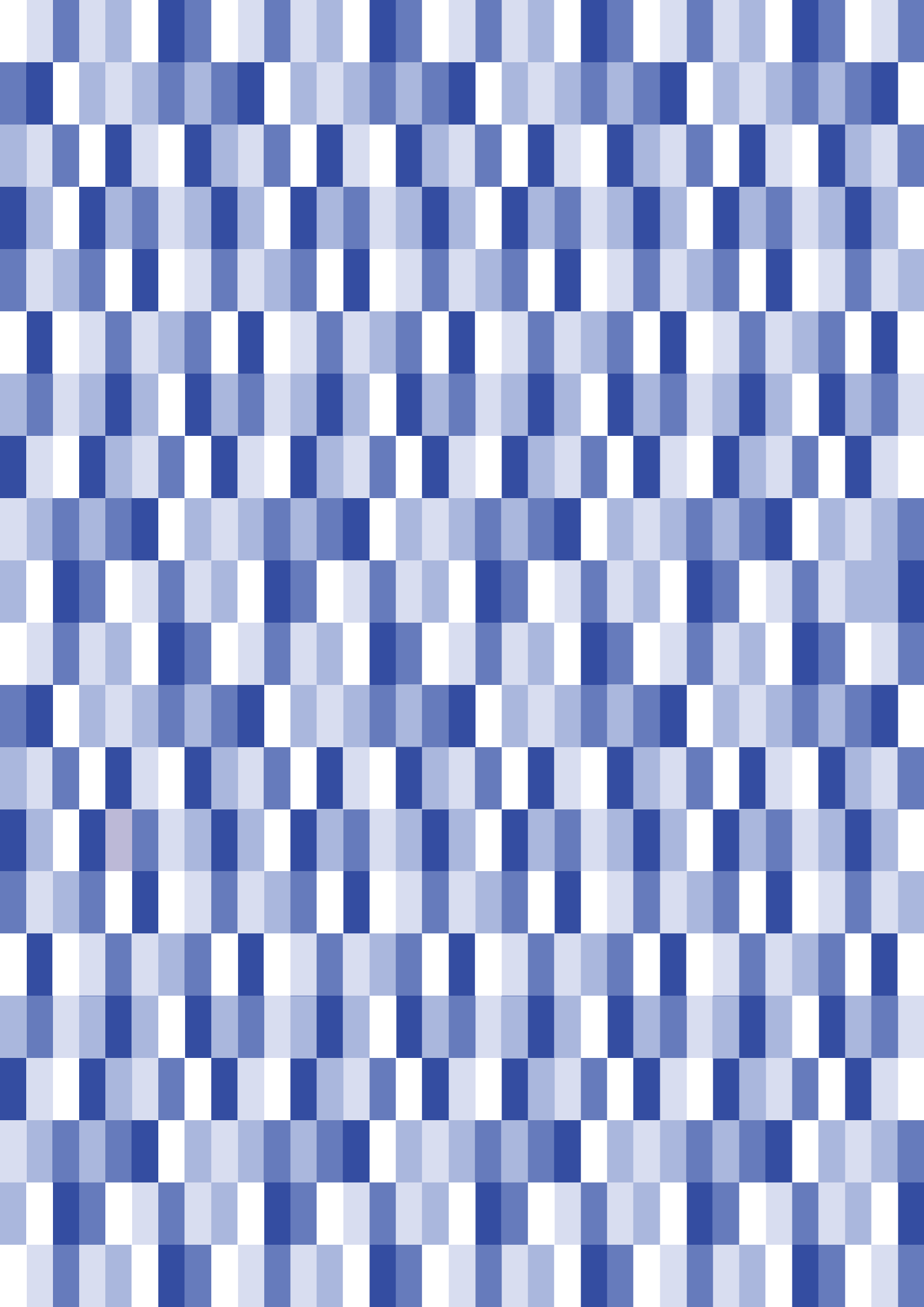




# In-between Cultures

How to work effectively in a multicultural and multilingual group of Teaching English in Poland participants



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# Introduction

In the 32nd year of the Teaching English in Poland program, the American volunteers, together with their leader Kristin Miller, proposed a new slogan for it, a slogan of changing the world with conviction, to which any person can contribute (*One person can change the world*), that can serve as a guiding principle. TEIP camp staff from Poland, Ukraine, and the USA took on the task of equipping participants with tools that can help in accomplishing it. We have many such tools in our program, with the two of them of greatest importance. The first one is learning language and communication skills. The other one involves making an effort to understand and accept a foreign culture. As Marta Bujakowska writes, it's about immersing oneself as deeply as possible into a new world. Language is a mediator in this process. The key word is 'want'. As part of the TEIP program, we create favorable conditions for participants to learn about other cultures and be guides to their native cultures. The program is designed so that participation can be treated as an adventure and a chance to make friends.

Following Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence, cited by Anna Grabowska, we can conclude that participants receive a sizable portion of knowledge about each culture (Polish, American, and Ukrainian). They also have a chance to hone their interpretive skills in an atmosphere of openness, which allows them to see similarities and differences. The duration of the camp, however, is limited. Even though some of the campers will stay in touch with one another, we are aware that this is only a small step in the right direction. Developing intercultural competence never ends.

In the TEIP camp program, there is a special time planned for the participants to present their native cultures. The 'lessons after lessons' are no less important. Joining in the interaction of representatives of three different cultures during free time is an opportunity to learn from each other and enjoy diversity. These experiences are also important for teachers. They, too, develop their own intercultural competence too. They realize that sensitivity to another culture is necessary to teach a foreign language effectively. Usually, however, they gain much more. American teachers come with a strong motivation to get to know Poland, which takes place during a several-day tour of the country.

When you overcome language barriers and learn more and more about each other's cultures, you can change the world together, as shown in the videos from this year's program, which I strongly encourage you to watch.

Grażyna Czetwertyńska

President of The Kosciuszko Foundation Poland

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## Table of contents



• <b>ABOUT THE TEACHING ENGLISH IN POLAND PROGRAM</b> Aleksandra Kujawska	9
• <b>IN-BETWEEN CULTURES AND LANGUAGES. THE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS AND TEACHERS</b> Anna Grabowska	14
• <b>THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS THE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION TOOL OF LANGUAGE CAMP PARTICIPANTS</b> Marta Bujakowska	24
• <b>TEACHING ENGLISH IN POLAND PROGRAM CHANGES YOUR LIFE</b> Patricia Kosciuszko Collette	28
• <b>BRIDGING BORDERS AND HEARTS: TEIP'S UNFORGETTABLE SUMMER IN POLAND</b> Kristin Miller	32

