

# MIĘDZY INNYMI – AMONG OTHERS

## Bringing Intercultural and Non-Formal Education to Higher Education Institutions

by Elżbieta Kielak, Michael Kimmig, Anna Szlęk, 2018

“Między Innymi” (engl. “Among Others”) aims at developing intercultural awareness and competence of future teachers, educators, youth and social workers and bringing Intercultural and Non-Formal Education to Higher Education Institutions. The initiative started 2010 in Poland and is a joint initiative between the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE) and the German-Polish Youth Office (PNWM).

### Między Innymi. The idea



The world nowadays is filled with diversity, mobility and constant change. Intercultural competence proves vital in various contexts - travelling, migration, exchange programs for younger and older people (studying and volunteering abroad), or working in an intercultural environment.

But how can we define intercultural competence? In our team we understand intercultural competence as a combination of knowledge about intercultural similarities and differences and how it influences people's behaviour and actions. This includes the ability to build positive intercultural relations and the ability to communicate and interact effectively and appropriately. Essential for this is an attitude of tolerance for ambiguity, cognitive curiosity and willingness to learn and change one's own perspective. All competences mentioned here are becoming indispensable in the world that we live in now.

In Poland we observe a great need to raise awareness and train skills for intercultural and multicultural encounters. To realise this we are offering two-day workshops to a group of future teachers and educators, youth and social workers or cultural animators who will have a great impact on youth in the future. We believe that their studies is the right moment to implement this. In that way, incorporating non-formal learning into a formal academic education system became also a very important aspect of our project.

### Między Innymi. The project

Our project started in 2010 as a joint initiative between the Polish National Agency of the former Youth in Action Programme (now: Erasmus+ Youth in Action Programme) by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE) (<http://www.mlodziez.org.pl/>) and the German-Polish Youth Office (PNWM) (<http://pnwm.org/>). The idea

for this stemmed from the need which both institutions recognized to start qualifying multipliers for International Youth Work and developing awareness and competence for intercultural encounters at a different angle. That's how Między Innymi („Among others“, <http://www.miedzyinnymi.org.pl/>) was born.

The main focus of Między Innymi is to provide future teachers, educators, youth and social workers with basic knowledge and skills of Intercultural Education and Non-Formal Education. For this we developed a programme for students of pedagogy - i.e. future teachers, social workers or cultural animators. This programme consisted first of five modules: Introduction to Intercultural Education, Intercultural Communication, Stereotypes, Intercultural Project Management and Intercultural Competences, as well as an introduction to non-formal learning and a presentation of programmes and activities of both organisations.

Over the years we came up with new ideas and modules, which reflect the needs of the various institutions, but also the current situation in society. That's why within our workshops we also address migration and refugee issues and discrimination through language. And we extended our approach including diversity and biographical methods.

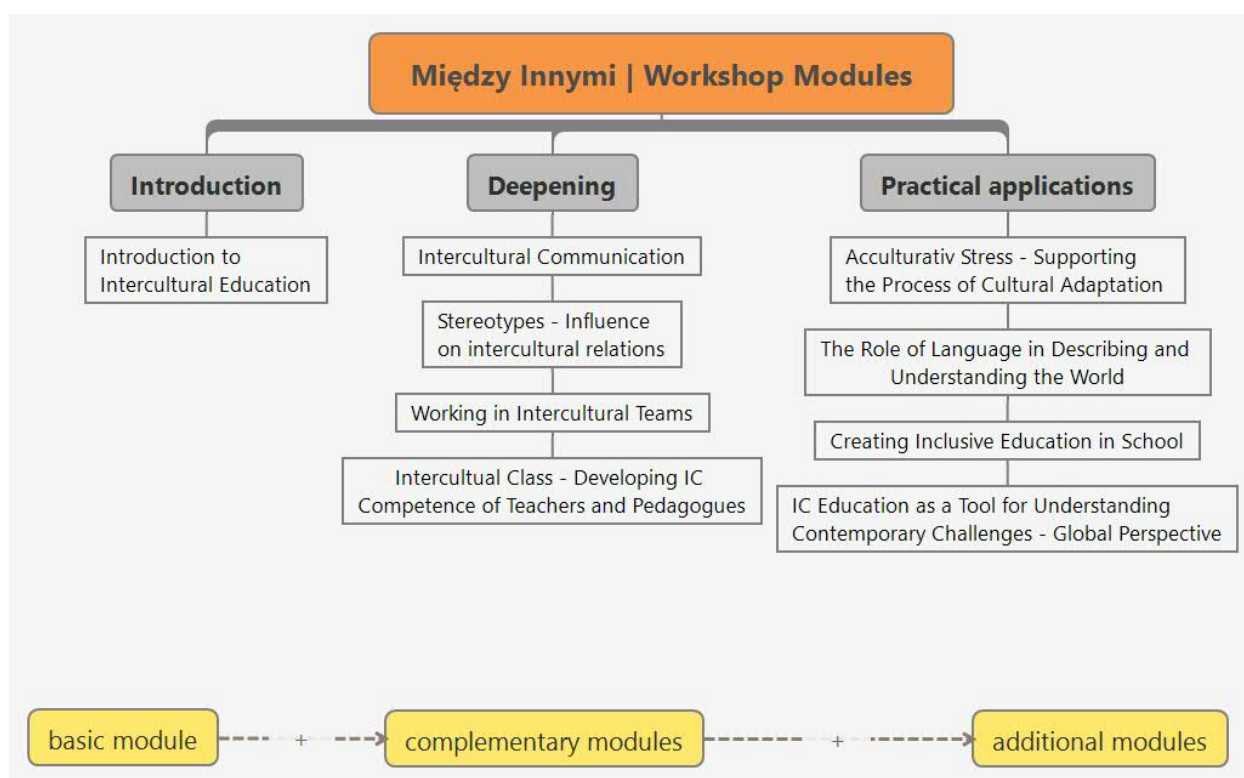


Table 1: Między Innymi | Workshop modules

We cooperate with various educational institutions and universities. Every year we are able to cooperate with 5 to 7 different institutions. In the first 5 years, between 2011 and 2016, we cooperated with 21 universities in 15 cities all over Poland and reached with out workshops more than 1000 students.

