13.

These solutions allowed for stronger involvement of parents in sending their children to school.

For these reasons only in recent years (since 2010) have there appeared studies and analyses concerning the adaptation of culturally different children to the conditions of the Polish school which, nevertheless, do not address all questions and areas connected with the subject<sup>3</sup> (Błęszyńska 2010; Barzykowski, Grzymała-Moszczyńska et. al 2013; Chromiec 2004; Czerniejewska 2013; Kosiorek 2014; Linka 2014; Nikitorowicz 2005; Pawlic-Rafałowska 2010; Todorovska-Sokolovska 2009; Zieliński 2010). With regard to an insufficient scope of analysis of the literature on the subject and research on children originating from various cultural circles in the Polish school we have undertaken the task of elaborating on the knowledge about children from the most culturally distinct groups in the Polish school: of Chechen, African and Arab origin. The research was conducted in the years 2011–2015<sup>4</sup> within the research project „A culturally different child in Poland. A pedagogical study of »rooting«”<sup>5</sup>.

### **The problem and aim of the research**

The main, direct aim of the project „A culturally different child in Poland. A pedagogical study of »rooting«” – within which the present text was written – was to study the process of „rooting” and „adaptation” of children from three diverse cultural groups in Poland: the Chechens, as well as the culturally non-homogenous groups of Arabs and Africans<sup>6</sup>. The notion of rooting – with reference to a small home country – was described by the Polish sociologist Stanisław Ossowski (Ossowski 1967; 1984). The term –

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<sup>3</sup> This is mainly research concerning Vietnamese and Chechen children, however, there is an absence of research on, among others, African children and children originating from Arab countries.

<sup>4</sup> The project – no BST no 3/10-I – was financed from the means of the Academy of Special Education in Warsaw.

<sup>5</sup> The study comprised 71 categorized interviews, including: 33 with teachers, pedagogues, school psychologists and other educators, 22 interviews with refugees and immigrants, 4 interviews with persons from bilingual families, 6 interviews with NGO staff, 3 interviews with social workers and one psychologist working in a Social Care Centre, one interview with an employee of Social Aid Department of the Office for Foreigners, Benefits Section, as well as one interview with a caretaker at a Children’s Home where minors without custody remained.

<sup>6</sup> The terms: Arabs and Africans are contractual terms which include individuals who represent the cultures of Arab and African countries. Our research covered also bicultural families in which both or one of the parents have roots in an African or Arab country.

with reference to a group – was also elaborated on by the French philosopher Simone Weil (Weil 1961). Presently, the term „rooting“ is widely explored in international research. Jerzy Nikitorowicz (2009) uses a phrase „we–others–foreigners“. The etymology of the term „familiarization“, which we use in the text, has its roots in the term „familiar“ and „familiarity“.

The research aimed at discovering the formation process of the attitude of openness, readiness to encounter and cooperate in the relations: Foreigner–Other–Familiar and Other–Other in the dimension of coherence and differentiation of cultures in the Polish social reality. The undertaken research concerned a pedagogical perspective of adaptation and functioning of „culturally Other“ children in a mono- and multicultural family and school environment, in a peer group and in a local environment. Thus, the research distinguished three main aims: to learn and follow the process of formation of a „new“ (resulting from a distinct culture) identity of „culturally Other“ children and their functioning in the Polish social reality, the formation of a process of „familiarizing“ the Polish society with „culturally Other“ individuals (of Chechen, African and Arab origin) as well as the formation of relations in the encounters: Others–Others.

The research concentrated on two main study questions:

1. *How does the process of „rooting“ of culturally different children proceed in the Polish society?*
2. *How does the process of „becoming familiar“ with culturally different children proceed in the host society?*

As well as detailed questions:

- How does the process of constructing a „new“ identity proceed between Foreigner–Other–Familiar?
- How does the Foreigner „become rooted“ in the environment? How does the environment „become familiar“ with the Foreigner?
- What subjects, and based on what rules, participate in the process of adaptation?
- Around which communities – institutions (e.g. NGO, Church, school) does the process of „becoming familiar“ with the Foreigner take place?
- In which social networks do Chechen, African and Arab families function? (Only among Poles? Only among their minority groups? In other culturally diverse groups?)
- Do traumatic life experiences (among others, war experiences) help or hinder „reaching out“ to the society?
- To what degree does the school support or inhibit the process of „rooting“ and „adaptation“ of a Foreigner?