# About the Teaching English in Poland program

Aleksandra Kujawska

The Teaching English in Poland (TEIP) program implemented by the Kosciuszko Foundation is a form of English language promotion among Polish youth. It combines leisure with improving English language skills and learning about the elements of US culture. The formula of the summer or residential camp has basically remained unmodified for 30 years: we offer an opportunity to improve English under the supervision of experienced American teachers during a two-week vacation camp. In the mornings, there are usually classes in groups formed according to language proficiency level and age, while the afternoon consists of workshops in groups that bring together young people with similar interests and talents. American teachers and their assistants conduct interactive classes in English that allow Polish students to enrich their vocabulary related to US culture, history, geography, customs, and traditions. It's a time when young people learn to talk about their emotions, express their opinions, and discuss a song or movie. They can talk about basically any topic. There is only one condition: you have to speak English. American teachers are recruited by the Kosciuszko Foundation team in New York. It's an open-ended process, with the idea of teaching English as an essential component. In language classes, the emphasis is on developing and improving communication skills and, above all, on breaking down barriers that can prevent pupils from speaking English. "The biggest benefit of participating in the TEIP program is learning without the pressure imposed by school. Students learn so much in two weeks. Without even realizing they are gaining knowledge. We focus

on the practical use of English," says Kristin Miller, TEIP volunteer leader, about our method of work. We strive to ensure that camps conducted as part of the TEIP program are the result of close cooperation between Polish and American staff members. This allows us to introduce qualitative changes both in the methodology of language teaching and in the preparation of Polish and American staff to work together at the camp. This yields better educational results and greater student and parent. We hope that this will result in increased interest from other centers in joining the TEIP program and that the camps will become an attractive offer for volunteers, who will be able to improve their inter-cultural dialogue, linguistic, and so-called soft skills. For each language camp, a team of more than a dozen teachers and assistants from the US arrives in Poland. Its leader is responsible for the preparation of the language curriculum and its smooth implementation. The Polish camp manager is responsible for all activities carried out at the camp. The staff consisting of Polish tutors and teachers also reports to the Polish head. Since 2018, TEIP has been undergoing major changes. First of all, we are adapting it to the dynamic social and economic situation in Poland. We hope to spread our offer primarily to students from outside of metropolitan areas, where opportunities for meeting a native English speaker are significantly limited. The Kosciuszko Foundation Poland team not only seeks to establish cooperation with more schools and community organizations but also systematically standardizes TEIP's curricula, evaluation methods, and the conditions of participation for students and volunteers. One could conclude that the TEIP program

is in a constant process of change, which is obvious if we consider that we are teaching about two countries (Poland and the US) whose society, culture, and economic situation are also constantly evolving.

## THE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE TEIP PROGRAM

### Cultural exchange:

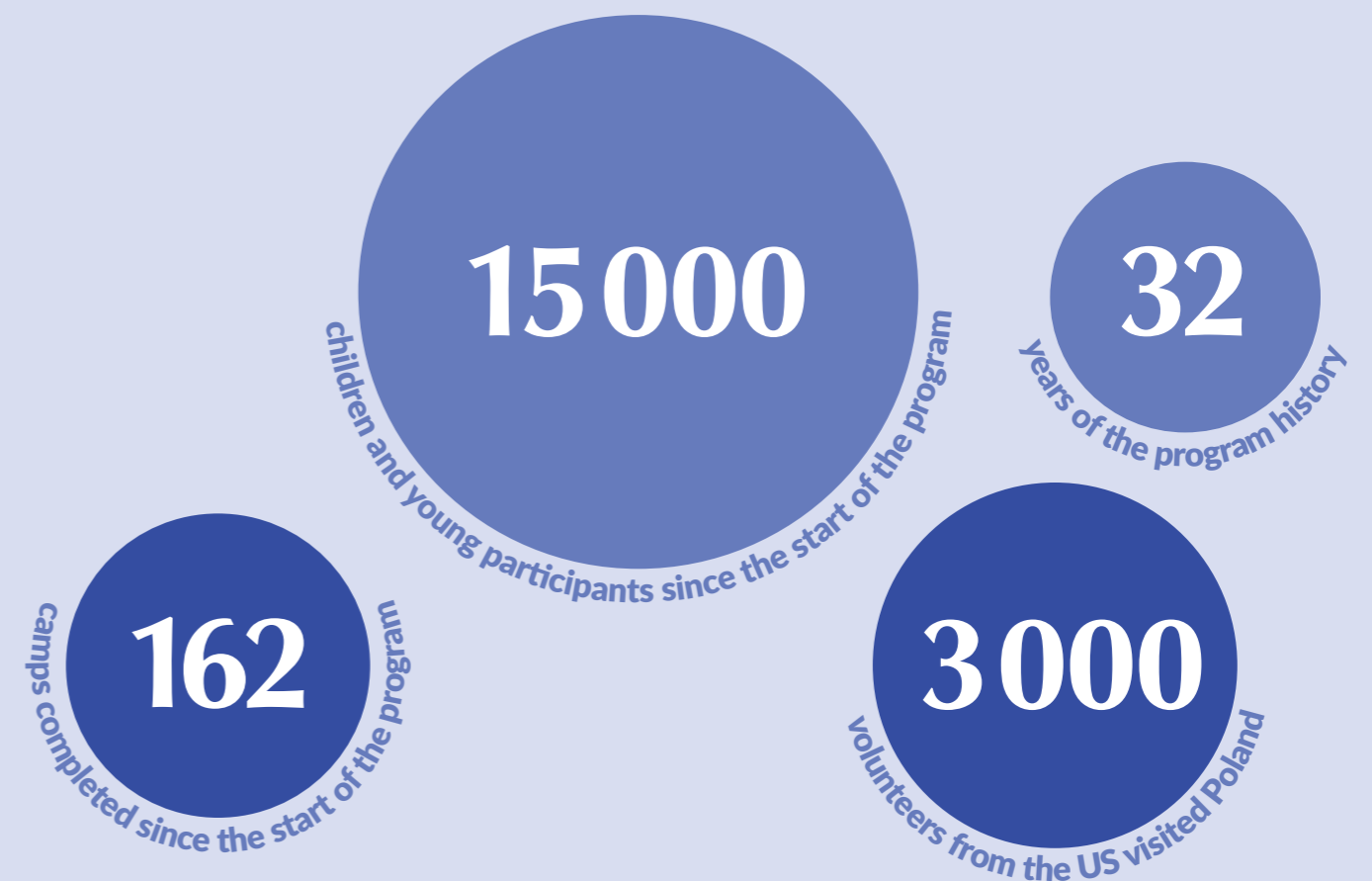
- Enabling financially disadvantaged children and young people from Poland to immerse themselves in the English language and American culture;
- Familiarizing Polish children and young people with various aspects of American life and culture;
- Acquainting American teachers with Poland and its culture, history, and traditions in the hope that their knowledge and impressions will be passed on to their students, families, friends, and communities in the United States;
- Encouraging local communities in Poland to host American volunteers and share their own experiences with them;
- Promoting an open approach to cultural and social diversity among both the Polish and American communities.

### Developing the social skills of camp participants:

- Formation of civic attitudes and intercultural competencies, including diplomacy, social and cultural awareness and expression, as well as responsibility and commitment;
- Developing key competencies of the future, such as cooperation, problem solving, creativity, innovative thinking, entrepreneurship, agency, and autonomy

### Developing language skills:

- Providing Polish children and young people with a variety of experiences with the English language in the American cultural context;
- Improving and developing the communication skills of camp participants;
- Engaging all language skills to ensure interactive communication in the English language;
- Providing interdisciplinary learning opportunities that utilize the English language as a tool to develop Polish campers' skills in math, science, technology, sports, music, literature, and art;
- Developing students' confidence in using English on a daily basis.



