On the role of the teacher in intercultural education

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Abstract. In a globalizing world, interaction with different cultures has become a matter of everyday life. Multiculturalism is determined by the awareness of cultural differences and, at the same time, by opening or closing oneself to the otherness, and entering into interactions. The article discusses the role of the teacher in multicultural and intercultural education. Moreover, the author discusses multicultural and intercultural competences as well as teacher's role related to their development. The teaching and educational work contributing to translating the theoretical knowledge, and postulates of multicultural education, into practical situations which take place at school are also defined in the article.

O roli nauczyciela w edukacji międzykulturowej

Słowa kluczowe: kultura, wielokulturowość, międzykulturowość, kompetencje międzykulturowe, nauczyciel, uczeń

Streszczenie. W globalizującym się świecie kontakt z odmiennymi kulturami stał się codziennością. Uświadomienie sobie różnicy kulturowej determinuje wielokulturowość i jednocześnie otwieranie się lub zamykanie na odmienność oraz wchodzenie w interakcje. W artykule ukazana jest rola nauczyciela w edukacji wielokulturowej i międzykulturowej. Omówione są kompetencje międzykulturowe i interkulturowe kompetencje komunikacyjne oraz zadania nauczyciela związane z ich rozwijaniem w procesie edukacji. Wskazane są zasady pracy dydaktyczno-wychowawczej sprzyjające przełożeniu teoretycznej wiedzy i postulatów edukacji wielokulturowej na sytuacje praktyczne, realnie odbywające się w szkole.

Introduction

The diversity of people and their cultures in the modern world is a common phenomenon. The processes taking place in modern Europe, related to the crystallisation of national and state consciousness, as well as social and economic changes in the nineteenth century and liberalization in matters of education provided the basis for the contemporary understanding of identity (Kłoskowska, 1996; Taylor, 1995) and for the educational practice in the education of minority groups. Over the twentieth century, a variety of views and educational practices were formed in many countries, raising hopes for the recognition of multiculturalism as a wealth and for overcoming negative phenomena related to multiculturalism. The social changes that have taken place in recent decades, such as globalisation, increased mobility, and growing waves of migration have become a source of growing interest in intercultural education which is expected to be a way of overcoming the weaknesses of previous forms of education as well as to play a crucial role in promoting social cohesion and peaceful coexistence (UNESCO, 2007, p. 8).

In the time of globalisation, migration is commonplace. More students originating from different cultures appear in schools in many countries. The current demographic data also show an increase in migration to Poland. Working in a classroom with children from different cultural backgrounds constitutes a big challenge for a teacher. The children, guided by different cultural norms, react differently to difficult school situations which can be traumatic for them. As the teacher's role in such a class is particularly important, running a multicultural course requires relevant preparation.

Culture as a basis for school operation

In a globalising world, interaction with different cultures has become a matter of everyday life. As defined at the World Conference on Cultural Policy held in Mexico in 1982: "Culture is the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterise a society or social group" (Wojnar, Piejka, Samoraj, 2008, p. 124). Therefore, it includes ways of living and producing material and symbolic goods, systems of values, beliefs, and views.

In intercultural psychology, culture is defined as a dynamic system which, in addition to the already mentioned values, also includes norms, ways of behaviour, communication styles and attitudes towards other nations. In such

an approach, culture is a system of overt and covert rules characteristic of a group of people, established and accepted by the group, transmitted across generations, and relatively permanent, but nevertheless changing over time (Matsumoto, Juang, 2007).

Viewed in this light, culture has a significant impact on both the functioning of children, as well as parents and teachers at school, as cultural differences manifest themselves both at the level of norms and values, and communication styles, as well as behavioural scripts. The differences are visible in the style of dress, in language, youth slang, but also in the ways of addressing the teacher, and in verbal and non-verbal communication. They are also visible in the approach to learning, as well as in learning styles, expectations and everyday behaviour at school, and in the positioning of education in the system of values of a specific culture.

Multiculturalism and interculturalism

The contemporary idea of multiculturalism was mainly based on the investigations of two Canadian philosophers: Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka. They postulate the application of a multiculturalism policy that recognises differences and cares about cultural diversity. Taylor proposes to combine the politics of equality and difference by supporting, recognising and appreciating people and groups so far excluded (Taylor, 1996, p. 24). On the other hand, Will Kymlicka believes that the state belongs equally to all citizens, and the policy of assimilationism and support for the dominant group while excluding minorities should be replaced by a policy of recognition, in which every citizen has access to state institutions and can play a role in political life without denying his or her ethnic identity (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 150‑154). The need to recognise cultural diversity becomes the key to understanding the approach to multiculturalism.

