

Dialogue in the Context of Intercultural Competence

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Abstract. The concept of intercultural competence refers to openness to diversities. It is widespread in various fields of work and life in general. Intercultural competence involves both social and cultural aspect. Knowledge of languages is an important part of both aspects and it covers peculiarities of the vocabulary, communicative skills, etc. Dialogue is one of the intercultural competence expression forms. It is accepted by the United Nations as a means of understanding diversities. Dialogue is described as a two-sided process of information exchange where both sides understand message and they respect each other. It is also analysed from philosophical, linguistic, political and interpersonal relations aspect in the research. Conditions (interaction of equal partners, tolerance, listening skills, common aims, clearly transmitted information, knowledge of local social and physical environment) of true dialogue are revealed.

Introduction

The theme of intercultural competence is becoming more and more important because of globalisation processes. Necessity of intercultural competence is clearly reflected in the four forces of globalisation (Latvija. Pārskats par..., 1999): new markets, new technologies, new agents (from multinational corporations to individuals) and new norms (agreements, conventions, etc.). Therefore globalisation is a new way how people by means of new technologies, knowledge and skills link together capital, technologies, market and politics. Globalisation links mean worldwide contacts among companies, organisations therefore people need the ability to communicate in a successful way. Therefore the topicality of intercultural competence is increasing year by year.

From the point of view of competence classification intercultural competence refers to social competence. Social competence is necessary in all the fields of work and it often is defined as a part of civic maturity which is characterized by ability to judge, decide and to manage concrete social and business-like situations according to concrete conditions (Keller & Novak 2000). Intercultural competence comprises all the spheres of life starting from everyday situations to specific international projects. Koķe (2000, p. 7) in her article on further education in Latvia in relation to globalization processes recognises that there is a necessity to change the aim of action content putting stress on the development of independence, initiative and openness for changes on basic degrees of education and further education.

So we need intercultural skills to understand and be able to act in communication with diverse people. It means that such features as effective communication, tolerance, knowledge of other cultures and norms, attitude expression in appropriate way should be developed. Dialogue is one of popular practical ways through which the mentioned features are demonstrated.

The aim of the research was to reveal the conditions of true dialogue in connection with the components of intercultural competence.

The objectives of the research:

- To analyse intercultural competence and its components in connection with the competence theory
- To analyse the concept of dialogue
- To describe the conditions of true dialogue

The methods of the research: analysis of the sources of philosophy, pedagogy and psychology.

The Essence of Intercultural Competence and its Components

Competence is a very complicated conception because it is used for a description of the person's intellectual potential, abilities and other qualities. The word *competent* originated from the Latin language word *compeito* meaning *useful, appropriate*.

We use it a lot because it is very capacious and we use it for expression of assessment.

Competence can be defined as a totality of knowledge, skills and reflection abilities possible to prove documentary and in action in which a person agree to participate actively and with a sense of responsibility.

There is a quite accepted opinion that competence involves two large parts: professional and social. That assertion is also under debate because the both parts overlap. The both parts consist of a lot of components, e.g. knowledge, skills, reflection etc.

Social competence (Halfpap 1992; Keller, Novak 1993) is described by such characteristics as cooperation, communication, competition, self-competence, etc. All of them refer to intercultural aspect in local and global context. Social competence should be demonstrated in various and diverse environments. They are

"conceived topologically as a nested arrangement of concentric structures, each contained within the next. These structures are referred to as the micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems. A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and

materialistic characteristics. A setting is a place where people can readily engage in face-to face interaction. A mesosystem comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (for adults: work, family, social life)" (Bronfenbrenner 1996, p.22).

An exosystem refers to one or more settings that do not involve a person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by the person (Bronfenbrenner 1996, p.25).

The macrosystem refers to consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems that exist on the level of subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief system or ideology underlying such consistencies.

"The systems blueprints differ for various socioeconomic, ethnic, religious, and other subculture groups, reflecting contrasting belief systems and lifestyles, which in turn help to perpetuate the ecological environments specific to each group" (Bronfenbrenner 1996, p.26).

Transferring social competence to those systems it is possible to conclude that social and appropriately intercultural competence as well is reached if a person is able to discover, recognise, alter and try to orientate in those systems on a cognitive, emotional, and social level.

Considering the above mentioned acknowledgements intercultural competence can be briefly defined as the ability for mutual understanding and communication with people of other cultures.

This ability can be developed in the result of appropriate upbringing from childhood, or it can be developed thanks to personal motivation.

Risager (1994) writes that one of the results of the last 25 years' discussion of the cultural dimension is that there is a broad agreement that the cultural dimension has three aspects: knowledge, attitudes and behaviour.

