



Katarzyna Smoter

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5180-6344>

e-mail: katarzyna.smoter@uj.edu.pl

Uniwersytet Jagielloński

Developing Intercultural Competences of Future Preschool and Early Childhood Education Teachers Using Transformative Learning

Kształtowanie kompetencji międzykulturowych przyszłych nauczycieli przedszkola i edukacji wczesnoszkolnej z wykorzystaniem uczenia się transformatywnego

KEYWORDS

transformative thinking, intercultural competences, future teachers, preschool, early childhood education

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to show the specific features of the academic training of future preschool and early childhood education teachers with regard to supporting the development of their intercultural competences. Taking into account the theoretical background, these activities can be undertaken in classes including the practical part carried out at school with children with migration or refugee experience. The theoretical basis of this concept includes Jack Mezirow's concept of transformative thinking. The author of this article presents an example of development of such competences within the cycle of classes: *Intercultural Education* (30 h, 2 ECTS points) and *Intercultural Competences in Teacher's Work* (30 h, 2 ECTS points), with supervision and consideration of the ten stages of transformative learning. These include the emergence of a disorientation dilemma, self-examination, critical evaluation of epistemological assumptions, recognition of the similarity of others' experience in an analogous situation, exploration of the possibility of a different role of the teacher, designing new actions, acquiring additional knowledge and skills, temporarily taking on new roles, and (the longest and most demanding stage): developing competences and self-confidence in intercultural interactions

SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

myślenie transformatywne, kompetencje międzykulturowe, przyszli nauczyciele, przedszkole, edukacja wczesnoszkolna

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie specyfiki akademickiego kształcenia przyszłych nauczycieli i nauczycielek przedszkola i edukacji wczesnoszkolnej w odniesieniu do wspierania rozwoju ich kompetencji międzykulturowych. Uwzględniając teoretyczne przygotowanie, działania te mogą być podjęte na zajęciach uwzględniających część praktyczną realizowaną w szkole z dziećmi z doświadczeniem migracji lub uchodźstwa. Podstawą teoretyczną staną się tutaj założenia koncepcji myślenia transformatywnego Jacka Mezirowa. W tekście ukazuję przykład wdrożenia rozwiązań związanych z rozwijaniem tych kompetencji w ramach projektowanego cyklu zajęć: edukacja międzykulturowa (30 h, 2 pkt ECTS) i kompetencje międzykulturowe w pracy nauczyciela (30 h, 2 pkt ECTS) z superwizją i uwzględnieniem dziesięciu etapów uczenia się transformatywnego. Obejmują one pojawienie się dylematu dezorientacyjnego, autobadanie, krytyczną ocenę przyjętych założeń epistemologicznych, uznanie podobieństwa przeżywania analogicznej sytuacji przez inne osoby, badanie możliwości odmiennej realizacji roli nauczyciela, projektowanie przebiegu nowych działań, uzyskiwanie dodatkowej wiedzy i umiejętności, czasowe podejmowanie się nowych ról, a także – będące najdłuższym i najbardziej wymagającym etapem: rozwijanie kompetencji i poczucia pewności siebie podczas interakcji międzykulturowych.

Introduction

One of the consequences of the war in Ukraine, which is continuing for another year, is the increase in refugee numbers. As the crisis caused by the Russian military attack has deepened, Ukrainian nationals supported by Poles have filled the spaces of Polish cities and villages, joining the ranks of workers and consumers of various services, including education. The remarkably large presence of “children of war” in the Polish educational system was and is a revolutionary change. The exercise of their right to education in a safe environment where their special educational needs are taken into account has become a special challenge for those working in schools.

With Polish-Ukrainian interactions intensifying in educational institutions, and with the presence of other minority groups, the issue of developing intercultural competence becomes a key social task. Due to the nature of their professional role, this becomes a particularly relevant issue for those employed in educational institutions and those preparing to become teachers. The success of the education and socialization of refugees largely depends on these actors. This is especially true for those accompanying the youngest students and pre-school children due to the vulnerable phase of their development. In this regard, it is assumed that future kindergarten and early

childhood education teachers should know how to work with people with migrant experience, how to conduct intercultural dialogue and effectively work in culturally diverse environments with children for whom Polish is another language, using intercultural and glottodidactic competencies (Regulation..., 2019).