The subject of the study is a culturally „Other” child and its functioning in a family, school and local environment.

The basis of the scientific workshop is qualitative research. We employed qualitative methods, biographical method, narrative interview, participatory observation as well as data analysis and photographic method.

We used qualitative research as it allows to study social life in its natural environment (Babbie 2003) and enter the „difficult” subjects, connected with evaluations, values, and experiences of particular individuals. This enabled us to undertake the task of interpreting and understanding the researched phenomenon in a biographical, environmental, cultural and situational perspective.

### **„Culturally different” child in a school environment**

„In the social discourse children from new minority cultures are usually identified through the prism of adaptation problems, identity crisis, school difficulties and failures as well as the perception of parents as Others or Foreigners (accent, appearance, status). It is not possible to speak about a homogenous perception of migrants due to the strong diversity of this group” (Markowska-Manista, Niedźwiedzka-Wardak 2013).

The category of culturally different children is a very wide and multidimensional category as it refers not only to the children remaining on the territory of the Republic of Poland, those without the Polish citizenship, but also to children from bicultural families, children belonging to national and ethnic minorities as well as children with a migrant background. Thus, the category of culturally different children includes:

- foreign children who are not citizens of the country in which they are currently residing. According to the legislation on foreigners „a foreigner is any person who is not a Polish citizen”<sup>7</sup>;
- refugee children (and their parents or guardians) who as a result of justified fear of persecution (due to religion, nationality, belonging to a particular social group, or due to political beliefs) reside permanently or temporarily outside the country whose citizens they are and cannot, or do not wish to – due to the fear and danger to their lives and health – use the protection of their own country (Geneva Convention of 1951);

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<sup>7</sup> Based on the Act on foreigners of 13 June 2003 (Law Journal no 128, pos. 1175).

- immigrant children born in another country. The term „immigrant children” is used interchangeably with the terms: „newly arrived children”, „children from an immigrant environment”. These children come from families with various legal statuses in the host country – they can be families with full residence rights and a refugee status, families applying for an asylum or families without any residents permits (remaining in Poland illegally) (Dąbrowa, Markowska-Manista 2010);
- children with a migrant background – children whose parents, grandparents were born in a country other than the country of their origin. This term is used with reference to the second and third generation of migrants;
- bicultural children – children whose parents belong to two different cultures and nations.

Educational and nurture work, including pedeutological work with foreign children and children from bicultural families at the school level differs slightly from work in a culturally and nationally homogeneous group of students. It involves, among others, the realization of intercultural education which, as results from the records of *UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education*, is based on three assumptions:

1. respecting for the student’s cultural identity through the provision of culturally adequate education at an appropriate level;
2. providing each student with access to cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in a society;
3. providing each student with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills which will contribute to building respect, understanding and solidarity between people from various ethnic, social, religious or national groups (UNESCO Guidelines).

Mono- and multicultural students function in a school which is not only a place for teaching and learning but also a collection of various spaces (Nalaskowski 2002). The space of school is „an area where various life scenarios are realized, it accompanies our everyday life, however, we are not always aware of its existence and importance for the content and quality of our actions” (Polak 2007, pp. 63–64). It is also „an aggregate of relations between coexisting material subjects, their sizes, distances, shapes” (*Nowa encyklopedia powszechna* 1996, p. 373). Thus, school is a place of encounter, communication and teacher’s work with students, a place in which various relations are shaped. It also a place of socialization and acculturation which, in case of foreign children, involve cultural shock. Each initiated and spontaneous action, both cognitive and practical: connected with the process of school education

in the space and place of school, carries a number of positive and negative references.

The space of school is a space of work, nurture and education which influence both students and teachers. It sanctions social (material and nonmaterial) distances; it can favour close interactions, creation of bonds, hinder them or prevent them altogether, disturb or destroy them. It can encourage one to be active or discourage from undertaking action. Remaining in a foreign school environment which the student is not completely familiar with (in the case of foreign students) can become a series of interesting and constructive or burdensome and hardly tolerated responsibilities and experiences. Intercultural communication in this environment takes place in an individual and group perspective, in interpersonal communication, through a clash of certain reasons, where „we decide upon and compare the sense of symbols which we use, searching for common designations, characteristic for a particular interpersonal situation” (Misiejuk 2001, p. 162).