### Professional development of teachers:

- Improving the teaching and methodological competence of Polish and American staff of the language camps;
- Mutual learning and observation of the teaching methods used;
- Establishing contacts between Polish and American educators to develop the cooperation and intercultural competence of both educators and campers;
- Enabling Polish teachers and assistants to enhance their English proficiency;
- Creating, updating and developing teaching resources that can be used and adapted by TEIP camp staff and other English teachers.

### The main principles of cooperation in the TEIP program

1. Provide adequate infrastructure for teaching groups of up to 20.
2. Provide the residential camps with accommodation, adequate sanitary facilities, and a canteen for Polish and American students and staff.
3. Supply educational materials, teaching aids and art tools that were agreed upon by both parties in advance.
4. Provide transportation for a group of volunteers from the United States from the airport and to the airport on their return flight.
5. Ensure members of the American personnel have liability insurance.
6. Organize a 3-day trip for American volunteers after the language classes and pay all costs of the trip.
7. Ensure there are Polish educators, preferably English language teachers.
8. Appoint a Polish teacher to serve as the head of the Polish staff, and allow the head of the American staff to contact this person. •

7  
camps in 2023

79  
days of having fun together in 2023

210  
Ukrainian children participated in the camps in 2023

400  
Polish children participated in the camps 2023

66  
American volunteers taught during the TEIP camps in 2023

### TEACHING ENGLISH IN POLAND – GLOSSARY OF TERMS

#### American staff leaders

Experienced volunteers, managing the American staff on their respective camps. They are responsible for communication with Polish organisers, working alongside with the Kosciuszko Foundation during the camp preparation phase as well as supervising the organization and teaching activities.

#### Volunteers

American volunteers from all walks of life and of many different professions. They come to Poland to teach English to Polish students, as well as actively spend time with them. Among our volunteers there's of course a lot of teachers, but also professional pastry chefs, yoga teachers or former FBI agents. During TEIP camps they not only teach English as a foreign language in a classroom, but also give cooking lessons, play sports, do arts and crafts but also provide children with knowledge on how to collect... fingerprints.

#### Polish organizers

A school/local government body/NGO responsible for the organization of TEIP camp in Poland as well as contacts with the Kosciuszko Foundation.

#### Polish Staff

Polish teachers working hand in hand with the American volunteers during camps. Experienced and enthusiastic educators, they teach classes, organize sport lessons and events, do arts and crafts and take the participants out for trips and themed events.

#### TEIP summer camp

Almost two weeks of good fun and learning English from American volunteers and Polish teachers. Active recreation and immersive English learning all day long, even during the meals, playtime and free time.

#### Task based learning

Its main focus is to „submerge” the student in the language by using it not only during class, but also extracurricular activities! Students go over their fear of speaking by simple everyday interactions. By talking to the volunteers about their hobbies and interests, the schedule or simply by asking them to pass the salt during lunch – they're practicing without even knowing it!

#### Teacher assistant

Teacher assistants are younger volunteers working alongside their more experienced colleagues.

#### Post TEIP camp trip for American volunteers

After the TEIP camp is over, American volunteers get some well-deserved rest as they go on a trip around Poland for a few days. They get to see more of Poland's beautiful scenery, historic sites as well as lively cities.



“

*Among this year's group of over six hundred participants, about 400 students came from Poland, 200 traveled from Ukraine and, it should be noted, three participants were students from Belarus. The national diversity at each camp perfectly reflected the current situation in Poland, where cultural differences enhance the beauty of the exchange of experiences.*

**Kirstin Miller**  
TEIP camp leader  
of American volunteers

# In-between cultures and languages. The intercultural communicative competence of foreign language students and teachers



Anna Grabowska

**In the 21st century, language learners and teachers must have well-developed intercultural communicative competencies that will allow them to function fluently in situations where at least two cultures encounter, their own and a foreign one, in a so-called no-man's land, to negotiate and mediate between their own language and culture and that of their interlocutor(s).**

## **The relationship between culture and language**

The discussion surrounding cultural components of language education has been going on for a long time. It's based on a wide variety of definitions of culture. The International Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Education (Saha 1997), published in 1997, provided 164 definitions of the term 'culture' used throughout the literature. Not all of these definitions are applicable to contemporary language education. We will therefore cite a few that are most often referred to by researchers. Geert Hofstede (1994:5 in Lázár et al. 2007), referring to computer terminology, defines culture as "collective programming of the mind (mental software)," i.e., learned cultural presuppositions that shape ways of thinking and acting, distinguishing one group of people from another. Theorists of the integrated

teaching of culture and language rely on a definition derived from Clifford Geertz's symbolic anthropology that describes the concept of culture as "a system of meanings and symbols that regulate social action" (Sztompka 2002:239 cited in Bandura 2007:28). This definition is referred to, among others, by Michael Byram (1989:44) in his concept of intercultural education, stating that cultural education is "familiarizing students with a new system of meanings and associated symbols." Contemporary sociolinguistic literature on the relationship between language and culture revolves around two opposing concepts. One is the theory that it is the structure of language that determines how its users perceive the world around them. The other is based on the claim that it is culture that is reflected in language. The authors of the thesis that language determines culture are Edward Sapir and

his student Benjamin Lee Whorf. In his theory, Sapir stresses that the relationship between culture and language is so strong that it is impossible to analyze one component without relating it to the other. Currently, Whorf-Sapir's theories of linguistic determinism and relativism are treated as hypotheses and have not been acknowledged as sufficient to settle the debate on the relationship between language and culture. Ewa Bandura (2007:34) stresses that in the context of language learning, the so-called weak version of the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis centers around the claim "that the way the world is perceived differs between cultures, and language can reflect these differences." Therefore, it is necessary to combine the study of language and culture and look for their interrelationships.

It is also worth mentioning that as early as the 17th century, John Lock described the relationship between a national language and culture, pointing out that every language has words and expressions typical only of that language and its culture (cf. Tabakowska 2001:176). In a similar way, the relationship between culture and language was explained by Humboldt, who claimed that language is a reflection of "the spirit of a given nation." In the 1920s, the popularizer of the concept of language as an integral part of culture was Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, who in his works proclaimed the view that language is the link that unites members of a given community when they perform given cultural rituals. The researcher stressed that a proper understanding of a given word or phrase is possible only in the context of the entire communicative situation, which includes non-verbal elements. The work of Malinowski and Whorf and Sapir was built on in the 1990s by American anthropologist Michael Agar, who created the concept of languaculture. According to his theory, 'langua' in the name languaculture refers to the entire discourse, and 'culture' is related "to the meanings that are contained in it and that go beyond what the dictionary and grammar offer" (Agar 1993:96).

## **Cultural and linguistic didactics**

The relationship between language teaching and learning the culture of a language has been the subject of linguists' debates for several decades, resulting in significant

changes in the perception of the function of culture in the development of language teaching methods. The grammar-translation method incorporated themes of high culture and lifestyle in the exercises designed to develop writing and reading comprehension skills. The direct method focused on material culture, while the audio-lingual method is based on language drills about situational contexts related to everyday life. The communicative approach, despite its interest in the culture of the community of the language being taught, was limited only to imparting knowledge about the country in texts for practicing reading and listening comprehension.

