Intercultural dialogue: Understanding Janusz Korczak using qualitative interviews about a Polish-German exchange project

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Abstract- The purpose of this study is to better understand the development of intercultural competence and critical cultural consciousness in the mindsets of aspiring social workers. Sixteen social work students from Stuttgart, Germany and three of their lecturers traveled to Poland to engage in intercultural dialogue with Polish students and their lecturers. Polish and German lecturers intentionally planned an intercultural educational exchange where JanuszKorczak, an educational philosopher dedicated to social justice served as an organizing influence in inquiry based learning. Together they visited places where Korczak lived in order to deepen their understanding of his contribution to educational philosophy and practice of today. Historical documents, photographs, observations, and interview data were collected to help us better understand the ways in which intercultural dialogue encourages the development of intercultural competence and critical cultural consciousness of pre-service social workers.

Keywords-JanuszKorczak, intercultural competence, critical cultural consciousness

1. Introduction

As "intercultural interactions become part of everyday life in our increasingly globalized world", developing one’s ability to act on critical cultural knowledge is essential (Perry & Southwell, 2011, p. 453). Culture has been viewed “as a system of meanings and practices that remain constant and that individuals learn from the groups with which they identify - groups that are often defined with broad racial, ethnic, and economic terms” (Godley, 2012, p. 457). However, this definition of culture has changed, i. e., educational researchers such as Cole (2010) view culture more “as shifting over time” and “as something that is revised and created through interactions between people” (Godley, 2012, p. 457). It is through intercultural communication that new cultures and communication patterns develop. Intercultural communication also includes non-verbal interactions and is “the place where both identities and cultures are formed and revised” (Godley, 2012, p. 455). In studies on intercultural communication in education, similar to the concept of culture, the concept of identity “has become more fluid and complex” (Godley, 2012, p. 459). It has been referred to as “multiple, shifting, and both reflected and shaped by human interactions” (p. 459).

The world has become more interconnected, which makes skills related to intercultural understanding and dialogue important pre-requisites for building and maintaining cross-cultural relationships. Dialogue refers to inclusive and respectful communication concerned with values, perspectives, experiences, and interpretations (Stevick, 2013; Stevick & Michaels, 2013). It refers to “open and interactive processes of communication comprising a respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups and organisations with different cultural backgrounds or worldviews” (EICCR, 2008, p. 153) and is pivotal to achieving intercultural understanding.

The concept of intercultural competence as used in this context has been defined as a process that may include revisiting historical moments that influence contemporary mindsets and practices (Bolten, 2009; Krondorfer, 2013; Schäuble&Thoma, 2006). As such, the goal is to develop a critical consciousness that gives us the ability to challenge oppression rooted in history for which have political implications in society currently. One such example is the current effects of the Holocaust on the mindsets of German students who are aspiring to become social workers. Drawing on McKenna’s (2008) model of transformative teaching and learning, the Polis and German lecturers intentionally planned an intercultural educational exchange. There is a paucity of research on excursions to memorial sites using an intercultural dialogue framework (Meseth, 2008).

Like transformative learning cannot occur if based on knowledge only (McKenna, 2008), the art of intercultural dialogue requires more than words and information. According to Diehl (2005) it needs to be learned in at least three practical ways, (1) by practicing intercultural dialogue and learning through trial and error, (2) by observing models of intercultural communication and dialogue, and (3) by critical (self-)reflection. It is through intercultural dialogue that individuals can develop culturally inclusive attitudes and behaviors necessary in a globalized world (Lim, 2001).

Internationalization and globalization are phenomena that are shaping the world in new and promising ways, providing possibilities unknown to previous generations, but also presenting challenges. This has educational implications for facilitating intercultural dialogue. The role of visits abroad for the development of global competency has been researched, for example by using the Intercultural Development Inventory (ID; Bennett et al., 2009). Williams (2005) found that interaction with locals and cultural immersion were important variables that accounted for the development of intercultural abilities. Anderson et al. (2006) found significant growth of intercultural sensitivity in participants of a short term, non-language based study visit.

Recent European scholars have questioned the necessity of cultural competence as a special competence because of its tendency to overemphasize cultural difference (Koch, 2013; Scheitza, 2007), whereas the concept of cultural sensitivity focuses more on appropriately balancing overemphasis and ignorance of cultural aspects. The following two questions guided the design of our research: (1) In what ways does intercultural dia-

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logue help foster the development of intercultural competence and critical consciousness of aspiring social workers, and (2), In what ways do contemporary social workers believe Korczak’s philosophy influences their mindsets and practices?