The space of school also designates a new quality of educational and identity processes, of social bonds – created and defined with divisions as well as access to space and (lack of) access to places (for a number of reasons) as well as to social capital. The space of school and the place which the school is as a category reflects the processes of rooting and adaptation of culturally different students as well as the formation of identity of individuals in relation to a place, an ecosystem or an environment. The places (a classroom, a playground, a school corridor, a school day room, a teacher’s room, the principal’s office and the secretary’s office) which fill the school space reflect the complexity and multidimensional character of interactions between the participants of school life: teachers and students, of communication processes and the processes of adaptation to the conditions and requirements of the school. This multidimensional character of the school environment – the place which, on the one hand, educates, nurtures, integrates, on the other hand, is a system which presents foreign children and their legal guardians with challenges, becomes a space of positive and negative relations, a space of multicultural communication in the line: teacher–student, student–student, parent–teacher. This environment is not always understandable and clearly interpreted by foreign children and parents. What can pose problems with acclimatization and everyday functioning is the visual distinctness of foreign students, their modest number, manner of communication, rules and principles of functioning in the Polish school.

The teachers noticed in the interviews that „it is very difficult to recognize the true needs of a culturally different child. Particularly when it is



distrustful and reserved and finds it difficult to trust a new, strange person”. Some children do not have any school experience as due to the problematic situation in the country of origin (war, armed conflicts) they did not have an opportunity to attend one. According to our respondents, some foreign students feel comfortable at school regardless of the level of knowledge of the Polish language or Polish culture. In the case of others the contrary is true. Some students will identify with Polish schoolmates, both with regard to behaviour, style and clothing. Others will stand out due to their originality, still others – as a result of a traditional attitude to their culture.

### **The number of foreign children in Polish schools – statistical data**

It is estimated that in the academic year 2013/2014 the number of foreign students attending Polish public and non-public preschools, primary and secondary schools was over 8 thousand (Fihel 2014, p. 8). These are both refugee children, children of individuals awaiting a refugee status as well as individuals who were granted permanent residence permit in the republic of Poland, supplementary protection, tolerated residence permit, residence permit for humanitarian reasons and temporary residence permit. Moreover, school provides education for children of seasonal employees, employees migrating from EU countries, national minorities (mainly Romani people), repatriates and children from mixed marriages (Bernacka-Langier 2010, pp. 8–9; [www.kuratorium.waw.pl](http://www.kuratorium.waw.pl) – access date: 26 February 2015). The number of foreign children in Polish schools constitutes approximately 0.06% in relation to the total school population, which, compared to Western European countries, is a marginal number<sup>8</sup>.

As certain data show approximately a thousand foreign students learn in Warsaw in public and private schools<sup>9</sup>. Valentina Todorovska-Sokolovska reports that in the school year 2006/2007 there were 1506 foreign children learning at schools in the Mazovian Voivodeship (Todorovska-Sokolovska 2010, p. 3). In June 2008 in Warsaw schools there were 753 children, 702 of whom were children from the third countries (Chrzanowska 2009, p. 2).

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<sup>8</sup> Data from the school year 2006/2007.

<sup>9</sup> The website of the Ministry of National education and the websites of departments of education of particular voivodeships do not provide official data/statistics concerning the number and countries of origin of foreign children. We drew our research on reports which appeared within various research projects and projects realized by non-government organizations. Thus, the data from various sources can differ.

Research conducted by the Main In-service Teacher Training Centre within the project „Education in the face of migration challenges”, under the substantive supervision of prof. Krystyna M. Błeszyńska<sup>10</sup>, showed that in the school year 2009/2010, 234 foreign children attended Warsaw primary and secondary schools (including 109 girls and 125 boys). Approximately 90% of them were single students (up to five pupils of particular nationality). They represented 54 countries<sup>11</sup> and three republics of the Russian Federation<sup>12</sup>. Despite a large number of foreign students included in the study, the greatest percentage of children – refugees learning in Warsaw public schools are of Chechen origin. Among the remaining refugees the majority students are from Georgia and single students from Iraq, Sri Lanka, Congo, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan (Błeszyńska 2010, pp. 23–24). Anna Bernacka-Langier reports that in the school year 2009/2010, 134 refugee children attended Warsaw schools (in four primary schools and two lower secondary schools), the largest group were Chechen students. The number of schools appears to be understated due to a large number of children<sup>13</sup>. Among immigrants (mainly economic immigrants) Vietnamese (341) and Ukrainian (263) students belonged to the majority. There were also 330 children of migrant workers in Warsaw schools – mainly non-public ones (Bernacka-Langier 2010, pp. 9–10).