Thus, the cultural component in language learning included culture spelled with a capital "C," which included references to history, artistic, musical, and literary works, theater, and culture spelled with a small "c," encompassing, on the one hand, the products of everyday life and, on the other hand, elements that are less visible and tangible in the context of school practice, i.e., ideas, beliefs, values, and behavior, including customs, traditions, etc. (Lazar 2007:7, Bandura 2007:1, Chłopek 2009a:61). For years, language education has been dominated by an approach that emphasizes teaching culture with a capital "C."

According to Hanna Komorowska (2006), the main factor that influenced the interest in cultural issues in language teaching was the introduction of the learner-centered approach in the 1980s, which was increasingly linked to meeting the needs of learners arising from their participation in international mobility for educational and professional purposes and frequent, even daily, contact with representatives of other cultures in work and study environments. There was a growing realization that the success of international cooperation depends not only on proficiency in foreign languages but, first and foremost, on cultural knowledge that helps avoid cultural misunderstandings. Therefore, a very important task in foreign language teaching is to develop so-called "cultural awareness" (Bandura 2007:34), thanks to which a foreign language user knows how culturally conditioned behavior affects communication with a foreigner. As Krystyna Mihułka (2014:83) writes, "it is therefore no longer just a matter of knowledge about the



culture of, for example, Germany, or rather awareness of one's own culture, but also knowledge about the functioning of cultures in general," as well as the ability to use communicative patterns adequately to the communicative situation, including those that go beyond contacts with a native speaker of a given language. A perfect example of this are the camps of the Teaching English in Poland program, which bring together participants and teachers from Poland, the US, and Ukraine.

This approach is also reflected in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001), which highlights the need to both provide cultural input to foreign language learners and work on their abilities to reflect on the culture of their own community. The result of such reflection should be the learner's readiness to act as an intermediary between representatives of the two cultures.

#### **Developing intercultural communicative competence**

The increasing cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of modern societies resulted in the introduction of the concept of intercultural communicative competence into foreign language didactics in the late 1990s. Intercultural communicative competence is understood as "the ability to use a foreign language to communicate successfully with a representative of another cultural background" (Byram 1997:13), and its recognition as a fundamental concept in glottodidactics, to finally gain the status of an overarching goal of language teaching and learning at the beginning of the current century (Byram 2000, 2009; Sercu 2006; Aguilar 2008).

As Lázár (2007:5) notes, a high level of proficiency in a foreign language does not ensure comfort in functioning in a culturally alien community. According to Lubecka (2003:44), what hinders intercultural communication is "the strong cultural otherness of the participants in the conversations, their lack of sensitivity to the culturally determined semantics of the words spoken by each party, and the behavior presented." Therefore, linguistic competence limited to knowledge of the grammar and lexis of a given language and factual information about the country of its speakers is not sufficient for acquiring the

ability to conduct intercultural dialogue: "a conversation between representatives of (at least) two cultures, proceeding beyond divisions, beyond differences between communities, nations, linguistic and ethnic groups... conducted in the spirit of mutual respect, openness (to the interlocutor), and friendship" (Mihulka, 2009:64). For this reason, learning a foreign language has two sides: linguistic and cultural, the combination of which is the most important but also a very difficult task for language teachers.

Bandura points to American researcher Louise Damen (1987) as a forerunner of the intercultural approach in language teaching. She introduced the concept of 'fifth skill' complementing the four linguistic proficiencies with the training of intercultural skills. The necessity of intercultural competence training was also pointed out by German researcher Claire Kramsch (1993:233-259), emphasizing that in the 21st century, students will have to be able to function fully in situations where at least two cultures meet, their own and those of a stranger, in a so-called "no man's land," and will therefore be forced to negotiate and mediate between their own language and culture and that of their interlocutor(s).

#### **The model of intercultural communicative competence, according to Michael Byram**

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is seen by many researchers as an extension of communicative competence. Its most widely known and cited model was proposed in 1994 by Michael Byram, distinguishing the following components:

1. Knowledge of social and cultural processes and groups, their products, practices, and non-verbal communication in both the interlocutor's culture and one's own, the causes of cross-cultural misunderstandings;
2. Attitudes that include values and communication readiness, including openness to other cultures, tolerance, unprejudiced attitude, curiosity, and the ability to cope with feelings of alienation;
3. Interpretive skills on the interrelationship of native and foreign culture in the geographical, social, and historical

context, pointing out what unites and what separates native and foreign cultures;

4. The ability to acquire cultural knowledge and use it to achieve understanding;

5. Critical thinking and cultural awareness of the existence of differences and similarities between cultures, as well as the ability to draw conclusions (Byram 1997:31-54).

#### **Profile of an intercultural interlocutor**

Researchers around the world agree that intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is one of the key competencies of the 21st century (Delors 1996; UNESCO 2006), and that the primary goal of language education should be to develop an intercultural interlocutor who can not only cope with linguistic and cultural diversity but also actively participate in multicultural situations (Deardorff 2009). Thus, the goal of intercultural language education is to prepare a mediator who possesses intercultural competence as well as a high level of language proficiency (Byram 1997:56).

American researcher Karla Deardorff (2006) points out that becoming a competent intercultural communicator is a process that never ends. It is impossible to pinpoint a specific moment when a learner becomes fully intercultural competent. It is also difficult to determine which culture learners will deal with in their interactions with foreigners in the future, given that languages such as English and French are spoken in many countries with different cultures. An additional element that makes it difficult to determine the repertoire of necessary intercultural knowledge and competencies are multicultural and multilingual countries with large cultural differences. In such contexts, "any transferred knowledge will be inadequate" (Byram et al. 2002).

Aguilar also points out that the training of an intercultural mediator poses the teacher with the task of effectively integrating two teaching processes: on the one hand, the improvement of foreign language skills, and on the other, the acquisition of intercultural competence. The question also arises whether teachers themselves possess these competencies, to what extent they are prepared for this role during their training for the profession, and whether

they have the need to improve these competencies as part of their teaching work or non-formal education, such as TEIP language camps.

#### **Intercultural competence of foreign language teachers**

The people to whom the school entrusts the transmission of knowledge about the cultures of other countries are usually language teachers, who play the role of mediators between cultures and therefore should themselves have highly developed intercultural competencies (Bandura 2007:64-65; Mackiewicz 2009:72; Mihulka: 2009; Zajac 2012:15; Siek-Piskozub 2014:192), which include relevant knowledge, skills, and attitudes that go beyond the traditional understanding of competencies associated with language education. Sercu et al. (2005) describe such a teacher as a foreign language and intercultural competent (FL&IC) teacher. Breka and Petravić (2014) divide the competencies of such a teacher into two categories: the teacher's intercultural competence as a person and the professional competencies necessary for the development of students' intercultural competence. The two categories include mutually intersecting sets of competencies:

- Cognitive: including general knowledge of the target culture and the students' culture and knowledge of methods to develop their intercultural competence;
- Affective: including the motivation and will to develop one's own intercultural competence, attitudes of cultural openness, and positive attitudes toward integrating intercultural education into language learning;
- Pragmatic: including the ability to assess the level of one's own intercultural competence and promote its development in students; the ability to select and apply appropriate teaching strategies, techniques, and exercises.