2. Methodology

A qualitative case study design is employed to better understand the meaning the students gave to their own development of intercultural competence and critical cultural consciousness. The in-depth focus, or the ability to “learn the intricate complexity of one case”, is a strength of case study design (Yin, 1994). The student excursion to Poland is the object of study or case. It is interpreted in the context of intercultural learning and wider social contexts that bear upon the multiple meanings of the project.

Although the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (Chen & Starosta, 2000) and the Behavioral Assessment Scale for Intercultural Competence (Koester & Olebe, 1988) are often used to measure several aspects of intercultural competence and behavioral interactions, our guiding research questions warranted an approach that more deeply helps us understand how the students made sense of their experiences. For future research, we would like to design a mixed methods approach that draws on these quantitative inventory scales as well as continuing our qualitative inquiry, for which assesses intercultural learning in a more nuanced way. Data collection occurred in two distinct, but also interrelated phases. The first phase includes the use of biographical method whereas interviews and observations were the focus of the second phase of data collection; all of which are detailed further in the following sections.

2.1. Biographical method

Biographical method was employed to analyze the historical writings of Janus Korczak. Educational biographers provide a written record of an individual by drawing on archival data in order to decide which themes will “carry better the burden of the evidence of the life” (Smith, 1994, p. 291). As educational biographers, we have the responsibility to set the theme of the life being told in our project. Moreover, we employ the scholarly historical form of biography in order to put the theme of the life history, as reported chronologically, into context. This framework allows us to draw on the work of an educational philosopher who inspires contemporary students of social work to engage in intercultural dialogue concerning ideas of pedagogy and resistance.

2.2. Interviews and observations

Interviews were conducted with four German students who participated in the Polish-German exchange project. They were one female and three male Caucasians and ranged in age from 22 to 26 years. Informed consent was obtained orally. The semi-structured questionnaire evolved around transformative learning experiences during their excursion to Poland.

In preparation for analysis, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. During the visit in Warsaw, observational data of student responses to the historical, memorial locations were also collected. In addition, photographs of interactions between the Polish and German students were taken. In particular, observations were focused on the dialogic exchanges between the students. These observations served as a point of triangulation because they provided greater context for the meanings the students attributed to their experiences.

Drawing on our theoretical frameworks of intercultural competence and critical cultural consciousness, which is discussed in the next section, we developed a focused coding scheme that allowed us to indicate cognitive, affective, and interactive domains of the students’ experience. Moreover, a focused scheme allowed us to have the structure needed to employ inter-rater reliability with our coding. We then engaged in intercultural dialogue ourselves to discuss our codes and develop the thematic findings. Our intercultural dialogue also included interrogating our biases in order to strengthen the credibility of our research. It is in this regard that our collaboration is born out of the promise and challenges approaching our work with students from a critical pedagogical framework.

2.3. Theoretical perspective

The central problem of our research resides in a restructuring political-economic context that shapes the type of intercultural interactions that occur in our increasingly globalized society. We are increasingly interconnected, but also often at a distance through images posted on the Internet via YouTube and a few words being followed on Twitter. While some media generate empathy toward cultural difference, the majority has the potential to fuel stereotypical thought. Intercultural education responds to the need for humans to gain a deeper understanding of cultural similarities and differences, especially when considering its implications on peace initiatives (Diehl, 2005). Quite simply, we want to better understand the impact an intercultural education exchange has on the mindsets of aspiring social workers. Therefore, the lens through which we viewed our inquiry falls within two areas of thought: intercultural competence and critical consciousness.