The reconsideration of the training of future teachers can lead to the search for approaches that allow education to be adapted to social tasks such as those described here. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to present the author's proposal for the practical application of J. Mezirow's concept of transformative learning in academic teaching practice. The essay shows an example of a methodological design of a series of classes: *Intercultural Education* and *Intercultural Competence in the Work of the Teacher* with supervision taking into account the stages of transformative learning. Key in this regard is the discussion of conditions that promote critical reflection and openness to the Other and the skills of decentration and divergent thinking in students.

Intercultural competence of (future) teachers

The issue of intercultural teacher training has been an object of pedagogical research and an aspect of academic didactics in colleges and university centers in Rzeszów, Krakow, Cieszyn, Warsaw and Wrocław, among others. The research analysis and pedagogical practice focused on intercultural competence, which is a complex construct, has been extensively described in the literature. The issue was expounded by, for example, Nikitorowicz (2005), Grzybowski (2008), Rembierz (2017, 2020), Bem (2017), Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), Deardorff (2006) or Byram (1986). The latter of the cited authors points out that intercultural competence involves components of knowledge (it is the knowledge that enables adaptation to changing circumstances and information about cultural practices), awareness of the existence of differences and similarities between cultures, the ability to "observe" reality, the interpretation and negotiation of what cultures have in common, as well as the analysis of cultures, and an attitude of open communication, inquisitiveness, and preparedness to give up prejudices (Szczurek-Boruta, 2013, p. 157). Some of the basic skills that foster intercultural competence include showing respect for others; being oriented to concepts and categories that describe themselves and the surrounding reality (and manifesting unprejudiced views); empathy; managing interactions, construed as the capacity to adjust conversation; task-oriented behaviors regarding relationships in a professional group context; behaviors conducive to harmonious interpersonal relationships within a group and tolerating ambiguity (Lustig and Koester, 2010, pp. 72–73).

The "list" of features which are relevant during intercultural interaction may inspire an in-depth analysis of this problem under a complex model of social interaction.

Deardorff (2006) points out the prerequisites for this process: developing an attitude of ambivalence, openness, respecting members of other groups and refraining from judging them. Following this, attention should be paid to the cognitive component that provides opportunities for interpretation and the shaping of sociolinguistic awareness. The skills of listening to and understanding the “Other” and analyzing these interactions are built on this ground. On an individual level, these activities are an opportunity to gain an “internal outcome”: a conscious frame of reference (whose elements are cognitive flexibility, adaptability, ethno relativism and ethnocultural empathy). During this dynamic process, an “external outcome” may eventually emerge: the competence to communicate in an intercultural context in harmony with the needs of the other side of the dialogue. Looking at this definition, it is worth noting the step-by-step process of developing these competencies, which depends on one’s commitment and cognitive and emotional effort.

The issue of developing intercultural competence can be associated with human development: the process of transforming the way of understanding the world, crossing the frame of reference of interpreting events and discovering new meanings (Straś-Romanowska, 2009). These dynamic intercultural competence concerns “learning” with Others, regardless of what ethnic, cultural, national category this Otherness refers to. And it is the notion of learning, seen in its complexity and interactional dependence, that is central to understanding these competencies.

Transformative learning

When considering the issue of intercultural competencies, an analogy can be drawn between their development and the learning process, especially between transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000). Critical tasks that inspire and sustain the learner’s activity should be regarded as crucial in this process (Tripp, 1996). The learning process can transform the way a person interprets themselves and their “frames of reference”: an individual interpretive system made up of preconceptions of thought and predictions about an object. There are three dimensions: cognitive, emotional and motivational, while the “task” of the frame of reference is to show the context for making meanings. The fundamental components of this mental frame are mental habits and points of view (Kławsiuć-Zduńczyk, 2014, p. 42).