Krystyna Mihulka (2009) created the following profile of a teacher – an ideal intercultural mediator:

- not only are they able to interact with Otherness, but also, with their

well-developed teaching skills, they support the development of intercultural competence in others;

- knows how to teach students about a country in such a way as to not only thematize what is Other, but explain the historical and cultural reasons for this Otherness;
- draws attention to intercultural misunderstandings of a verbal and non-verbal nature and points out the basis of their formation; conducts discussions on the dissimilarity of values, behaviors, prejudices, and stereotypes;
- provokes students to discuss how they perceive members of other cultural groups and how we are perceived by these groups.

In addition, the intercultural teacher-mediator should, among other things,

- have an extensive knowledge of the countries whose languages they teach, as well as of his own country and its culture;
- be open to Otherness and Others, tolerant, and respectful of cultural differences;
- plan lessons on culture and conduct them, depending on the topic, in a foreign or native language;
- not to be limited to a textbook, but to seek additional sources of information on both the “target” and “starting” cultures (Mihulka 2009).

### Milton Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

The formation of students’ intercultural competence raises the question of assessing it. Teachers agree that while they are familiar with methods and tools for assessing language proficiency, assessing the development of intercultural competence is difficult, if only because during the school year, in Polish schools, there are few opportunities for cultural immersion in the language they teach. Therefore, it is worth noting the “Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity” (DMIS), developed in 1993 by Milton J. Bennett, which explains how an individual, subjected to the influence of a foreign culture for an extended period, reacts to cultural differences and how these reactions change over time. According to

the researcher, the acquisition of intercultural sensitivity is a process of transitioning from an ethnocentric attitude to a state of ethno-indifference, thanks to the changes that occur in a person at the cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels. As Sobkowiak (2015:68) writes, the model developed by Bennett “is developmental in nature, i.e., it is fluid, and it is difficult to assess unequivocally whether someone is sensitive or not, and to what extent. Instead, it allows one to conclude that he or she is developing intercultural sensitivity by putting in a tremendous amount of effort.” The DMIS model consists of six stages. Three of them relate to the ethnocentric phase, and three more to the ethnorelativistic phase, during which the individual reaches a high level of intercultural competence.

Below are the components of the DMIS model.

#### Stages of ethnocentrism:

- Denial of the existence of cultural differences through psychological and physical separation from other cultures.
- Defending against the influence of other cultures by repeating stereotypes and promoting the superiority of one’s own culture. It is worth noting that at this stage there may be the phenomenon of reverse ethnocentrism, i.e., the perception of one’s own culture as the inferior one, which happens in the case of shorter stays in a given culture and fascination with its products.
- Minimizing differences is the phase during which we begin to recognize the existence of cultural differences on a superficial level and gain a belief in the universal value of our own culture and the general similarities of all cultures. It is very important that the result of this phase be the individual’s acquisition of cultural self-awareness and recognition of a more complex picture of the world.

#### Stages of ethnorelativism:

- Acceptance is the phase during which an individual recognizes and respects cultural differences and begins to believe that they are enriching.
- Adaptation is a phase that, according to Bennett, can be referred to after a stay of about three years in a foreign

culture and the acquisition of the ability to perceive cultural differences through the prism of empathy and a pluralistic approach.

- Integration of cultural differences, which leads to the inclusion of the peeps of Others in the repertoires of one’s own perceptions of the world and the cessation of treating one’s own

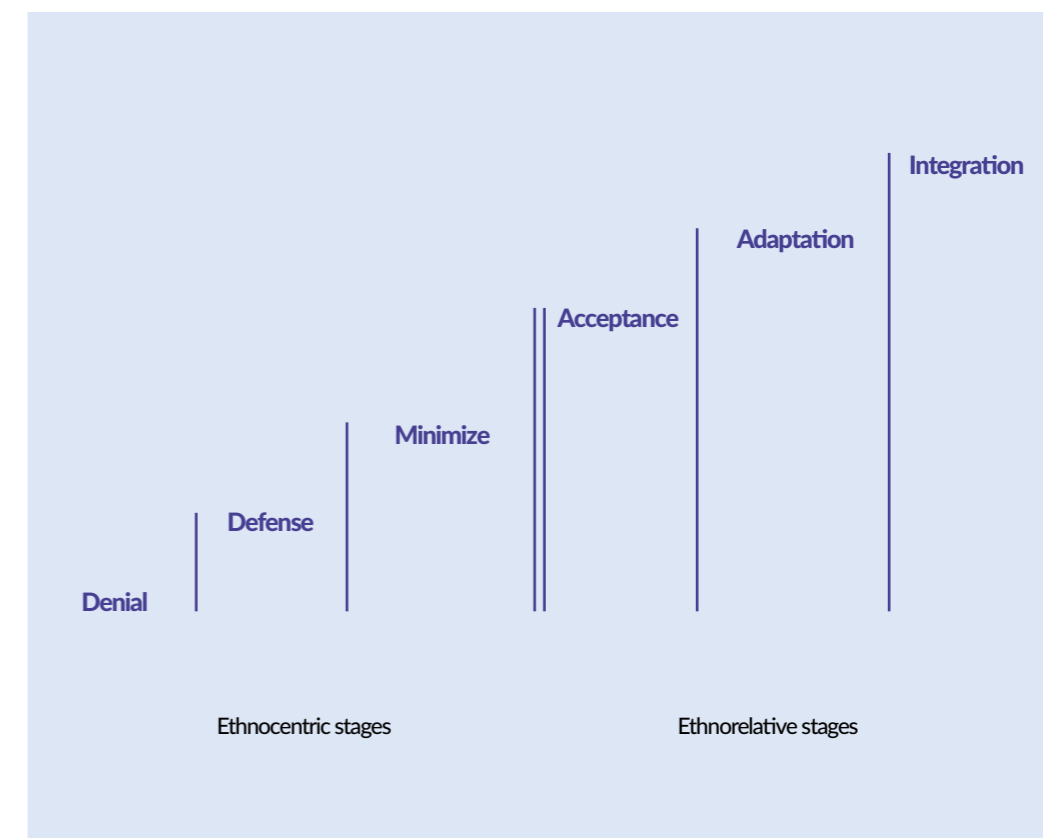
are more likely to apply the acquired skills in direct communication with representatives of other cultures.

#### Summary

Intercultural competence is certainly one of the key issues of language education and, consequently, the education and professional development of language teachers in the 21st century, who will be able not only to prepare their students to be intercultural competent interlocutors but will themselves be able to use intercultural competence in encounters with representatives of different cultures in their private lives, outside of the professional context. Many studies are confirming the need to educate teachers who will be well-prepared to work in culturally and linguistically diverse environments. That is why it is so important to equip language teachers with tools to help them critically reflect on their attitudes and perceptions of other cultures and to make them aware that teaching a foreign language goes well beyond learning basic language skills. Without well-developed intercultural communicative competence, attempts to communicate in a foreign lan-

The six phases of the development of intercultural competence distinguished by Bennett illustrate the dynamic process of moving from a complete lack of this competence to a fully intercultural competent person. A person with a high level of intercultural sensitivity is able to point out subtle differences in both non-verbal communication and communication styles, while the so-called naive traveler only notices differences regarding food, currency, or other elements of daily life (Bennett 2004:10). Although the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity presented above does not contain direct references to communicative competence, communication is treated by Bennett as one of the strategies for its development, given that with the development of intercultural competence, learners