While scholars have explored intercultural competence in a myriad of ways, general consensus does exist about how to define it. In agreement with several scholars, we define intercultural competence as the ability to effectively develop knowledge about cultural similarities and differences that allows for appropriate interactions in an intercultural setting (Bennet, 2008; Deardoff, 2006; Perry & Southwell, 2011). Intercultural competence is comprised of a (1) cognitive, (2) an affective, and (3) a behavioral domain. In the cognitive domain, developing knowledge about the similarities and differences between cultures is emphasized (Hill, 2006; Pusch, 2004). In the affective domain, positive attitudes toward other cultures are required for the development of empathy, curiosity, and respect of differing cultures (Deardoff, 2006). As the cognitive and affective domains are explored, intercultural understanding and sensitivity are the desired outcomes. The affective response to intercultural difference has been referred to as ‘intercultural sensitivity’ (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003) and it is considered to be an important element of intercultural competence. With greater intercultural sensitivity, Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman’s (2003) research suggests that greater intercultural competence develops. While intercultural knowledge and positive attitudes are important, intercultural competence is also defined by the ways in which people act on their knowledge and attitudes. In the final domain, intercultural competence is understood by the appropriate behaviors people exhibit when in an intercultural situation or context.
Although knowledge, attitudes, and actions are central to intercultural competence, the question of how culture is taught is in question (Weideman, Straub, & Nothnagel, 2010). Is it enough to just teach tolerance? We are inclined to argue that just teaching tolerance is not enough. Rather we must trouble ourselves by deeply exploring the assumptions we make about our own cultural identities as well as the assumptions we make about people of differing cultures. Therefore, we extend our framework of intercultural competence to also include the development of a critical cultural consciousness (Landreman et al., 2007). Critical cultural consciousness requires developing an awareness that goes beyond institutional, historical, and political aspects of ‘culture’ toward that of critically examining culture by interrogating issues of power, privilege, and marginalization. Exploring alternative worldviews and cultural self-awareness further supports the development of cultural awareness (Bennett, 2009). Moreover, cultural awareness, in our view, includes developing intercultural communication or the “ability to effectively and appropriately communicate with people from other cultures” (Arasaratnam, 2009; Perry & Southwell, 2011, p. 456).

Thus, intercultural competence, cultural awareness, and intercultural communication interact in ways that produce a critical consciousness, which is intended to interrogate one’s own assumptions about the current social order in ways that trouble one to challenge the status quo of social injustice (Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The term critical consciousness was first coined by Paulo Freire (1973) and it describes the process of developing knowledge and skills to actively work towards social justice. Paulo Freire (1970) argued that dialogue is a way for people to develop the “true trust” needed to act in solidarity in order to transform our world. Intercultural dialogue was an intentionally planned method to help the German and Polish students develop their own sense of intercultural competence and critical cultural consciousness. Our theoretical framework gave us a way to make sense of how the students developed a deeper understanding of the diverse perspectives they presented to each other.

3. Findings

3.1. Biographical theme of the life of Korczak

Janusz Korczak (pen name of Henryk Goldszmit) was born in Warsaw and lived from 1878-1942 (sources vary). He was a Jewish-Polish physician, educator, and author and mainly became famous through his extraordinary social commitment. In 1906 Korczak went on a summer camp for children from the Warsaw slums for one month. This experience was a turning point in his life. In 1911 he became the director of Dom Sierot, a Jewish children’s home and orphanage of his own design, where he could pursue his own concept of education founded on justice according to his principles. Characteristic for his pedagogy is self-governing structures such as the Children’s court, which aimed at ensuring the basis for dialogue and fair decisions (Eichsteller, 2009; Ungermann, 2006), because “the power of the educator is greater than his competence” (Korczak cited in Ungermann, 2006, p. 142).


When the war broke out in 1914, Korczak was 36 years old and was called into the Russian Army as a physician. This is when he wrote the well-known book “How to love a child”. In 1919 Korczak returned to Warsaw, where he founded the orphanage Nasz Dom for Polish Christian children. According to Korczak (1919), children have three fundamental rights, 1) to their own death, 2) to the present day, and 3) to be whatever they desire to be. According to Beiner (2012) those statements summarize the main content of Korczak’s entire work. Korczak was referring to how parents control their children in fear of death that children are so severely restricted from taking risks that create dynamic life experiences. The second right proposed by Korczak stresses that we focus on child development for future purposes rather than on the present moment. The last right encourages us to accept children for who they are, both in terms of possibility and shortcomings.

The theme that guides the development Janusz Korczak’s biography is that of selflessness and respect. Korczak’s pedagogy of respect is best illustrated by his well-known quote, “There are no children, there are only human beings”. Another one of his often cited statements is the following, “You say, ‘The exposure to children is exhausting.’ I say, ‘You are right.’ You say, ‘As we have to bend down to their concepts. Bending down, looking down, bowing, demagnifying ourselves.’ I say, ‘This is not what is exhausting. It is rather that we must rise up to their feelings. Rising, reaching out, standing on our toes, stretching in order not to hurt them.’” (Korczak, 1919).

In Korczak’s view, self-knowledge and self-reflection are very important. He writes, “If you want to educate children, you must create your own life richly. Read, go to the theater, love nature, try to feel yourself as deeply and as often as you can. Everything that happens inside of you, everything, that may come to life inside you, is a benefit for pedagogy” (Korczak, 1919). A pre-condition for understanding oneself and a child is reflection. This is illustrated by Korczak’s probably most famous quote, “Understand yourself, before trying to understand children. Recognize your abilities, before you start defining children’s rights and duties.” (Korczak, 1919).