The term *multiculturalism* is often seen on three levels, as: (1) factual (empirical) multiculturalism, when we find cultural, ethnic or religious diversity in a specific society, (2) multiculturalism in social consciousness (when people notice differences between them and their neighbours on a daily basis, when they perceive other values as important), (3) multiculturalism in an ideological (political) system, when opinion-forming groups consider the coexistence of multiple cultural groups as a positive value and when they create institutions that care for the coexistence of these groups (Szempruch, 2013, p. 312‑313). This includes multicultural education, programmes and projects fostering the development

of multiculturalism, building awareness of the consequences of living in a culturally diversified society.

Multiculturalism is determined by the awareness of cultural differences and, at the same time, by opening or closing oneself to the otherness, and entering into interactions. Multiculturalism is a fact that is present in the practices of modern societies. It concerns the natural state of the society which is inherently diverse: multilingual, multi-ethnic, multi-faith, etc. These differences are visible in the common public space. Interculturalism, on the other hand, is an active dimension of diversity. It is a state expected at the interfaces of cultures. It assumes interaction between individuals, social groups, and communities. Interculturalism supports the relationships of groups and their ability to carry out joint activities, to accept co-responsibility and build common dimensions of identity.

Multiculturalism and interculturalism in education are two separate notions. Multicultural education provides information on different cultures in order to build acceptance, or at least tolerance, for these cultures. Intercultural education aims to go beyond a passive co-existence and to form a sustainable model of living together in a multicultural society. The means to achieve this is to deepen understanding, respect and dialogue between different cultural groups. As a tool for learning democracy, intercultural education consciously creates situations of exchange, interaction and enrichment of cultures. It supports diversity and complexity in the process of cultural change. It shapes attitudes of understanding, cooperation, coexistence and peace.

Dimensions of intercultural competences

The development of intercultural competences in students is slowly gaining its rightful place in education. The instrumental aspect of the notion of competence is determined by the Latin term *competentia* derived from the verb *competere*, meaning "to agree", "to be fit", "to compete" (Kopaliński, 2000, p. 269). The essential meaning of this term concerns the internal potential of a subject determining his or her ability to take action or have a specific position. Competence in this sense determines the subject's ability to adapt to the conditions of social environment. In pedagogy, it means the ability of personal self-fulfilment and the basic condition of upbringing. It is considered to be a result of learning, from which there stems the ability to perform specific task areas (Szempruch, 2013, p. 101).

Competence is therefore determined by an internal context and is described as a subjective potential dependent on something, and is defined by an external context and given meaning as an ability to do something. Both meaning ranges can intersect.

Intercultural competence is understood as a cognitive structure composed of knowledge of cultural diversity and its effects on communication, the ability to communicate in such a way and the openness to cultural diversity (Brzezińska-Hubert, Olszówka, 2008). Therefore, competence is understood as a function of interaction of skills, knowledge, disposition and attitudes. This meaning is illustrated in Diagram 1.

personal features and attitudes

COMPETENCE

knowledge   **skils**
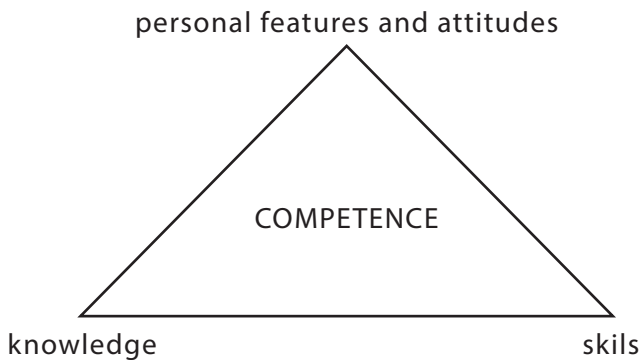
Figure 1. Components of intercultural competence

Source: Szempruch, 2013, p. 103.