Scheme 2. M. J. Bennett’s developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. Source: Centre d’apprentissage interculturel, Institut canadien du service exténeur: www.intercultures.gc.ca, after M. J. Bennett, 1986, A developmental Approach to Training for Intercultural Sensitivity, Intercultural Journal of Intercultural Relations, vol. 10, no. 2, New York (translated in Italian).



guage may fail. Foreign language teachers should be aware that the actions they take educationally influence the formation of students' intercultural attitudes and teaching a language that is a carrier of values and culture proves that education is not only immersed in culture and draws from it, but is one of the basic culture-creating factors (Beacco 2000:23). The formation of intercultural sensitivity among students requires the teacher to have this intercultural understanding of culture and language. Such an attitude is critical in all-encompassing

globalization forcing schools and teachers to prepare students to function in educational, family and professional contexts that are now difficult to predict. Therefore, although most language teachers will likely teach languages in a local environment, they must be aware of the global dimension of language education, which does not necessarily mean preparing students to live and work in another country. Indeed, it may turn out that the local will be (or already is) more multicultural and multilingual than the reality outside its borders. •

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*Immersing in and being surrounded by Polish and Ukrainian culture and traditions was the best thing about teaching in Poland. The colourful Polish culture, the unique cuisine, the students' beautiful stories about their national traditions and customs, listening to their songs sung with pride and participating in their traditional events, confirmed the importance of focusing on each child, their native language, traditions and family.*

**Alexandra Hernandez**  
AFT volunteer at the TEIP  
camp in Basznia Dolna

# The English Language as the Intercultural Communication Tool of Language Camp Participants



Marta Bujakowska

**The language camp is not just about words and phrases. It is about breaking down barriers, forging connections, and creating lasting memories that transcend language and borders.**

## Introduction

In an era of unprecedented global connectivity through the widespread circulation of information and rapid technological advancements, the significance of language as a bridge for effective communication cannot be overstated. Within this context, we come to appreciate the profound importance of language in fostering connections and promoting understanding among people from various corners of the world.

For Polish and especially Ukrainian students, who often find themselves embarking on the journey of learning a third language, typically English, this endeavor holds a unique and invaluable place in their personal growth. Ukrainians are often bilingual, speaking Ukrainian and/or Russian, with Polish being their third language. For many of these students, the English language evolves into more than just a means of communication. It becomes a versatile tool for connecting with peers from diverse backgrounds. It is in this dynamic crucible of language and culture that bonds are formed, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries.

This article delves into the transformative role of the English language within the framework of a language camp, focusing

particularly on the experiences of Polish and Ukrainian teenagers, as well as dedicated American teachers and volunteers who converge in this vibrant setting. Their collective mission is to foster cultural understanding and friendship. Through the lens of their stories, we aim to shed light on how language, especially English, operates as a conduit for interactive cultural dialogue and personal growth, contributing to the larger narrative of global interconnectedness in our modern information-driven age.

## The Language Camp Experience

Welcome to the language camp, a captivating fusion of culture and language that offers an unparalleled experience to all its participants within the confines of this immersive program. It's not merely about mastering a new language; it is about delving into an entirely different world where language becomes the gateway to understanding and embracing a foreign culture. Much like the broader world, the language camp serves as a microcosm where the participants are encouraged to step out of their comfort zones and embark on a journey of discovery. Here, they engage in a diverse array of activities, creating an environment that mirrors the rich tapestry of global society.

In this extraordinary setting, the emphasis is not just on vocabulary and grammar but on exploring the deep-rooted traditions, customs, and idiosyncrasies of the culture they are immersing themselves in. It's about tasting the flavors of different cuisines, dancing to the rhythm of native music, and understanding the nuances of everyday life that may differ from their own. For many Polish and Ukrainian students, this camp is not just a linguistic adventure but a unique opportunity to put their English skills to the test. In a meaningful intercultural context, English isn't confined to textbooks and classrooms. It becomes a living, breathing entity that helps bridge the gap between individuals from different backgrounds and origins.

In this enriching environment, participants are encouraged to embrace the joys of cross-cultural friendships and to be open to the vibrant mosaic of experiences that the world has to offer. The language camp is not just about words and phrases. It is about breaking down barriers, forging connections, and creating lasting memories that transcend language and borders. Join us on this remarkable journey where words are just the beginning and the doors to a wealth of culture and understanding swing wide open. The language camp awaits, and with it, the opportunity to explore, learn, and connect in ways that extend far beyond language alone.

As the sun sets over the camp, a sense of unity and shared purpose envelopes the participants. The campfire crackles and stories are shared in a variety of languages, demonstrating the beauty of multiculturalism. Here, participants learn not only from their dedicated instructors but also from one another, each sharing their unique perspectives and stories. The language camp also incorporates outdoor adventures that build bonds and create unforgettable memories, from hiking through breathtaking landscapes to embarking on field trips to nearby landmarks. Every moment is an opportunity for growth and cultural appreciation. And it's not just the students who benefit from this immersive experience. Local communities also reap their rewards as they interact with the camp, sharing their own traditions, knowledge, and warmth with the participants. This two-way cultural exchange enriches the lives of everyone involved, fostering a sense of global interconnectedness.

The language camp truly represents the magic that happens when people from different backgrounds come together to celebrate language, culture, and the beauty of diversity. It's a transformative journey that goes beyond the textbooks and classrooms, igniting a lifelong passion for learning, understanding, and embracing the world.

## ACTIVITIES TO FOSTER COMMUNICATION AND CONNECTION

### Cultural Exchange Nights

This engaging activity is like a journey around the world without leaving the camp. Participants, including students, teachers, and volunteers, bring elements of their own culture to share with others, whether it's traditional dance, food, music, or any other cultural aspects. The catch is that everyone communicates and explains these elements in English, which not only broadens their horizons but also strengthens their language skills. It's a wonderful opportunity for participants to discover the beauty of diversity while practising English conversation.

### Storytelling Circles

In these intimate circles, participants come together to share their personal or popular national stories. This activity encourages openness, empathy, and a better understanding of each other by sharing stories about their life experiences. Stories, not only personal ones, can be a powerful way to create connections and break down barriers. The stories are, of course, facilitated in English, making it a heartfelt language learning experience and a way to connect on a deeper, more personal level.

### Collaborative Projects

The collaborative projects are not only a fantastic way to address real-world problems, but they also create an ideal environment for improving English communication skills. Students work together in small groups to tackle issues related to environmental conservation, global challenges or community service. Through teamwork, they learn to express their ideas, plan, and execute their projects, all in English. This not only enhances their language profi-

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ciency but also teaches them the importance of effective communication when working towards a common goal. These activities not only foster language skills but also create lasting connections among the participants. They enable a deeper appreciation of the diversity within the camp and help individuals grow not just as language learners but as global citizens who can communicate effectively and empathetically across cultures.

#### THE ROLE OF ENGLISH AS THE BRIDGE

##### Using Language as a Trophy

In the grand tapestry of global communication, the English language stands as a medallion, a symbol of connection and understanding. Participants of the language camp proudly wear this linguistic emblem signifying their unwavering commitment to fostering connections that transcend borders and backgrounds.

##### Overcoming language barriers

For many Polish and Ukrainian students, English is their third language. As they come together at the camp, the challenge of overcoming language barriers becomes harder and deeper than ever. The American teachers who guide these students play a pivotal role in breaking down linguistic barriers. They facilitate conversations, explain subtleties, and inspire creative language use. In the process, they help students realize that language is not just a set of words; it's a tool for understanding and forming connections.