In his children books Korczak uses stories in order to explain the dilemmas of the adult world and the necessity for assuming responsibility in decision-making processes and in matters that occur in relationships with others. Korczak’s children’s book “King Matt the First” from 1929 has been translated into nine languages. It is a parable about a boy who becomes king and starts ruling the kingdom, but he soon realizes that power is not enough; true trust is best interests we make according to his principles. In the historical, and political aspects of ‘culture’ toward that of critically examining culture by interrogating issues of power, privilege, and marginalization. Exploring alternative worldviews and cultural self-awareness further supports the development of cultural awareness (Bennett, 2009). Moreover, cultural awareness, in our view, includes developing intercultural communication or the “ability to effectively and appropriately communicate with people from other cultures” (Arasaratnam, 2009; Perry & Southwell, 2011, p. 456).

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3.2. Thematic Analysis of the Interview and Observational Data

In March 2013, sixteen social work students traveled to Warsaw to connect the teachings of Korczak to their contemporary pedagogical development. Three of their lecturers provided this opportunity for the purpose of strengthening their intercultural competence, which previous studies suggest enhance intercultural understanding and sensitivity (Kitsantas, 2004; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004). Moreover, the lecturers intentionally planned situations that would create space for intercultural dialogue between the Polish and German students (Ullrich et al., 2014). Specifically, McKenna’s (2008) transformative learning model served as a guide to their pedagogical approach. McKenna (2008) stresses that transformative teaching and learning is a non-linear process that consists of the following mutually dependent phases: 1) information; 2) integration; and 3)
transformation. We extend her theoretical model in our analysis by connecting McKenna’s (2008) phases to our conceptualization of intercultural competence and critical cultural consciousness.

3.2.1 Themes emerged.

In the information phase, two group meetings with just the German students were held in order to discuss organizational issues and to clarify expectations and fears about the upcoming excursion. A reader was compiled, which provided in-depth readings related to different aspects related to the study abroad such as intercultural exchange (Kuleta-Hulboj, 2011), memorial pedagogy, and culture of memory (Meseth, 2005) as well as information on the history of Poland, e.g., the Warsaw Ghetto and the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. During the first joint Polish-German meeting of the trip, the film ‘Korczak’ by Andrzej Wajda (1990) was shown. This biographical picture, a black and white production, which contains scenes constructed from archival footage of the Warsaw ghetto, documents JanuszKorczak’s life based on “The Ghetto Diary” from 1990. Following the viewing, Polish and German students and lecturers shared their thoughts and impressions in mixed groups. Multiple perspectives emerged within the small group discussions. Family history references with regard to the period of National Socialism were made and questions related to national identity were voiced. Personal experiences of prior confrontations with this historical period were discussed and questions of guilt and responsibility were raised as stories from family biographies were shared.

An important theme related to this phase, which emerged from the interviews was “the power of film” as a tool for developing critical cultural consciousness, self-awareness, and a sense of national identity. For example, one student said, “I felt very German when the lights came on and we were looking into the eyes of our fellow Polish students.” According to McKenna (2008) the focus of this stage is in the process of transformative teaching and learning is in acquiring knowledge, developing a deeper comprehension of past events, and it is characterized by direct instruction.

In the integration phase, we visited the historical places where Korczak lived and worked. This included his former orphanage and the Warsaw ghetto. The ghetto tour was prepared and carried out by our Polish hosts. At significant points, the students read aloud important sections from JanuszKorczak’s writings to the whole group, thus encouraging all participants to reflect on the meaning and relevance of Korczak’s ideas while also imagining Korczak at work in those historical spaces. One student remarked, “to actually walk in Korczak’s footsteps and to learn more about his life really deepened my understanding of his main goals for education.” During our tour through the former ghetto of Warsaw it became almost tangible for us what Korczak may have felt when he had to witness his dream of a better world crumbling down.

We called the theme, which emerged in this phase “at a loss for words”. It comprises student responses related to the emotional override they experienced at the “Umschlagplatz”, the final stop of our tour in Warsaw. Several student responses were related to the emotional impact of visiting a memorial place with their loss of words to describe their experience in tandem with their reflections on their own family history. As one student said, “I read all those names and I was wondering, do I have, are there, could it be that I find a family member’s name here?” The main focus of this stage of transformative teaching and learning is on facilitating dialogue and exchange, thus providing space to discover the relevance of past events for today. The connection of the students’ experiences during the first two phases to their personal and professional situation became even more apparent in the third and final stage of transformative learning.

In the transformation phase, where information and integration culminate into a transformative learning experience, the theme “stream of consciousness” emerged. Evidence for this theme was two-fold. Students voiced their unwillingness to stand by when witnessing contemporary xenophobia, racism or injustice, thus indicating increased sense of their critical cultural consciousness, as one student said, “I think that from every visit to another country I have taken away the experience of a clearer sense of what it means to be German, in what ways I can assume responsibility for it, and how I can contribute to a better world.” They also mentioned their hope to become change agents within the profession of social work.

The final theme evolved around the “practice relevance of Korczak’s ideas”. The students reported an advanced knowledge of Korczak’s life and a deeper understanding of his work, while they also questioned how to put his principles into practice. One student commented, “the respect that Korczak had towards all human beings, I think, that impresses me most.” Both themes are related to the main characteristic of this stage of transformative teaching and learning, which is characterized by moving from a level of knowing and understanding to that of being able to take action to address situations or injustices. At this deepest and broadest stage of learning according to McKenna’s (2008) model, all participants (learners and teachers) recognize that they have skills and behaviors to offer to their communities and to the world, which can make a difference. It is at this stage, where a goal beyond all educational goals is achieved, which McKenna names nurturing the “generosity of spirit” (p. 89).

4. Discussion

In line with our theoretical framework (intercultural competence, critical consciousness, and transformative learning associated with intercultural dialogue in education), our first research question aimed at understanding the role of intercultural dialogue in fostering the development of intercultural competence and critical consciousness in aspiring social workers. Our findings suggest that intercultural dialogue embedded within a transformative teaching and learning process is an effective method for fostering the development of intercultural competence and critical cultural consciousness. Data collected also confirms more recent views on cultural competence as a “fuzzy construct” (Bolten, 2011) overemphasizing difference, e.g., in one interviewee’s remark that “language seems to be the only difference”. In our assessment of the German students’ development of cultural competence and critical cultural consciousness, the evidence suggests that such development is a non-linear process from intercultural understanding to intercultural sensitivity to intercultural competence. Much like ‘intercultural sensitivity’ is not developed “in a step wise fashion” (Perry & Southwell, 2011, p. 455), it is likely that processes of transformational learning move forwards and, depending on specific contexts and situations, they may also move backwards.

The medium of film was engaged to support “perspective recognition and caring that is part of historical empathy” (Stoddard, 2012, p. 286), which is considered key to the development of democratic citizenship skills (Barton &Levstik, 2004). Using film to “promote aspects of democratic education such as deliberation and examination of (…) difficult issues and events” (Stoddard, 2013, p. 272), proved to be a helpful method; however, challenges were also voiced. One student remarked that watching the film at the first meeting with our Polish hosts was getting “in medias res” quite steeply and that starting with getting to know each other using “lighter” activities may have been less challenging. Having said this, he
remembers that following the film all participants engaged deeply in discussions and deliberations of historical events, which may not have resulted from using other types of media such as group-building games.

It was important to intentionally plan for opportunities for dialogue, for example by providing structure in organizing discussions in small groups based on country of origin. For the discussions, a guiding structure was provided, using techniques which ensure that reflections are conducted in a way that allows for intercultural dialogue. Lecturers suggested some initial open-ended questions to the groups in order to encourage the sharing of reflections. The use of dialogue to develop intercultural competence resonates with the Korczakian principle of respect. Not only did we intend to explore Korczak’s life further during the intercultural education exchange, but we also practiced his belief about the importance of dialogue to the process of learning. By encouraging intercultural dialogue, Korczak’s idea of respect for individuality was put into practice (Berdning, 2013).

When it comes to exploring the students’ perspectives about the relevancy of Korczak’s ideas to their current practice in the field of social work (second research question), we found that the students, in fact, did believe that his ideas have practice relevance. While the students’ experience in Warsaw advanced their knowledge of and appreciation of Korczak’s ideas, they also questioned how to put several of his ideas into practice. The visit to Treblinka, in particular, left many of the students “at a loss for words.” Experimental learning within an intercultural context was essential to how the students connected Korczak to their contemporary aspirations as social workers. Similar to McKenna (2008), Köbler (2010) asserts that historical learning through the appropriation of facts alone is not conducive to consciously connecting the past to the present condition. The same is true for experiential learning. Experiences and adventures offer “a basis for the possibility of learning” (Steinebach, 2007, p. 115). But it is only through reflection and dialogue that conclusions for the present are drawn from history (Bernhard, 2011). There is also a parallel between research on intercultural learning and McKenna’s model of transformative teaching and learning in that experiential learning is considered to be more effective than language learning at home or in a classroom. Similarly, findings from interview and observation data used in this study indicate that the experience of physically being at the memorial site Treblinka had a strong emotional impact on them.