Intercultural competences include, among others:
- knowledge of the cultural diversity of the world and the individual's own environment; awareness of how cultural differences condition human behaviour; knowledge of values, norms and hidden cultural patterns;
- knowledge of the causes of misunderstandings in verbal and non-verbal communication (meaning of words, tone of voice, gestures) and readiness to clarify misunderstandings;
- knowledge of one's own cultural conditions and their influence on the perception of the world and behaviour; and awareness of the limitations and subjectivity of one's own cultural norms;
- ability to be flexible in behaviour; ability to adapt one's behaviour to the cultural context; ability to deal with ambiguous and problematic situations;
- ability to interpret, explain manifestations of a foreign culture and relate it to the native culture;

- ability to establish and build positive intercultural relations, i.e. communication skills; ability to listen;
- ability to act in intercultural groups;
- ability to diagnose the mechanisms of one's own prejudices, beliefs and principles;
- attitude of tolerance for ambiguity and "otherness of others";
- respect for otherness, willingness to get rid of prejudices;
- cognitive curiosity, willingness to learn and get to know cultures and draw knowledge from intercultural meetings (cf. Szempruch 2018, p. 71).

Similar areas of intercultural competences are identified by M. Byram who points to:

- knowledge, which is comprised of information about the world, facilitating adaptation to changing conditions; it is also knowledge relating to cultural products and practices in the context of one's own and interlocutor's context;
- awareness of the existence of differences and similarities between cultures and the processes governing social interaction;
- skills: observing reality, communicating, interpreting and establishing interrelations, analysing cultures in historical, geographical and social contexts;
- attitudes that imply a readiness to communicate, such as inquisitiveness, openness, readiness to get rid of prejudices, tolerance (Byram, 2003, pp. 53–65).

This classification distinguishes the knowledge of the world's cultural diversity from the awareness of the existence of differences and similarities between cultures, and highlights the perception of cultural otherness and its interpretation. Intercultural competence means that we stop looking at the world solely from the perspective of our own country and try to appreciate other cultures and learn to behave accordingly in one or more different cultures.

Intercultural competence is defined in a similar way. According to Wilczyńska (2005, p. 22), intercultural competence should consist of three elements:

- general knowledge of culture as such, together with its mechanisms, i.e. understanding the nature and mechanisms of culture;
- intercultural sensitivity which allows to properly recognise and interpret cultural behaviours;
- intercultural mediation skills, i.e. an attitude aimed at overcoming communication boundaries, at interaction and mutual enrichment.

Intercultural competence is also treated as a construct consisting of:

1. Knowledge of the native and target culture (knowledge/*savoirs*).
2. The ability to interpret manifestations of another culture and relate them to one's own culture (skills/*savoir comprendre*).
3. The ability to acquire knowledge of a culture and use it in a specific communication situation (skills/*savoir apprendre/faire*).
4. Curiosity, openness to otherness, readiness to verify views on one's own culture or another culture (attitudes/*savoir être*).
5. Critical cultural and civic awareness which is necessary to observe and draw conclusions about a culture (education/*savoir s'engager*) (Horn, 2017, p. 15‑16).

In practice, a distinction is made between intercultural competence and intercultural communication competence (ICC). Intercultural communication competence means the ability to use a foreign language to communicate effectively with a person belonging to another culture (Byram, 2003). This competence differs primarily in the way it uses language in intercultural interactions. The former means communicating with foreign cultures using one's own mother tongue, while ICC emphasises the use of a foreign language for successful communication with a specific culture.

Teacher and student in a multicultural classroom

Developing intercultural competences in students is an important task of the teacher, who should take into account, to a greater extent than before, the dynamics of the modern world and the need to shape intercultural competences (cf.: Szczurek-Boruta, 2013, p. 156).

Intercultural education should be implemented by the teacher in parallel with the implementation of the core curriculum, in an interdisciplinary, cross-curricular and general approach, using all educational opportunities and consciously inspiring with them. The objectives and contents of intercultural learning are in line with the principles of the report by Jacques Delors: *Learning: the treasure within* (Delors, 1998), which identifies four pillars of competence – *learning to live together, learning to know, learning to do* and *learning to be*. Intercultural education highlights *learning to live together*. It involves developing the ability to understand other people and appreciate interdependence in a spirit of respect for values of pluralism, mutual understanding, peace, and cultural diversity. It means assimilating knowledge, skills and values that can contribute

to an atmosphere of solidarity and cooperation between different individuals and groups in the society.

From the perspective of educational goals, the intercultural approach assumes (e.g. Wilczyńska, 2005, p. 21‒22) that a student should:

- know their own culture and the target culture well;
- perceive and overcome stereotypes while being aware that some of them may be true;
- be able to behave appropriately in a specific communication situation at the interface of different cultures; be able to adapt to the target culture;
- be able to promote their native culture among foreign cultures;
- mediate dialogue between different cultures.

The overall objective of intercultural education is therefore to build social cohesion, openness to diversity, understanding and respect for differences between social and cultural groups, and to reduce tensions arising from diversity and prevent discrimination. According to Jerzy Nikitorowicz, important objectives of intercultural education include: acquiring the ability to perceive "otherness", developing sensitivity to "otherness", shaping awareness of the equality of all cultures, referring to the experiences of students and parents, developing the ability to solve problems related to stereotypes and prejudices, shaping distinctiveness and tolerance, and the ability to conduct dialogue and exchange values within multicultural groups (Nikitorowicz, 2001, p. 101). Intercultural education as a process of mutual learning about each other and from each other is aimed at preparing for dialogical interactions. A requirement and consequence of intercultural learning is the reflection on one's own culture, allowing to grasp differences and similarities between the cultures, shape the ability to set limits of tolerance and justify them (Brzezińska-Hubert, Olszówka, 2008, p. 38‒39).

When providing intercultural education, the school should pay particular attention to such factors as:

- shaping of intercultural competences,
- the organisational conditions of intercultural education (objectives and contents, education methods and forms of work, teaching aids, etc.), which should also be adapted to students from other countries,
- individualisation of didactic and educational influence on students from other cultural groups.

When working with a multicultural class, the teacher should develop his or her own ways of teaching and educating. Katarzyna Kubin proposes several principles in this scope:

1. Be aware that you are culturally shaped yourself.
2. Be interested in other cultures, especially those of your students.
3. Be aware that differences between children are not always the result of cultural differences.
4. Prepare activities that make it possible to get to know and discuss different ways of perceiving and understanding the world.
5. Define basic principles and rules for the class.
6. Try to get to know your students better.
7. Develop a community in the classroom by promoting cooperative rather than competitive attitudes.
8. Refer to the real life situations of the students during the course – the students' life experience can form material for the course.
9. Do not be afraid of disagreements and discussions, but prepare for conflict situations.
10. Create an interesting work and learning environment.

Following these rules will make it easier for the teacher to translate the theoretical knowledge and postulates of multicultural education into practical situations taking place at school.

In multicultural education, the teacher should treat learning about a new culture not only as learning about facts, but above all he or she should take care of:

– making students aware of how communication between cultures occurs;
– developing social and civic competences by teaching how social roles influence interactions between people;
– making students aware of how our beliefs about others and their beliefs about us determine success in communication;
– shaping the ability to independently search for information about people and the specificity of the cultures they communicate with (Byram, Gribkova, Starkey, 2002, p.10);
– developing a community in the classroom by supporting mutual cooperation, which should have a positive impact on relations between students.

Education understood in this way means better understanding of one's own identity and expanding it along with contacts with what is different. The teacher's role is to prepare students to successfully enter into relationships with different and complex personalities, while avoiding stereotypical thinking about them, as well as to draw their own conclusions from experiences with foreign cultures.

The implementation of the objectives of multicultural education requires commitment, knowledge and competence of the teacher, his or her openness

to the initiatives of students and parents, and the use of local resources. It may be necessary to involve a cultural assistant or translator, especially when a student and parents do not speak Polish.

Conclusion

Intercultural education assumes the coexistence of many cultures, customs, lifestyles, and promotes mutual dialogue, understanding and cooperation aimed at developing individuals and social groups. However, in order for the objectives of intercultural education to be fully achieved, teachers are needed who have the practical skills to shape the multicultural competences in students, necessary to effectively transgress cultural boundaries.

The role of the teacher in intercultural education is invaluable. The way in which a teacher presents the diversity of other communities becomes crucial in the perception of the world by young people and determines the success of the learning process, perceiving the presence of different cultures in society, and treating them as elements of mutual enrichment as a result of developed intercultural competences. These competences are understood, on the one hand, as a necessary factor for meeting other cultures in a way free of prejudices and stereotypes, thus enabling mutual understanding and, on the other hand, as an outcome of learning about a culture.

The teacher should be prepared to work with a multicultural class during vocational training. The local community, NGOs and youth organisations, as well as the media and society, should support the development of intercultural competences of teachers. Building an atmosphere of trust, subjectivity and co-responsibility, as well as promoting the values of cooperation, dialogue and understanding will contribute to effective action and increase intercultural competence, becoming a stimulus for the development of social behaviour that determines identity.

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