The learning process can both strengthen the frame of reference (formative learning), impact the learning of “a new version of it,” and its transformation, or the process of rebuilding the frameworks (semantic perspectives, habits and thought patterns) that were adopted earlier, often indiscriminately, making them more inclusive, reflective and giving them the emotional potential for change (see Jarvis, 2012, p. 129).

Mezirow divided transformative experiences into the following categories: reflection (new awareness of accepted ways of perceiving reality and experiencing existential situations), critical reflection (coupled with testing the validity of these premises, their origins and consequences), and critical self-reflection (with an assessment of personal perspectives of meaning and attainable ways of undermining them) (see Mezirow, 2003, p. 61; Jokikokko, 2010, p. 33; Pleskot-Makulska, 2007, p. 91). Pleskot-Makulska identified ten aspects of transformative learning, namely:

1. triggering the transformation of the frame of reference (which results from a “disorientation dilemma” – an event or series of situations occurring at a particular time),
2. self-examination (self-analysis) – analysis of one’s identity, accompanied by emotions such as anger, fear, shame or guilt,
3. critical evaluation of one’s previous epistemological assumptions,
4. recognizing that both myself and others experience a similar sense of contention or frustration in a similar situation and undergo a similar transformation,
5. exploring eventualities related to the choice of new roles, relationships and behaviors,
6. designing future actions,
7. acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out the planned activities,
8. undertaking temporary new roles,
9. developing competence and self-confidence in the new roles,
10. reintegrating one’s life, which includes the conditions of the new frame of reference (2007, p. 91).

The stages of the learning process cited here can also be used to describe the formation of intercultural competence. This issue was raised by Jokikokko (2010) and Taylor (1994), among others. Interactions with members of culturally different groups are conducive to the shift in one’s frame of reference. In cross-cultural learning, becoming conscious/aware of how one’s experiences and social influences have affected one’s frame of reference is essential to understanding other cultures and looking at social problems through others’ eyes (Taylor, 1994). This can encourage critical reflection, indispensable for a shift in perspective, which enables one to question their personal constructs (Taylor, 1994).

Recognizing the value of this process, it is worth considering how elements of transformative learning can inform the formation of future teachers’ intercultural competence. This category is not explicitly included in the Regulation of the Ministry of Education of July 25, 2019 on the standard of training for the teaching profession, but the issues described in this document can be read as conditions conducive to including this aspect in school activities. These are:

1. individual approach and support for self-determination: “individual methodological counseling should be provided to support the integration of knowledge in education-related disciplines, while shaping students’ self-determination and responsibility for the course and effectiveness of their own learning.”
2. support for the reflexivity of students: “In the process of education, students should receive support in ... forming the attitude of a reflective practitioner.”
3. shaping the attentiveness of those studying and sensitivity to the developmental needs of children, developing an attitude of interpersonal openness and “being guided by ethical sensitivity, empathy, openness, criticism, and taking responsibility for the holistic development of children or students and the teaching measures.”
4. paying attention to divergence, as well as: “contextuality, openness and variability of the teacher’s daily educational and teaching activities” (Regulation..., 2019).

Priority given to the aforementioned characteristics became one of the inspirations for designing a series of classes on developing intercultural competence, which will be described in more detail later in this article.

“Transformative” development of intercultural competence of future early childhood education and preschool teachers

The proposed series of classes places special importance on reflective and transformative learning. It combines theory and practice with the supervision and didactic support of academic teachers-facilitators and was designed for the classes offered at the Jagiellonian University for preschool and early childhood pedagogy majors. The classes are implemented in a college and elementary school (where teaching practice takes place), where children with refugee and migration experience learn. It includes two courses: Intercultural Education (2 ECTS credits, 30 h) and Intercultural Competence in the Work of a Teacher (2 ECTS credits, 30 h), ending with a passing or failing grade (ZAL, b/o) in consecutive semesters (winter and summer) of the fifth year of study.