	I	II	III	IV	V	Σ
Year	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	5 Years
Modules	17	19	23	24	36	119
Students	106	183	187	221	313	1010
Towns	1	6	9	6	11	15
Universities	5	9	10	9	12	21

Table 2: 5 Year Summary of Między Innymi Activities

To realise our programme we have a group of eight trainers, supported by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE) and the German-Polish Youth Office (PNWM). Both institutions also finance the overall costs of this programme.

### Między Innymi. Our experience

The first workshops took place in October 2011. Since then we have cooperated with 21 Higher Education Institutions in Poland, e.g. Warsaw University, Łódź University, University of Social Sciences and Humanities. Whereas in the first years we focused more on bigger cities like Warsaw, Łódź, Poznań, Szczecin, Kraków and Wrocław, until now we are spreading our activities over the whole country. We have already worked in Biała Podlaska, Gdansk, Lublin, Łomża, Radom, Tarnów, Tarnobrzeg, Wrocławek and Zielona Góra.

Every workshop is evaluated by participants and the feedback is very positive. We get reassurance especially regarding two following aspects:

#### The importance of intercultural competence

Participants of our workshops stressed the importance of intercultural competence for themselves and for their future work as a teacher or youth worker.

*„I became aware, that to get to know another country, one has to go deep into culture, because what we see at first glance is not everything.”*

*"I noticed how important it is to make contact with other people and to get to know their culture, and not only rely on what I already know."*

*"I learned that there might be different perspectives in interpreting other people's behaviour."*

*"Intercultural communication is not only between two cultures, but begins between two persons."*

*"The workshop opened my eyes ... the problems surrounding us in the context of intercultural communication."*

Classes on this topic are seldom offered at universities and for some students it was their first time having classes on such topics. Although Intercultural Education is becoming more and more popular, this has not been reflected in the curriculum of teacher and youth worker education. Knowledge about other cultures as well as the ability to establish intercultural relations and communicate effectively really needs to be present in the Polish education system.

### Non-formal Education within Formal Education

Our engagement at the Universities clearly revealed that approaches to learning and education applied in Polish Higher Education Institutions do not embrace non-formal learning activities at all. Most of the classes are based on lectures or other ex cathedra methods. Only few classes introduce experiential and non-formal learning activities that actively involve students.

*"It was a very interesting experience that gave me a lot to think about. From now on I will go deeper into culture."*

*"I opened myself and started to talk and share my experiences during the workshop."*

*"I discovered what others might feel."*

*"I thought about myself and my attitudes; I knew before that every person is different and therefore should be seen differently, but the workshop increased my awareness."*

*"I take with me practical exercises that I can use in the future as a teacher."*

Again it seems that offering our workshop met the need for a broader variety of pedagogical approaches and methods, especially when it comes to future teachers and youth workers who are going to work with young people.

### Among Others. Going international...

In 2015 the first international meeting was held in Poland to connect with similar initiatives in Europe and spread the idea of Among Others. Since then, coordinators, trainers and contact persons from university meet once a year aiming at exploring how non-formal methods can help develop intercultural competence in higher education. This international Among Others events are funded by Erasmus+ National Agencies within Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCA) and focus on:

Sharing and evaluating the national project activities (ideas, context, resources and achievements),

Identifying ways of improving the recognition of Intercultural Competence (ICC)

and Non-formal learning (NFL) within Higher Education,

Developing the project's sustainability notably through the establishment of a network/community of practice and

Reviewing concept of Intercultural Competence within the European Training Strategy (ETS).

Part of the transnational network of Among others are the following countries: Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Turkey and United Kingdom. Meetings have been held in Konstancin/Warsaw, Poland (2015), Birmingham, UK (2016), Prague, Czech Republic (2017) and Istanbul, Turkey (2018).

### **Między Innymi. Some ideas and plans for the future**

We would definitely like to continue our initiative and organize workshops at different Polish universities and other institutions of higher education. In the future, we want to focus on three aspects:

#### **Increasing our activities in smaller cities and towns in Poland.**

One of the main conclusions from our evaluation meetings was that it is worth spreading the idea and our activities in smaller cities and towns of the country. While for the bigger universities our workshops may be just one part of many that are available, for smaller academic centres we may provide a very fresh attitude when it comes to both intercultural education and our methodology. It gives us a chance not only to provide knowledge and skills regarding intercultural education but also to promote non formal education by showing it can function well and effectively within the frame of formal structure.

#### **Extending our offer and experimenting with new topics and working methods.**

The topics chosen in our workshops reflect the interests and questions of our students, the needs of the various institutions, but also the current situation in society. Over the years, we came up with new ideas for modules or address current issues within our workshops. e.g. the question of migration in Poland and Europe as well as the situation of refugee, the use of language and discrimination through language.

We would like to continue trying out and implementing new methods and approaches, like working with diversity and biographical methods. And we want to extend our „normal offer” to a model with 2 times 2-day workshops for selected universities, to be able to go deeper with intercultural learning and have a bigger impact and learning outcome on students.

## Strengthening transnational cooperation in Europe.

Our intercultural cooperation reached now eight countries in Europe. The international meetings between Among Other initiatives help to share experiences and best practices and therefore strengthen our work.

### Appendix

The Story of „Among Others” | Infographic

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