Byram (2000) stresses that intercultural competence involves five elements:

- attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own;
- knowledge: of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction;
- skills of interpreting and relating: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own;
- skills of discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction;
- critical cultural awareness / political education: an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries.

According to Fantini (1999) intercultural competence covers three abilities:

- to develop and maintain relationships,
- to communicate effectively and appropriately with minimal loss or distortion,
- to attain compliance and obtain cooperation with others.

Actually those abilities involve communication aspect to a great extent. Dialogue skills are the basis for them. Knowledge, attitude and behaviour are those three components involved in all above-mentioned acknowledgements. Therefore a brief description of them is given from the aspect of intercultural competence.

Knowledge as a totality of facts and acknowledgements give every individual its own cultural affiliation of geographical, ethnical, moral, ethical, religious, political, historical conditions on diverse environments including social groups and their products as well as of the societal processes. Knowledge provides possibilities of analysis, synthesis, evaluation of information. Therefore the content and methods we choose for construction of knowledge should be thought over carefully. Risager (2000) as a good example mentions Byram subject areas, *which together comprise a minimum content*:

- social identity and social groups,
- social interaction,
- socio-political institutions and values which characterise them,
- socialisation and life-cycle,
- national history and national consciousness,
- national geography including regional differences,
- national cultural heritage,
- stereotypes and national identity.

Attitude comprises feelings, knowledge and demonstration of one's readiness to be open towards other cultures, people and conditions. Such terms as tolerance, emotions, values, ethics, prejudices, stereotypes, empathy refer to attitudes. Attitude is a complicated problem in pedagogy, psychology languages in intercultural studies. Byram (2000) remarks that the most complicated task is to assess students' attitude change and tolerance because it is difficult to measure those features. He advises that a record of students' competence and portfolio could be better means for judging about one's attitude and tolerance. Byram & Morgan (1994) recommend that pupils' empathy should be tested. They also suggest ethnographic method, where the pupils seek during fieldwork to put themselves in the position of the ethnographers, which observes and takes part in cultural practice and develop appropriate attitude.

Behaviour is a feature through which knowledge and attitude is expressed in real communication. People usually judge considering behaviour. In intercultural aspect it refers to ability to acquire new knowledge of culture and to use knowledge, attitude and skills in real interactions adequately

considering cultural rules, norms, conventions, circumstances of the appropriate environment.

Components of intercultural competence should be assessed and therefore the problem of measuring is topical. It does not seem too complicate to measure knowledge, skills and behaviour as well but it is difficult to measure attitude. It consists of several components, which need to be described scrupulously and precisely in order to understand measurable things. So the goal of assessing intercultural competence is to find out if a person has this ability or the potential for it.

Dialogue is one of the ways of proving the potential for intercultural competence. To communicate effectively, we have to construct our one way messages or keep dialogue in a way that strangers can understand what we mean and we need to try to interpret strangers' messages to us in the way they meant them to be interpreted.

The theme of dialogue seems topical since the establishment of democracy but it is still not solved nowadays. It is one of the reasons the year 2001 was announced as the United Nations Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations. Big cultural, educational and social programmes were planned to promote. The concept of dialogue became topical and is continuing to keep this position in spite of wars and bloody conflicts. It is fully accepted that dialogue is one of the guarantees for peace, stability and development. Dialogue was accepted as a means of understanding diversities and by UN secretary-general Kofi Annan *as a chance for people of different cultures and traditions to get to know each other better* (UN Year of Dialogue... 2001).

Dialogical relations comprise all the spheres of life and demand co-operation of equal partners. Subject-subject relations in which people express tolerance towards each other and have an ability to listen to each other and answer adequately are important in a true dialogue. Unfortunately we lack those skills starting from examples in families and ending with violent relations between cultures. It means that the dialogical skills should be developed from childhood.

The Essence of Dialogue and Its Conditions

Dialogue is a wide concept and it is analysed from several aspects in the world.

Relevance and problems of dialogue and dialogical relations studied Allen, Bakhtin, Borovoy, Bush, Biber, Buber, Ekerman, Feierbach, Feldstein, Glazman, Guy, Jackues, Jaffe, Kuchinsky, Lacroix, Morin, Scherba, Voyskunsy, Whiel, etc.

Feierbach (Фейербах 1955) evaluated the importance of dialogue in philosophy considering that a true dialectics is not monologue of alone thinker with himself but it is dialogue between you and me. Later a group of thinkers established a philosophical direction – dialogism, e.g. Buber was one of them.