Foreign children (including those awaiting a refugee status or recognized refugees) have the right to education in Polish schools, which is regulated in Education Act of 7 September 1991 (Law Journal of 2004, No. 256, pos. 2572 with later amendments) as well as the order of the Minister of National Education of 2 January 2015 on the conditions and procedures of accepting

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<sup>10</sup> The research continued between September and November 2009 and its aim was to diagnose the school situation of these children in the perception of educational centres employees. The report does not provide a detailed list of the schools in which the study was realized.

<sup>11</sup> Western Europe (Belgium, Denmark, France, Spain, Germany, Portugal, Sweden, Great Britain and Italy); Southern Europe (Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Moldavia, Romania and); Central and Eastern Europe (Belarus, Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia and Ukraine); South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia); Asia Minor and Middle East (Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates); Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia); East and South Asia (China, India, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam); Africa (Angola, Ghana, Congo, Libya, Madagascar, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan); North America (USA, Mexico), Błeszyńska 2010, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan.

<sup>13</sup> This means that 22 foreign students would have to study in each school, which is not very likely.

to Polish schools non-citizens and Polish citizens who attended schools functioning in schooling systems of other countries, as well as the organization of additional Polish language lessons, additional compensatory education and lessons of the language and culture of the country of origin (Law Journal of 2015, pos. 31). Article 94a 1 and 1a of the Act states that „Individuals who are not Polish citizens benefit from education and care in public preschools, and those who are included in the compulsory schooling system enjoy education and care in primary and lower secondary schools, art schools and centres, on the conditions applying to Polish citizens under the age of 18 or until graduation from upper secondary school”. Article 94a 4a. states that children who are not Polish citizens have the right to: „Aid from a person speaking the language of the child’s country of origin, employed as a teacher’s assistant by the school principal. Such aid is provided for a period not longer than 12 months”. Paragraph 16.1 of the order of the Minister of National Education states that: „Individuals who are not Polish citizens as well as Polish citizens who are subject to compulsory schooling or learning system, who do not know Polish language or know it at a level which is not sufficient to benefit from education, are provided with additional, free Polish language education in the form of additional Polish language lessons organized by the organ which runs the school in which the student realizes education in accordance with the core curriculum of general education”, while paragraph 19.1.: „For non-Polish citizens subject to compulsory schooling system a diplomatic or consular institution of the country of their origin functioning in Poland or a cultural-educational association of a particular nationality can organize education of the language and culture of the country of origin if at least 7 people register for this education”. The total number of learning hours of the language and culture of the country of origin cannot exceed 5 lesson hours a week. Foreign children can also take part in additional compensatory classes in a given subject for the period of 12 months. The total number of additional Polish language classes and compensatory classes cannot exceed 5 hours a week. As data indicate in the year 2013/2014 approximately 18% of children (i.e. about 1400 students) participated in Polish language classes, while compensatory classes in other subjects were attended by less than 7% (i.e. 489 students), which is a marginal number compared to the number of foreign children attending public schools (Fihel 2014, p. 8).

## **The difficulties of „culturally different” children in a school environment**

In the multidimensional environment of the Polish school, perceived in the categories of a monocultural institution, we can witness a number of problems referring to, among others, special educational needs, adaptation problems of culturally different children, differences in the functioning of Polish and refugee as well as foreign children, cultural differences (among others, in verbal and non-verbal communication, difficulties with processing information in a foreign language) and intercultural factors; finally, problems resulting from the change of educational environment and the experiences of refugeeism and migration. As Zbigniew Kwieciński indicates, there is no area of functioning in which problems do not appear (1992).