**Marta Bujakowska** Freelance teacher and teacher trainer from Poland with a strong intercultural focus. She holds a TEFLA Certificate from International House, studied English at Silesian University in Poland and obtained her MA in Teaching degree from School for International Training in Vermont, USA. Marta has volunteered for IATEFL POLAND since 1994 and IATEFL since 2016. She believes that teachers should feel their self-development is insatiable.

##### Building Confidence

Through a plethora of engaging activities like debates, role plays, and public speaking contests, participants build their confidence in the English language. This newfound assurance empowers them to connect with people from diverse backgrounds, fostering a sense of openness and receptivity to the world's rich cultural diversity.

#### INSPIRATIONS AND LOOKING AHEAD

##### The Value of Connections

The language camp experience is not just about strengthening language skills. It's about nurturing intercultural connections that transcend the temporary confines of the camp. These connections often last beyond the camp's duration. This, in turn, sparks optimism for the future of our planet. And linguistic gaps become invaluable ambassadors of unity and understanding. The friendships formed at the camp become a testament to the power of language and cultural exchange, forging pathways for a more harmonious and connected global community.

##### Looking ahead: expanding cultural horizons

In conclusion, the English language, when employed in the right context, serves as a bridge for connecting diverse cultures and building enduring relationships. The experiences of Polish and Ukrainian students offer a unique and transformative opportunity. These camps allow students to not only enhance their English language skills but also master the art of intercultural communication and understanding. ●



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*The goal of a language camp is not just to master a new language, but to immerse oneself in a whole new world where language only serves as a tool to facilitate understanding and acceptance of a foreign culture. (...) It's about breaking down barriers, making connections and creating lasting memories that transcend languages and borders.*

**Marta Bujakowska**  
TEIP program trainer  
and teacher

# Teaching English in Poland Program changes your life



## Patricia Kosciuszko Collette

I decided to volunteer with the TEIP program for three primary reasons. As a descendant of Gen. Thaddeus Kosciuszko, I wanted to honor my ancestry and also to contribute to the Foundation. Additionally, I yearned to do something tangible to help the Ukrainian children and desired to visit Poland.

Spending the summer in Poland was life-changing. I knew I'd be able to teach the Polish and Ukrainian children new things, but they taught me so much in return. They were like little sponges, soaking up every lesson with enthusiasm, excitement and anticipation. They even started repeating our gestures! They were so eager to enter the classroom that we had to keep the door closed in-between classes to do prep work. We were greeted with hugs and high-fives each lesson. Often, we were serenaded by the Ukrainian students with songs from their homeland.

My assistant, Jackie MacAvery and I came up with some fun lesson plans that the kids really enjoyed. We started off with discussing identity and things you were passionate about, then each one designed an apron with their name and things they loved. The next day we

gave out the aprons and they painted and drew their designs on them. The creativeness was so impressive and each class asked for an additional day to add more details. We kept the aprons and gave them out each class as the students arrived.

Some of the cooking highlights were peanut butter cookies with chocolate chips and M&Ms, rice Krispy treats, trail mix and pepperoni pizza. We know they were popular as one of the directors overheard some of the parents talking about it in the grocery store. We also had the kids write down the recipes and created a cook book at the end of the camp. We also did several arts & crafts projects and some classroom games. We were thankful to KF for providing the aprons and fabric markers.

In an unexpected move, I also taught gymnastics lessons after school. This was after seeing several girls trying to do handstands in the gym one day and hitting their heads because they were too close to the wall. The class was a big success.

So what did I learn? I already knew Polish people were kind, friendly, welcoming and excellent hosts. They take great pride

in their country and in our village (yes I claim it now!) welcome people into their homes with welcome arms and great cooking. We had a fabulous celebration for the town's 700th birthday and the Mayor joined us at our first dinner, which was at the only restaurant there.

The Ukrainian children and Polish children were so caring and loving. When they embarked on any activity, they gave it 100%. I was so impressed with how when teaching us the traditional dances they thought nothing of holding hands with each other and changing partners. Everyone participated. That wouldn't happen in the US.

One evening I heard singing through the windows in the teacher's lounge and followed it until I found the source. A group in their PJs practicing singing and playing their instruments in their room. It was so moving, I became teary. One of the girls jumped off her bed and came to hug me. She sweetly said, we keep our

tears in our pockets. I'll never forget that moment.

The town itself was adorable and very remote. You could walk everywhere and there was a lovely lake nearby that we enjoyed on the occasion when we had free time, which was not often. The little store in town and the restaurant were very kind, and made us feel like celebrities. They reserved a table for us every day at the restaurant just in case we showed up.

The school and camp is obviously a charming, clean, safe haven for many children. I learned how much love the Polish teachers have in their hearts to give them. I relished our outings with the children, playing at the water park, ropes course and movie theatre and trampoline park. They excitedly reported back when they recreated one of our recipes for their families. These children, all 80 of them, filled my heart with a love that I will never forget. •

**Patricia Kosciuszko Collette** is an award-winning, blue ribbon pastry chef based in the Washington, DC area. She has appeared on numerous tv networks including Oprah, Entertainment Tonight, the Food Network and CNN. Patty has been featured in People Magazine, Engaged Magazine, the Washington Post, USA Today, Washington Times and voted top pastry chef for 22 years in Washingtonian Magazine. Her clients include Will Smith and Jada Pinkett, Vice President Al Gore, Barbara Streisand, Robert Duvall, the Rockefeller's, Steve Case, to name a few.



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*Sharing a table, talking about food, cooking together is always an integrative success. The more diverse the group, the better. (...) Tastes from childhood, grandma's house, vacations. The worst meals in kindergartens, the best sweets. There is a lot of excitement, curiosity and openness to other cultures around the topic of food.*

**Anna Machocka**

'Spring' program coordinator  
in 'Bednarska' High School  
in Warsaw



# Bridging Borders and Hearts: TEIP's Unforgettable Summer in Poland

**Kristin Miller**

In its 32nd year, the impact of the Kosciuszko Foundation's Teaching English in Poland program is shining brighter than ever. This year's theme *One person can change the world* resonated across seven camps, three of which served students in new locations in southeast Poland.

The echoes of learning, unity, and cultural enrichment reverberated across each camp, leaving an indelible mark on the over 600 students. The camps were also a melting pot of educators: 60 American, 30 Polish, and 10 Ukrainian teachers, teaching assistants, and eight peer tutors united by a common purpose. Thanks to a wonderful partnership with the American Federation of Teachers, the Basznia Dolna camp also hosted nine volunteer AFT members among its staff, and the Olsztynek camp operated in partnership with the EFC Foundation.

This year's theme *One person can change the world* was not just a slogan—it was a call to action, urging each participant to embrace their role as educators and learners in an uncertain world. Among this year's 600 TEIP campers, around 400 were Polish, close to 200 were Ukrainian,

and remarkably, even 3 students hailed from Belarus. The diversity within the camp mirrored the current population of Poland, where cultural differences enhance the beauty of shared experiences.