The importance of dialogue is reflected in the works of nowadays political philosophers, e.g. Ekerman (1998) recognises that dialogue can be and usually exists as a kind of liberal coexistence problem solving in the context of morality. Liberal people should consider dialogue, as one of the means of problem solving and dialogue is even their duty.

Morin (1990) stresses that in the center of the European culture is dialogue. It exists between individuals, countries, cultures and it is a feature of democracy.

Bush (1985) remarks that the science of dialogue has to recover coherences and methodological means to promote purposeful interaction. Effective ways of enhancing social and scientifically technical progress focused on growing necessities of fulfilling needs of society and each individual should be developed also in the frame of the science of dialogue. More developed dialogical relations reduce a possibility for antihuman relations.

Interaction of equal partners. Interaction as one of the features of dialogue fully relates to the concept of partner and vice versa. True dialogical relations are possible only in the case when one partner perceives fully the other person as a desirable equal partner.

Bush (1985) concludes that antidialogical relations are established when one or both participants relate to each other as objects (or one of them does it) and deny something common between them and therefore also the possibility of dialogue is destroyed.

So the problem often of course is in desire to talk monologues with a superior air. The problem also is that we don't want to listen to others. We are sure of our truth and ideas and we transmit them to our pupils almost every day. It is often absolutely clear that we don't want to start long equal conversations with pupils because we have no time, they are young and we are not interested in their experience and ideas. We need not them. We are satisfied after a monologue we told. The lack of the dialogue is in the case when we are indifferent to other person. It means that the problem of being interested in other person's message is topical as well. It is quite typically that people refuse to develop Dialogue because it means deeper insight and involvement in a problem in which we actually do not want to be involved. Dialogue also means closer relations with people. But there originates a question when dialogue is important and when the conversation can be superficial. We understand also the thing that dialogue can lead us not only to the solution of problems but sometimes to deeper conflict situation and therefore we try to avoid it.

Tolerance. In dialogue relations people also learn tolerance towards diversity. Wogt (1997) opinions that tolerance is vitally important because of inevitability of stereotyping bias and prejudice. Tolerance is complicated and fully relates to dialogue. It is not easy to understand both the dialogue and tolerance and therefore to comprehend how they can be explained and learned at school. Tolerance is a one of the features of dialogue and teaching it means to develop understanding what should and what should not be tolerated i.e. when dialogue is important and when not. Wogt (1997) writes that tolerance is intentional self-restraint in the face of something one dislikes, objects to, finds threatening, or otherwise has a negative attitude toward- usually in order to maintain a social or political group or to promote harmony in a group. Formula is diversity+ equality+ peace= tolerance. Most sociologists and political scientists treat tolerance as an attitude, a disposition to act favourably or unfavourably

toward someone or something. Tolerance can also be a belief or commitment and engagement in action.

It is important to recognize and comprehend that tolerance like dialogue involves skills necessary for individuals to act adequately in diverse cultures, societies and groups. The term *diversity* and *tolerance* are tied together with the term *dialogue* because the last one is a means of *coping with a lot of diversities and conflict situations*.

The European Science and Arts Academies Charter of Tolerance (Eiropas Zinātņu... 2001) confirm the above mentioned concepts of tolerance. It is interpreted as a rule of living together in the Charter. According to it tolerance means protection of each person's honour, mutual understanding and respect to diversity of other people, respect to people and their freedom in their cultural environment. The Charter stresses that supplying and development of tolerance is a general duty and the basic element of upbringing. Actually it is a serious task for schools in the promotion of personality development.

Dialogue means tolerance to each other and it possible in equal partner relations. It is a very difficult condition in many cases because we need tolerance and even will power to demonstrate equal partnership to each other. So pupils have to learn it at school. We use the concept of partner a lot but not every person with whom we speak is a partner. Meighan (1988) analysed the problem of partnership at school and concluded that they are relations of equal subjects and the result is reached commonly. It means that partners are able to listen to each other and hear what is actually told and interact respecting each other. This acknowledgement is close to the understanding about dialogue. Partner relations (Briede 1996) in a study process are humanistic, goal-centered, efficient and with mutual influence and understanding.

Listening skills. Dialogue consists of one partner's listening and other partner's speaking. The listening phase is very difficult because we follow the partner's talk and wish to express our thought before our partner has finished. It is highly important to teach to listen to and clearly express ones thought. Such type of dialogue became known as the Socratic dialogue.

The so-called carnival type dialogues are popular nowadays. They are conferences, symposiums, forums, etc. Those dialogues also describe the post-modern world in which the search of ideas and uncertainty is a typical feature. Both types of dialogue should be taught at school and explained also the philosophical difference between them.