Despite numerous programs and handbooks for teachers concerning work in a multicultural classroom there are still many schools which are not substantively prepared to educational-didactic work with children from other countries and cultures. There is often a shortage of systemic actions which support schools with a large number of culturally different students – mainly refugees. There are numerous problems and difficulties in a school environment in the relation: teacher – culturally different student. The main problems include, among others, difficulties in communication and acquisition of knowledge due to foreign students' inability to speak the Polish language. Another problem is the students' low motivation to learn, which can result, among others, from the fact that parents do not pay attention to education gained in Poland due to plans to migrate to another country or to a different system of values in which education and learning are not of great importance. Moreover, the problem which can influence educational and didactic work of teachers as well the functioning of a school community can lie in cultural and religious diversity: lack of punctuality habit, displays of aggressive behaviour or lack of respect for women teachers. Yet another problem is isolation of students with a diverse cultural background by peer groups, lack of contact between teachers and foreign parents as well as children's „disappearance” from school<sup>14</sup> when their family move abroad (Dąbrowa, Markowska-Manista 2010; Nowak 2011, pp. 3–5).

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<sup>14</sup> It must be added that foreign children, like Polish children, miss lessons for various reasons. Due to cultural beliefs (most frequently: girls), unwillingness to learn, a test, oversleeping, being unprepared.

## Chechen children in a local environment – „reciprocity“ in overcoming barriers<sup>15</sup>

Foreign children often feel inferior and less appreciated at school. The teacher's task is to undertake actions which will raise their self-esteem. It is important to notice the strengths: talents, interests, abilities. One of the positive actions of pedagogues for children – refugees from Chechnya is the promotion of dance groups in the local environment. It is a frequent occurrence that schools which students belonging to such groups attend allow them to use their premises to practice and „show pride of them“ during various school and outside school events. One of the examples is a Children's Dance Group *Nohchi'o* founded by a writer, poet and social activist Marina Hulja and a Chechen Patimat Debirova. The group has existed for 9 years and gathers children from the age of 5 to 14 attending Warsaw preschools and schools as well as three children from a Dance Group *Lovzar* from Białystok<sup>16</sup> who take part, as guests, in common shows in Warsaw and other places. The students perform traditional Caucasian dances during various events and in various centres in Poland and abroad. The group has performed, among others, at schools, preschools, cultural centres, art centres, environmental community centres, in the Psychiatric Hospital in Nowowiejska St. in Warsaw, during academic conferences concerning refugees, in refugee centres, among others, at the Guarded Centre for Foreigners in Lesznowola (Januszewska draki-z-paki.pl – access date: 25 November 2013) and in Biała Podlaska, in social care centres in the Mazovian region, in remand centres and penitentiaries in Poland, as well as in Antwerp, Belgium, at the invitation of Pax Christi organization<sup>17</sup>.

The performances of children's dance groups are of great importance to Chechen children themselves as well as the local community. Thanks to the shows the young refugees can present their national dances, show their culture and at the same time express their identity. Issa Adger-Adajew writes that a girl never refuses to dance, while young men must be able to dance:

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<sup>15</sup> More on Chechen children see (Januszewska 2010).

<sup>16</sup> The *Lovzar* dance group was founded in 2008 and operates in the Youth Culture Centre in Białystok; the group is run by Achmed Tashaev. In 2014 the group took part in the program „Mam Talent“ (the Polish version of „Got talent“).

<sup>17</sup> Information received from M. Hulja during a phone interview conducted on 15 February 2015 by E. Januszewska.