The goal of the first course – Intercultural Education – is to develop knowledge, skills and competencies in the area of multiculturalism, the ability to analyze phenomena of cultural difference and to design classes. The assumption here is to start by discussing with the students the topics which are covered by the course and by adult learners writing down a contract. The proposed topics should relate to:

- stimulating reflection on the basic concepts and issues of intercultural education: “culture,” “multiculturalism,” “interculturalism,” “intercultural education,” et al,
- analysis of the issue of identity in multicultural settings, reflection on the concepts of: a “borderland person,” types of borderlands and building identity in the borderlands of cultures,
- reflection on attitudes towards cultural diversity (stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, as well as ethnocentrism and cultural relativism, xenophobia, and xenophilia),
- analysis of the concepts of national and ethnic minority, definition and analysis of the concepts of nation, nationality, ethnicity, assimilation, acculturation, enculturation and other minority groups in Poland and Europe, the issues of migration and refugee flows,
- basic concepts relating to intercultural communication,
- selected issues of methodology of intercultural education classes and organization of work “with and for foreigners,” creation of lesson plans and practicing these lessons during academic classes (Smoter, 2020).

The seminar involves the use of methods that develop the skills of presenting one’s point of view, interacting, building relationships, making individual and team decisions and developing creative problem-solving competencies (Brudnik et al, 2011) Useful methods/tools include, for example, microlearning, discussion, educational games, decision tree, fish skeleton, meta-plan, snowball, storytelling, graffiti, jigsaw, “aquarium,” brainstorming; while useful tools include autobiography of cross-cultural encounters, cross-cultural fairy tales, persona dolls, Mentimeter, and Edpuzzle (Smoter, 2020, pp. 132-133). In the middle and at the end of the course there is an evaluation part, which will facilitate targeted further work.

The next course in the series is called Intercultural Competence in the Work of a Teacher. The purpose of the classes is to form intercultural competence in practice. The course has three components. The first is a theoretical introduction to the topic of intercultural competence, transformative learning and its stages (4 h). The course continues to develop into the practical part, which is carried out in an elementary school from 1st to 3rd grade and focuses on observing work with a student/student with migration or refugee experience and taking initial actions with him/her (Component II: 8 h with supervision 5 h). These classes are also an introduction to the next part (Component III) carried out again in an elementary school (8 h with supervision 5 h), which provides an opportunity to apply the skills covered in the earlier classes. A mandatory component of the practical part of the classes is group supervision to discuss issues arising during the practical classes. The supervisor can be a person who has been trained for this role and who does not work at the school where the classes were held (Gębska & Gorzędowska, 2012, p. 50). The stages of supervision consist

of establishing a relationship, laying down the principles of the contract, setting acceptable and achievable goals, specifying possible problems and options for solving them, sharing suggestions, planning activities and summarizing the supervision meeting (Gębska & Gorzędowska, 2012, p. 50). The role of the supervisor is to support the development of skills of decentration, and critical and divergent thinking, which is part of “working on experience.”

During the (initial) practice part at school, the students are expected to learn about the characteristics of children with migration and refugee experience: the procedures for admitting them to school and kindergarten, the implementation of teaching/educational activities, assisting and observing the efforts of teachers and the interaction of these children with other students and school staff. The main element of this part can be the keeping of a reflective diary, affording an opportunity for deep learning, analyzing cause and effect, and developing a sense of responsibility and agency (Moon, 2003; Smoter, 2020). The course presupposes the possibility of a stage with a “disorientation dilemma” (an incident that begins the process of “reframing”).