It's a daunting task to pinpoint a singular highlight from each camp. From creating their own board games to delving into the charm of major U.S. cities like New Orleans, New York City, and Chicago to discovering the thrill of kickball, the campers were enthralled. Older campers were captivated by classes such as forensic science by an FBI agent, criminal investigation by an attorney, mindfulness by a yoga professional, and plein-air painting by a professional book illustrator. Baking apple pies, rice crispy treats, and peanut butter cookies added a delectable touch to the learning. Campers will never forget the dances they learned, like the Cha-Cha Slide, turning the camp into a dance floor of laughter. As Independence Day dawned, the camps celebrated the 4th of July in style—with hotdogs, s'mores by a crackling campfire, and a sense of unity that transcended borders.

For the dedicated staff, almost every mo-

ment in Poland was a cherished memory. Visiting historical landmarks such as the art museum and castle in Łańcut, the Wieliczka salt mines, the old synagogue in Kraków, and the Royal Palace in Warsaw, each experience was a journey of enrichment. For several of the staff members with Polish roots, the experience was the first time connecting directly with and learning about their ancestral homeland of Poland, and immersing themselves in the nation's history and culture was both educational and profound.

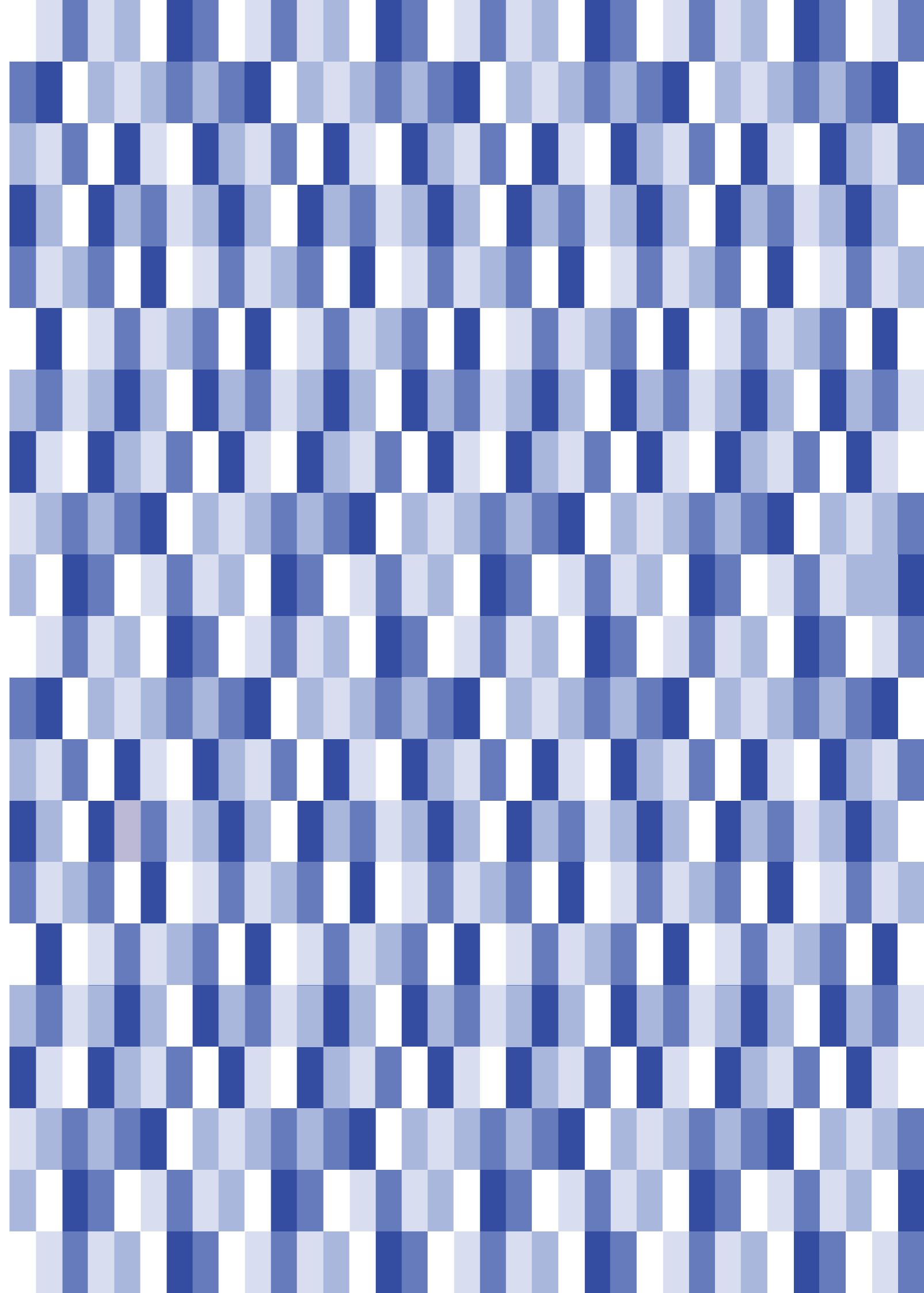
Intercultural bonds were also formed in unexpected ways. The students enthusiastically taught their American counterparts a popular Polish dance, sparking joy and camaraderie. Campers and teachers found when language barriers couldn't be bridged, sometimes the best translation was simple, heartfelt hugs. The warmth

and hospitality of the Polish people resonated deeply with the American staff, and Poland ceased to be just a place; it became a second home and its people, family.

As we reflect on another chapter of Teaching English in Poland the words of the theme resonate even more deeply. The impact of a single individual can cascade into a movement, transforming lives, cultures, and perspectives. The 600 students, the 100 educators, and everyone involved have proven that change is not just possible—it is inevitable when minds unite.

The Teaching English in Poland Program welcomes teachers from all subject areas and teaching assistants from all walks of life: professionals, retirees, and college students are encouraged to apply and to see how they, too, can change the world! •

**Kristin Miller** Educator with a passion for international learning who serves as the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme coordinator and instructional coach for Oberlin City Schools in Oberlin, Ohio. Over the past nine enriching summers, Kristin and her family have embarked on journeys to Poland with the Kosciuszko Foundation's Teaching English in Poland Program. They have been warmly welcomed by camps in Otwock, Załęczce Wielkie, Ocypel, and, most recently, Basznia Dolna. These annual visits to their beloved second home in Poland and their teaching at TEIP camps are cherished traditions for Kristin and her family.



## The Kosciuszko Foundation Inc.

The Foundation was established in 1925 in New York. For nearly 100 years of its history, it has been awarding grants to students and researchers in Poland and the United States. It works to popularize and spread knowledge about the history of culture and science in Poland by holding exhibitions, concerts and competitions, as well as promotes Polish art overseas. The Foundation is dedicated to commemorate Thaddeus Kosciuszko, an outstanding general, insurgent, leader and a Polish émigré in America.

## The Kosciuszko Foundation Poland

Initiated in 2010, the Foundation has been supporting intellectual, scientific and cultural exchanges between Poland and the United States. It organizes cultural events, participates in organizing scholarship abroad for researchers and artists and hosts American students as well. The Foundation holds competitions and participates in the selection of laureates of The Kosciuszko Foundation awards for exceptional physicians (The Bohdan and Zygmunt Janczewski award) and researchers (FamLab). It makes efforts to cultivate our mutual Polish and American history. Teaching English in Poland is the flagship program of the Foundation.

### Find out more:

[www.thekf.org](http://www.thekf.org)

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