„A girl’s dance expresses dignity, innocence, grace and a sublime beauty of a swan or a dove; on the other hand, a man’s dance expresses chivalry, courage, the strength of a falcon” (Adger-Adajew 2005, p. 242). Dance performances are a reflection of tradition, spirit and temperament of small Caucasian highlanders. Moreover, thanks to the performances during concerts and festivals children meet various people and new places, which allows them to learn the Polish culture, traditions and history. Dance is a source of joy for them and an opportunity to discharge their energy, to feel important and appreciated in the new host society. Thus, dance plays a therapeutic function, is a form of play and relaxation. Performances in a school environment gain particular importance: children present their abilities to their friends and evoke admiration. For some, dance is the first attempt to open up to others, overcome shyness and express themselves, which is particularly important for those children who do not know or have poor knowledge of Polish (Piegat-Kaczmarczyk, Rejmer 2010, p. 146). The performances of Chechen groups aim at overcoming barriers between the local community and refugees living in, among others, the refugee centre. They also aim at overcoming the stereotype of a Chechen terrorist, a refugee – freeloader who lives at the expense of the state and deprives Poles of jobs. They also bring joy and a getaway from the everyday reality to the sick, excluded and marginalized remaining in penitentiaries or hospitals. One of the authors commented on her blog *The School of Tolerance* that after the performance of the *Lovzar* dance group in „Got talent” the following words appeared for the first time in newspapers and on Internet pages: „These are our locals from Białystok of Chechen origin (blogiceo.nq.pl – access date: 27 February 2015). Dance proved to be a link between the refugees and the local community.

Another dance group *Dzieci Wajnachów* operates in the lower secondary school no 75 (in Warsaw) where we conducted our research. One of the teachers expresses the following opinion about the boys from this group: „They are always smiling, making jokes. They are eager to dance during breaks, on their own initiative, without music. They stomp the rhythm against the floor, clap or beat against something, so you know immediately that the Chechens are dancing. When we have school events, when we can show our pride of something, they dance. And they are very willing to do it; they put on their beautiful traditional clothes and perform in them. Recently we have had a school picnic and all Chechen mums prepared various national dishes, all of them were signed and the boys were dancing. The group also takes part in different events and through this promotes our school. We never have any doubts that when they commit themselves to something they will do it, that

they will come on that day. There was a situation that they were to perform outside but when the time came for their performance they were absent. They arrived after half an hour. They asked to move their show to the end, but it was very difficult as there was a prearranged program, schedule of the event. They have a different sense of time, they believe that they perform when they arrive. It looks nice when they are present and dance, but the organization issues are always stressful”.

### Conclusions

„On the one hand, education supports the processes of rooting in a native culture, places in the world of local communities and at the same time discovers and allows to go beyond direct experiences, notice others with their history, differences and similarities, make people aware of the peculiarity of diversity and at the same time of the common heritage of humanity” (Nikitorowicz 2011, p. 18).

In societies with a high level of cultural diversity in a culturally diverse school education and integration of the Familiar, the Others and Foreigners through intercultural contact happens every day. A multicultural school environment is an answer to the natural interactions present in an outside-school environment. In the case of Polish school environment in such specific – often monocultural conditions – the situation is completely different. This is illustrated with words from an interview conducted with one of the teachers working with foreign children: „I think that the school is not adequately prepared to accept a culturally different student. We know the legal acts and orders. There can appear difficulties with adaptation of the school to the students’ psychological, religious or cultural specificity. Communication can prove to be the main challenge. I think that religious symbols can be disturbing for some students. Others can have a problem with meals served in the school canteen. We lack experience and preparation in the sphere of intercultural education”. The school should try to foster an attitude of respect towards cultural differences and educational needs of its students: both of Polish origin and culturally diverse students. At the same time, it should establish rational limits which the students and parents ought to know and understand (Górski, Kosowicz, Marek 2010, p. 48–50). Each child, also a culturally diverse child in the environment of a Polish school is different, has diversified educational needs and its own way of establishing relations and adaptation to a school classroom as well as the space and place of school. This requires from the teacher – as the one who holds power – accepting a responsibility for ensuring



a sense of security, the quality of contacts between foreign and Polish students as well as between students and teachers. Education which Jerzy Nikitorowicz writes about in above citation, is an education which allows to adapt oneself, to become familiar and rooted – is an education which enables one to build reliable knowledge on the subject of cultural diversity, on-going solution of problems resulting from cultural misunderstandings and differences as well as builds support for students and teachers in the school environment.

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- Education Act of 7 September 1991 (Law Journal of 2004 No 256, pos. 2572 with later amendments).

„Culturally different“ children...

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Order of the Minister of National Education of 2 January 2015 on the conditions and procedures of accepting to public preschools, schools and institutions persons who are not Polish citizens and Polish citizens who received education at schools operating in educational systems of other countries, as well as the organization of additional Polish language education, additional compensation lessons and lessons of the language and culture of the country of origin (Law Journal of 2015, pos. 31).