The first supervision stage is the initiation, together with the students, of a transformative process of the frame of reference, relating to this dilemma (1). The challenges discussed during the supervision may include the teaching-learning process, communication barriers, issues of integrating these children into the school environment and their adaptation, cooperation with parents and with an intercultural assistant. The key element here is the identification of the dilemma: did it occur and how? What is it like? The next stage may be self-examination (2) – focusing on the emotional states accompanying the analysis of the problem and its valuation. The next step is critical evaluation of one’s previous epistemological, socio-cultural or psychological assumptions as well as (3) rethinking of how useful or insufficient they are. In this regard, it will be crucial for the supervisor to support the process of recognizing that not only the student, but also others may be experiencing similar change and experiencing difficult emotions (4). In a safe supervision setting, it is also possible to explore, without judgment, the various ways in which people perform social roles, form relationships and engage in behaviors (5). This will make it more feasible to plan the course of action in similar situations (6). When new ideas and concepts are emerging and possibilities and resources are being analyzed, it may be necessary to look for new inspirations coming from both professionals and a group of colleagues (7). During the supervision sessions, it may be possible to spark a conversation about various problem areas (based on the ideas in the diaries). In addition to this, however, it is also necessary to create opportunities for intra-subject consultations (most academics hold such consultations each week of academic classes). The return of students to the “school of practice” already allows them to carry out selected parts of the classes to a greater extent on their own: to take up new ideas, concepts, ways of carrying out roles (8),

which should then be discussed at the next group supervision (Smoter, 2020, p. 147). The possibility of practice with students can create more and more disorientation dilemmas. The next stages are supported only partially by the supervisor, based on the potential that has been developed, building competence and confidence in one's roles, and reintegration, in which the conditions included in the new frame of reference will be taken into account (Jokikokko, 2010, p. 38). It should be noted that this is a demanding process, which relies largely on self-reflection and, to a greater extent, search for original solutions (Smoter, 2020, p. 148).

Conclusion

Reflexion in action and over action is a sign of expert training of prospective teachers. The process of “describing oneself” seems especially challenging in the context of an encounter with a “difference” – with someone “other” than the student, pupil, parent, cultural phenomenon, etc. It can provoke a process of transformative thinking, however, a number of factors influence the way of solving “disorientation dilemmas” in the lives of teachers. These include, among others, previous socialization influences and the shaping of learning methods (Smoter, 2020, p. 76). Individuals, to varying degrees, may explore the potential that comes with fulfilling new roles and tasks, and consequently: “merging” identities with different ways of thinking about the surrounding world.

The questions of the categories of migration, refugees, and cultural difference cannot be omitted from the curricula of education studies today, and should also be reinterpreted in their topicality and complexity. This issue applies not only to children of Ukrainian origin, but also to members of other religious, ethnic and national minorities and re-emigrants functioning in Polish educational institutions (see NIK, 2020). Universities are spaces where we can and should create conditions conducive to the practice of transformative learning. Including it in the training of future teaching staff seems to be a matter of priority and a pledge of educational concern for students – including those who are experiencing adaptation problems resulting from migration or refugee situations.

Bibliografia

Bem, M. (2017). Modele kompetencji międzykulturowych [Models of Intercultural Competence]. In K.M. Błeszyńska (Ed.), *Edukacja międzykulturowa jako czynnik rozwoju kultury pokoju* [Intercultural education as a factor in the development of a culture of peace] (pp. 292–314). Wydawnictwo Naukowe Katedra.