Reflecting on the relevance of their experiences during the excursion both personally and professionally, the potential of experiential learning for the transformation of preconceptions or intolerance towards certain ethnic groups became clear (“stream of consciousness”). Finally, and again very much in line with Korczak, creating a “respectful and protective atmosphere” as one of the senior lecturers who accompanied the excursion described it, allows for processes of reflection and transformative learning. As Leon Edel (1984) reminds us, “biographers write lives”, we hope that educational biographers write and transform lives much like how the students of our study were inspired to engage in intercultural dialogue, as a result of studying the life and ideas of Janus Korczak (p. 23).

5. Conclusion

The goal of this project was to bring together students and scholars from Poland and Germany to share and exchange perspectives and experiences on learning about the central themes of JanuszKorczak’s life and pedagogy. The focus was on Korczak’s pedagogy of respect and on his contribution to nowaday’s educational practice in social work, special education, and other pedagogical contexts in Poland and Germany. Based on this idea, an exchange project for students from both countries was planned, which enabled students to understand Korczak’s writings on a deeper level.

Technology and globalization have made intercultural communication a very important skill, therefore “educators will need to dedicate more time and effort to learning about the various and hybrid communication patterns their students use and to developing more productive strategies to teach intercultural communication to all students.” (Godley, 2012, p. 475) Creating possibilities for intercultural dialogue is one such way to accomplish this. It is important to provide opportunities, where questions about the violations of human rights and social justice during the time of National Socialism, can be raised, discussed and reflected upon in the light of current questions of intercultural learning in an era of globalization.

The project was evaluated qualitatively and findings indicate that student reception of Korczak’s writings as well as processes of intercultural dialogue explored were very rich. The method of qualitative interviewing is appropriate in that it allows to better understand the complexity of the experience of intercultural dialogue and its impact on intercultural competence than the use of scales and inventories. In addition, it encourages participants to reflect on and verbalize their learning experiences, which may further promote transformative learning. Findings suggest that dialogue plays a crucial role for transformative learning in the cognitive, attitudinal, and behavior-related dimensions of intercultural competence. Many statements reflect a deeper level of knowledge and understanding both with respect to intercultural competence and to personal and professional growth. Engaging in intercultural dialogue enhanced the development of their critical consciousness and facilitated their professional growth as culturally competent social workers. Evaluating students’ learning experiences related to their visit to the excursion to Poland, the biography of JanuszKorczak, and the relevance they attribute to their experiences, yielded important insights for improving future intercultural exchange projects. More in-depth research is needed to examine the effects of the Polish-German exchange program on knowledge, attitude, and behaviors of both Polish and German students and lecturers.

It is clear that education in general may contribute to the enhancement of intercultural competence in particular with respect to cultural knowledge, but more research is needed on the question of how intercultural awareness, attitudes, and skills can be influenced positively. Interviewing the Polish students when they come to visit Germany as part of the intercultural education exchange is one way we hope to unpack further meanings. The established intercultural relationships are a solid base for ongoing intercultural dialogue.

Overall, findings from this study support the idea that intercultural educational exchange projects seem to enhance the development of mindsets, which are characterized by self-awareness, cultural sensitivity, openness, and curiosity towards others. However, a certain level of these abilities, attitudes, and skills also seems to be a pre-condition for entering into intercultural dialogue related to historical learning, about Korczak and his role during the time of WWII, and implications for today. For example, given that a total of 180 students was offered the opportunity to participate in a one-week excursion to Poland and that funding was available for a group of 20 students (not including the three lecturers), a relatively small group of 16 students signed up for it and actually participated. Committing to a 17-hour bus-ride suggests student characteristics such as intercultural curiosity and a desire for professional development, which seemed to be a pre-requisite for transformative learning and enhanced...
critical consciousness. Experiential learning and intercultural dialogue are crucial elements for the growth and development of active global citizenship skills (McKenna, 2008), which remains a lifelong task as we strive to be transformed into informed and critical global citizens who are willing and competent to make this world a better place.

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7. References


Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.