In the works by Bakhtin and Bush the essence of dialogue and its importance in communication is analysed and valued scrupulously.

Communication usually is defined as a two-sided process of information exchange where information is understood by both sides (Zinātnes un tehnoloģijas vārdnīca 2001) or communication refers to the process of human beings responding to the symbolic behaviour of other person (Adler, Rodman 2000). According to their research college students spent an average of 14% writing, 16% speaking, 17% reading and 53% listening. Studies show that most employees of major corporations in North America spend about 60% of each workday listening to others.

Listening and hearing are two different things but they both are important parts of dialogue. Hearing is the process in which we perceive sounds. Listening occurs when we give meaning to the sounds we hear. In language studies we have to be conscious of the differences in the use of it: semantic distinctions in the vocabulary, linguistic patterns of action, connections between content and form in texts. The *ability to pose appropriate and relevant questions and a readiness to answer questions asked are two linguistically based markers of the skill of discovery* (Byram 1997, p. 62).

Common aims. Like Bakhtin (Бух 1985), Freire (1998) describes the possibility for organising pedagogical experiences within social forms and practices in order to develop more critical and dialogical modes. He categorically demands from teachers' respect to students' autonomy, experience and curiosity otherwise they transgress fundamental ethical principles (Freire 1998, p. 59).

Giroux (1997) evaluates highly the contribution by Bakhtin because he views language usage as an eminently social and political act linked to the ways individuals define meaning and author their relations to the world through an ongoing dialogue with others. He also points to the pedagogical significance of the critical dialogue as a form of authorship since it provides the medium and gives meaning to the multiple voices that construct the texts constitutive of everyday life.

Information transmitted clearly. Vigotsky (Выготский 1934) writes that in dialogue the heart of the matter is easier to understand because the participants of conversation use both verbal and non-verbal means.

Scherba (Выготский 1934) points that dialogue is the most natural verbal form of oral speech and that monologue is quite artificial. Actually the essence of language can be expressed only dialogically. Bush (1985) continues the idea by Scherba, stressing that the solving of dialogical problems means also solving the problems of human being (existence). The human developmental process is dialogical and the diversity of the dialogue should be revealed and understood at school.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) analysing interpersonal structures as contexts of human development stresses that a dyad is a minimal and defining condition for presence of relations. By Bronfenbrenner the dyad starts from the moment when a person even only pay attention to other persons activities. The dyad is very important in the development of relations and it also serves as a starting point for larger groups. Bronfenbrenner divides between observation (one persons is interested in other persons activities and this other persons acknowledges it) and joint activity dyads (both persons accept that they do common activity and the tasks and aims can also differ).

Dialogue is a concept in pedagogy and it is described in the Explanatory Dictionary of Pedagogical Terms (2000) as a way of interaction between two persons or sides, or conversation, or a literary composition written in a way of conversation.

There are opportunities to teach dialogue relations much more seriously than previously because democracy actually means dialogue relations. It means that there should be taught

dialogue relations both among persons and between the persons and environment. Hutchinson (2003) stresses that there are opportunities to build solidarities across the generations and a developing sense of a global civic society. A vital challenge for educators is whether we not only acknowledge major difficulties but begin to 'walk our talk' in ways that combine freedom with responsibility and resist impoverished, violent social futures for our students and successive generations. It is highly important to understand that school should promote and teach dialogue relations by means of group work and a particular dialogue method.

The relationship between pupils and a teacher should be dialogical or two-way communication rather than monological or one-way communication. The teacher and pupil show that they are interested in each other message and seek evidence or clarification, or tries to persuade other person to think about the problem from different aspect.

The skill to make dialogue is of big importance. It involves the skill how to make conversation. This issue is stressed in many concepts of various philosophers, psychologists and pedagogues. One of examples could be Ramsden's view about students and teachers interactions, which can be easily transformed to general school as well. He stresses

that negative comments will be carefully balanced to positive ones; great delicacy is needed if critical feedback is to have the effect of helping students, especially inexperienced ones, to learn something rather than to become defensive or disheartened. Sarcasm comes too easily to many teachers. Learning how to find the right tone and level of specificity of feedback is another of the difficult arts of teaching that has to be mastered if we want consistently high-quality learning outcomes (Ramsden P. 2003, p. 188).

Those sentences by Ramsden express the essence of drawbacks in our conversation. It is a problem of listening to other person and desire to hear what he or she is saying. Dialogue should not be superficial.

Knowledge of local social and physical environment. According to Freire's theory the goal of dialogue is to reach both individual and social change. A teacher and a student are learners and they cooperate in ongoing dialogue. The teacher has to know the local physical and social environment as well to be in the open dialogue with the students.

Svence (2001) describes Frajero dialogue method, which has been introduced in the continuous education of teachers and psychologists since 1999 in Latvia. Frajero method promotes the skill to understand each pupil's individuality, to contact spontaneously, to communicate verbally, to consider one's reaction, to make and keep contacts the entire lesson.

Considering the previously described diverse aspects and problems of dialogue it is possible to conclude that true dialogue has conditions, which should be strictly considered by partners.

True dialogue is a tolerant interaction of equal partners with common aims and knowledge of local social and physical environment and ability of the partners to transmit information clearly and have listening skills.

It is also important to reveal the ideas and developmental possibilities of noosphere and the essence and role of true dialogue as one of the possible means for creating noocratic society in the future. Dinēvičs (2001) remarks that noocracy is the highest form of management of social systems. People with a high level of intellect (sense) and humanism should have power in the noocratic society. Intellect (sense) supplies progressive development of the system regarding biosphere, noosphere (The author of the idea of noosphere is Vernadsky. Noosphere is the sphere of mind, which comprises the world, and it is created in the result of intelligent thinking. It is a specific kind of energy, which interacts with antroposphere and geosphere.) and interpersonal relations.

Discussion

Intercultural competence actually is a question of openness to differences and knowledge of their context including dealing with cultural and ethnic diversity in a positive way. We need understanding how to deal with variety and plurality and to find a balance. It is not enough to have social skills, but a person has to improve the sensitivity, understanding for other values, views, ways of living and thinking, as well as being self-conscious in transferring one's own values and views in a clear and appropriate way. Intercultural misunderstanding often is caused by language barriers, cultural peculiarities, diverse attitudes which are expressed in prejudices, stereotypes etc.

The question arises about teaching intercultural competence form the aspect of content. It demands careful selection of content not only in one but also in various subjects. Therefore intercultural competence is a means of providing cross-curricular link and principles of content selection.

Next is the assessment of intercultural skills. Criteria and features should be scrupulously discussed and implemented, especially concerning attitude. Dialogue can serve as one of the means of assessment international competence but there have to be other kinds which validity should be tested.

Lack of dialogue skills is a typical problem at school and this shortcoming is stressed also in employers' demands for educational establishments. Dialogue learning on the basis of equal partner relations remains a topical problem and intercultural context in various subjects learning could be one way of solving it.

Conclusions

1. Competence is a very complicated concept including two big parts – professional and social; the view that a competent specialist has to be able to adapt to rapidly changing conditions and forecast the influence of the results of his / her action in the future is becoming more and more important nowadays.
2. Intercultural competence as a kind of social competence comprises the ability for mutual understanding and communication with people from other cultures.
3. Intercultural competence involves the components of knowledge, attitude and behaviour which in turn cover a person's ability to discover, recognise, alter and try to

orientate in various environments on cognitive, emotional, and social level

4. Dialogue is one of the ways to prove the potential for intercultural competence and it is a complicated phenomenon because it has a natural, social and cultural link.
5. The conditions of true dialogue are interaction of equal partners, tolerance, listening skills, common aims, clearly transmitted information, knowledge of local social and physical environment.
6. The conceptions of dialogue and intercultural competence overlap highly because they involve behavior, knowledge and attitude aspect.

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Dialogas tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos kontekste

Santrauka

Tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos sąvoka susijusi su pasiruošimu priimti skirtumus. Ji yra apamai plačiai paplitusi įvairiose darbo ir gyvenimo srityse. Tarpkultūrinė kompetencija apima tiek socialinį, tiek kultūrinį aspektus. Kalbų mokėjimas yra svarbi abiejų aspektų dalis, ir ji apima žodyno, komunikacinių įgūdžių ir kitus ypatumus. Dialogas yra viena iš tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos išraiškos formų. Jungtinės Tautos priima ją kaip skirtingumų suvokimo priemonę. Dialogas yra suvokiamas kaip dvipusis informacijos mainų procesas, kur abi pusės supranta pokalbio prasmę ir gerbia viena kitą. Ji taip pat yra tirama, kaip filosofinis, lingvistinis, politinis ir tarpasmeninių ryšių aspektas. Yra atskleistos tikrojo dialogo sąlygos (lygių partnerių bendravimas, tolerancija, gebėjimas klausytis, bendri tikslai, aiškiai perduota informacija, vietinės, socialinės ir fizinės aplinkos pažinimas).

Straipsnis įteiktas 2005 09
Parengtas spaudai 2006 06

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