- Brudnik, E., Moszyńska, A., & Owczarska, B. (2011). Ja i mój uczeń pracujemy aktywnie [Me and my student work actively]. Przewodnik po metodach aktywizujących [Guide to activating methods]. Wydawnictwo Jedność.
- Byram, M. (1986). Cultural studies in foreign-language teaching. *Language Teaching*, 19, 322–336.
- Deardorff, D. (2006). The identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization at institutions of higher education in the United States. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10, 241–266.
- Gębska, M., & Gorzędowska, K. (2012). Superwizja – teoria i praktyka [Supervision: Theory and Practice]. In M. Grewiński (Ed.), *Dobre praktyki mentora akademickiego. Doświadczenia projektu „Kuznia Liderów – Szkoła Mentorów”* [Good practices of academic mentor: Experiences of the “Forge of leaders – school of mentors” project] (pp. 46–62). TWP Higher School of Education.
- Grzybowski, P.P. (2008). *Edukacja międzykulturowa – przewodnik. Pojęcia, literatura, adresy* [Intercultural education: a guide: Concepts, literature, addresses]. Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”.
- Jarvis, P. (2012). Transformacyjny potencjał uczenia się w sytuacjach kryzysowych [Transformative potential of learning in crisis situations]. *Teraźniejszość – Człowiek – Edukacja*, 3(59), 127–135.
- Jokikokko, K. (2010). *Teachers’ intercultural learning and competence*. Oulu.
- Kławiś-Zduńcyk, A. (2014). Poradnictwo całościowe jako element wsparcia w edukacji dorosłych [Lifelong counseling as a support element in adult education]. Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.
- Lustig, M.W., & Koester, J. (2010). *Intercultural competence: Interpersonal communication across cultures*. Allyn & Bacon.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult: Core concept of transformation theory. In J. Mezirow (Ed.), *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3–34). Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Mezirow, J. (2003). Transformative learning as discourse. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 1(1), 58–63.
- Moon, J. (2003). *Learning journals and logs: Reflective diaries*. University of Exeter – Center for Teaching and Learning.
- NIK. (2020, September 8). Kształcenie dzieci rodziców powracających do kraju oraz dzieci cudzoziemców [Education of children of parents returning to the country and children of foreigners]. Najwyższa Izba Kontroli. <https://www.nik.gov.pl/kontrola/P/19/028/>
- Nikitorowicz, J. (2005). Kreowanie tożsamości dziecka. Wyzwania edukacji międzykulturowej [Shaping a child’s identity: Challenges of intercultural education]. Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne.
- Pleskot-Makulska K. (2007). Teoria uczenia się transformacyjnego autorstwa Jacka Mezirowa [Theory of Transformative Learning by Jack Mezirow]. *Rocznik Andragogiczny*, 2007, 81–96.
- Rembierz, M. (2017). Kultura intelektualna, wątpliwości metodologiczne i refleksja metapedagogiczna w rozwijaniu teorii i praktyki edukacji międzykulturowej [Intellectual

- culture, methodological doubts, and metapedagogical reflection in developing the theory and practice of intercultural education]. *Edukacja Międzykulturowa*, 7, 37–67.
- Rembierz, M. (2020). Między zakorzeniem w dziedzictwie tradycji a otwartością (na pograniczu). O kształtowaniu “międzykulturowej tożsamości” i tropach pedagogicznych poszukiwań Jerzego Nikitorowicza [Between rooting in the heritage of tradition and openness to the border: On shaping “intercultural identity” and pedagogical paths in Jerzy Nikitorowicz’s work]. *Edukacja Międzykulturowa*, 12, 19–50.
- Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of July 25, 2019 on the standard of training to prepare for the teaching profession. *Journal of Laws*. 2019, item 1450 (2019). Poland.
- Smoter, K. (2020). *Przygotowanie studentek i studentów pedagogiki przedszkolnej i wczesnoszkolnej do pracy z dziećmi z doświadczeniem uchodźstwa i migracji* [Preparing preschool and early school education students to work with children with experience of refuge and migration: Selected contexts]. Jagiellonian University Publishing House.
- Spitzberg, B., & Changnon, G. (2009). Conceptualizing intercultural competence. In D.K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 2–52). SAGE.
- Straś-Romanowska, M. (2009). Doświadczenia graniczne w rozwoju człowieka: wyzwanie dla poradnictwa [Borderline experiences in human development: A challenge for counseling]. In A. Kargulowa (Ed.), *Poradownictwo – kontynuacja dyskursu. Podręcznik akademicki* [Counseling – Continuation of discourse: An academic handbook] (pp. 65–83). Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Szczurek-Boruta, A. (2013). Nauczyciele i kształtowanie kompetencji międzykulturowej uczniów [Teachers and the development of students’ intercultural competence]. *Pogranicze. Studia Społeczne*, 21, 155–169.
- Taylor, E.W. (1994). A learning model for becoming interculturally competent. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 18(3), 389–408.
- Tripp, D. (1996). *Zdarzenia krytyczne w nauczaniu. Kształtowanie profesjonalnego osądu* [Critical incidents in teaching: Developing professional judgment] (K. Kruszewski, trans.). Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne.