



Developing children's intercultural competence and creativity



Dorota Dziedziewicz, Aleksandra Gajda, Maciej Karwowski*

Creative Education Lab, Department of Educational Studies, Academy of Special Education, Szczesliwicka St., 40, 02-353 Warsaw, Poland

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ABSTRACT

An intervention study examined the effectiveness of the Creativity Compass program, which aimed to develop intercultural competences and creativity in children. One hundred and twenty-two children aged 8–12 years old took part in the intervention. The results indicated that the program was highly effective in stimulating creative abilities and moderately effective in developing intercultural skills. These results provide evidence that effective stimulation and development of both creative abilities and intercultural skills is possible and may provide a way of preparing children for life in a globalized and multicultural world.

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1. Introduction

Both intercultural competence and creativity are crucial in the contemporary world. Multicultural communities exist across the world due to global growth in immigration, emigration and migration of populations (Berry, 1990). It is therefore important to enhance the skills of teachers and educators in these areas so they can instill an attitude of respect and sensitivity in children and develop their understanding of cultural diversity (Ponciano & Shabazian, 2012). There is also a need for educational programs that help teachers to teach difficult issues related to cultural diversity, multiculturalism and anti-discrimination (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006).

Contact with people from other cultures makes it possible to develop outside-the-box behaviors and break habits which are inhibiting creativity (Maddux, Leung, Chiu, & Galinsky, 2009). Intercultural and multicultural experiences may also play a role in developing personality traits that are important for creativity. However although there is a need for interventions to promote cultural sensitivity and creativity, only few programs which aim to develop these skills in children exist (Subramaniam et al., 2009). This article addresses this gap, presenting an investigation of the effectiveness of a new program called Creativity Compass, which aims jointly to develop children's cultural sensitivity and knowledge, as well as creativity. The program's effectiveness in children between 8 and 12 years old is examined. To date there have been few studies devoted to studying cultural competences and creativity in children (DoBroka, 2012; Orly & Maureen, 2008) so the results presented below may contribute to our understanding of the effectiveness of such educational interventions.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +48 600456102.

E-mail addresses: maciek.karwowski@gmail.com, mackar@aps.edu.pl (M. Karwowski).

1.1. Education for intercultural experience

Intercultural competence is defined here as the skills needed to function effectively in interactions with people who differ from an individual linguistically or culturally. In describing these competences several other terms are used, such as intercultural communicative competence, transcultural communication, cross-cultural adaptation, and intercultural sensitivity (Fantini, 2000). Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman (2003) highlighted the differences between intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity, the latter being associated with perception of and respect for cultural diversity. Intercultural sensitivity is often treated as a synonym for communicative competence or intercultural awareness (Chen & Starosta, 2000). 'Competence in intercultural communication' is the inclusive term for cognitive intercultural awareness, cross-cultural behavioral skills (intercultural adroitness), and affective intercultural sensitivity (Chen & Starosta, 2000). Intercultural sensitivity is defined as the desire or motivation to understand, appreciate, and accept the differences between diverse cultures (Chen & Starosta, 1998).

Aside from intercultural sensitivity, intercultural competences include sense of national identity: the sense of belonging to a particular nationality, which is shared with a group of people and is independent of citizenship status. Sense of national identity is not an innate characteristic, it is based on knowledge about one's own country gained in everyday life and education. This knowledge includes awareness of national symbols and colors, language, the country's history, national awareness, blood ties and culture (Smith, 1993). Cultural self-awareness is an essential component of intercultural learning; if students do not have an understanding of their own culture as a reference point, it is difficult for them to recognize and deal with cultural differences.

The development of intercultural competence in childhood is based on increasing awareness of the diversity of cultures and encountering interculturalism in everyday situations (Kim, Greif Green, & Klein, 2006). Even conversations about cross-cultural differences strengthen children's ability to identify situations where they can behave with more sensitivity to other cultures (DoBroka, 2012). Based on an analysis of similarities and differences between peers in early childhood it was reported that the appearance of appropriate remarks about racial and gender differences provides the foundation of stable identity (Ponciano & Shabazian, 2012).

Intercultural education is based on the concept of social equality regardless of race, social class, language, or culture (Boutte, 1999). Literature, history, and books on intercultural topics are frequently used to develop children's intercultural awareness and sensitivity. Subramaniam and colleagues (2009) used reading of books in foreign languages to strengthen preschool children's cultural sensitivity and demonstrated an increase in interest in and positive attitudes to other cultures. A series of lessons on intercultural subjects in Bedouin schools in Israel (Orly & Maureen, 2008) resulted in a decline in negative stereotyping, indicating that this type of education, in the form of discussions about daily life situations or reading multicultural books and stories, may strengthen intercultural sensitivity. Such programs should target young children, because stereotypes are shaped during childhood and reinforced during adolescence (Powlishta, Serbin, Doyle, & White, 2004).

1.2. Multiculturalism in Poland

The cultural diversity of contemporary Poland differs significantly from historical levels. Between the 15th and 17th centuries Poland was inhabited by diverse nationalities and ethnic groups, including Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews and Germans. During the pre-Second World War period numerous ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural groups lived Polish territory. Only after the Second World War, with the reorganization of Polish borders and the resettlement, did this previously diverse country become nationally and culturally almost completely homogenous (Davies, 1986). The socio-political transition period after 1989 saw a revival of multiculturalism (Mucha, 1996). Entry to the European Union reinforced this process and enhanced Polish ethnic consciousness (Iglicka, 2004).

The 2011 National Census of Population and Housing showed that the population of Poland is predominantly a homogeneous group of Polish nationals (91.6%). About 2.17% of respondents declared joint Polish and other national-ethnic identities, whilst 1.44% declared non-Polish identity. Larger cities, especially Warsaw, are the most common destination for foreign immigrants: 86% of Chinese immigrants living permanently in Poland, 73% of Vietnamese, 30% of Ukrainians and Russians are resident in Warsaw and its surroundings.

Foreigners living in Poland are a small but diverse group and their number is gradually increasing. Immigrants coming to Poland include people coming for education or work who do not wish to settle permanently, returning Polish nationals, asylum-seekers and temporary political or religious refugees, transit immigrants and people wishing to permanently settle in Poland. The study 'Immigrants in Poland', interviewed more than 10,000 immigrants from 131 countries and showed that the percentage of people living in Poland temporarily but wishing to settle permanently increases with the duration of stay in the country (Information of Research on Immigration Resources, 2008).

A constantly increasing number of foreign residents, necessitates well-trained staff who can deliver integration programs, as Poles do not possess sufficient knowledge about the foreigners (Kasowicz & Maciejko, 2007). Such educational activities would be expected to take place mainly in large cities, where most foreigners settle. These considerations led to the development of the Creativity Compass program which was delivered in the Polish capital, Warsaw.

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