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On the need to support the development of intercultural and media competences in the education of teachers – in search of solutions

KEYWORDS

intercultural competence, media competence, teacher

ABSTRACT

Today, a characteristic feature of life is contact (direct or via media) with "otherness" and the "Other" – ethnically, religiously, nationally. The issue of the links between multiculturalism and the media is essential for education, but it does not seem to be sufficiently taken into account in the formal education of teachers. Therefore, the article addressed the issue of shaping media competences and intercultural competences of teachers, indicating the need to include both these issues in an integral manner. It has become important to consider the dimensions of these competences – cognitive, pragmatic and emotional – as well as to show the issues that should be present in the education of teaching staff. This type of approach seems to meet the requirements relating to the dynamically forming "knowledge-based society and "multicultural society".

Academic circles should be concerned with protecting valuable traditions and achievements made to date, but at the same time, they should intensively search for and take advantage of opportunities emerging in our times

(Lewowicki, 2004: 48)

Contemporary reality is characterised by a constant departure from the monolith-ic social order in favour of a new one, marked by the existence of forms of other-ness and diversity (Ziółkowski 2005, p.184, Mariański 1997, p. 37). Therefore, the characteristic feature of life has become increased contact with "otherness" mani-festing in the field of external appearance, language, religious beliefs, traditions or customs. Recognition and evaluation of the diversity that surrounds an individual becomes possible not only through direct contact, but also through contact me-diated through the media. Currently, an increasing part of reality is shared, pro-cessed or created by the mass media (Kluszczyński 2001, p. 75). Taking this fact into account becomes important in the reflection on the consequences of the im-pact of contemporary social and cultural processes on the thinking and acting of important "actors" of educational processes. This situation appears to, in a specific way, concern people preparing for the profession of a pedagogue and a teacher. As E. Wysocka notes, "[...] a pedagogue who wishes to effectively influence the young generation muse understand the world in which they live [...] its potential and changeability, [...] here and now, and in the future" (2012, p. 21). Therefore, the existing situation becomes a factor that forces the shaping of new competences, among which intercultural competences plan a special role. The importance of developing them is noted by, among others, J. Huber, who points out that it is these competences that allow people to "[...] notice and recognise the causes of some of the most burdensome problems that plague contemporary societies" (Huber 2014, p. 8). The development of media competences is also becoming significant here, as these days, the information society is becoming a key perspective for the organisa-tion of the organisation of a school and the work of a teacher (Cichocki 2008). This is connected with the penetration of the media into all educational environments and the fact that they remain an important agenda for shaping social opinions, attitudes and beliefs.

In this article, I will address the issue of shaping media and intercultural com-petences of future teachers, with an emphasis on the need to frame both these issues in an integral way. This approach seems to meet the requirements that re-sult from contemporary social transformations and the dynamically developing "knowledge society" and "multicultural society".

Intercultural and media competences

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines "competence" as the ability to do some-thing well" (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/competence). In

turn, M. Czerepaniak-Walczak defines competences as a particular property, associated with demonstrating – at an appropriate level, defined by social standards – the skills of adequate behaviour, awareness of needs for and consequences of such behaviour, as well as taking on the responsibility for it (1995, p. 135–137, see also Paśko 2016, p. 110). People should gain an awareness of their competences; they can be shaped through learning, they can be observed in others and repeated (*ibid.*). All of these characteristics may be applied to the issue of competences important in academic education. Among them, we can point to interpersonal, motivational and cognitive competences (Blasi 1999, s. 29, Krajewska 2003). Additionally, there are also "auxiliary" competences, such as creativity and initiative, ability to work in a team, ability to think critically, a good level of IT skills, as well as cultural sensitivity and international awareness (*ibid.*). I will pay particular attention to two of the last "auxiliary" competences listed here – hereafter referred to as intercultural and media competences.

The first of the aforementioned – intercultural competences – are considered one of the components of "intercultural learning", which is divided in the literature on the subject into the following four stages:

1. Expanding knowledge of a "foreign" culture;
2. Identifying the structures of thinking of representatives of the "Others" category, considered to be "carriers" of the meanings of a different culture;
3. Acquiring competences for intercultural action;
4. Mastering rules that enable orientation in diverse cultural conditions and perception of behaviours typical for a specific culture (Szczurek-Boruta 2013, p. 100).

On the other hand, M. Byram (1997, p. 53–65, after: Szczurek-Boruta 2013) understands intercultural competences somewhat differently. In his framing, they should encompass the following areas:

- **knowledge** – information about the world that enable adaptation to changing conditions, as well as knowledge related to the products of cultures and practices in the context of oneself and the person with whom contact is made;
- **awareness** of differences and similarities between cultures, as well as the complex processes that take place during social interactions;
- **skills** of "observing" reality, communication, interpretation and determination of interrelationships, as well as analysing cultures (in the historical, geographical and social contexts);
- **attitudes** that imply communication readiness, including inquisitiveness, openness, willingness to give up prejudices, or an attitude of tolerance.

Intercultural competences can also be considered by referring to three commonly recognised educational dimensions:

- the cognitive dimension (knowledge): "Learning to know". Therefore, all information that helps to awaken understanding and mutual respect in a multicultural environment is essential. This requires, on the one hand, factual knowledge of culturally relevant values and norms, traditions, religion, works of art ("Culture with a capital C"), and everyday life and habits ("culture with a lowercase c"). On the other hand, this is connected with the acquisition of strategic knowledge necessary in intercultural encounters (this refers to the rules of externalising cultural identity, clarifying misunderstandings and misinterpretations, dealing with conflicts, learning cooperation, etc.).
- the emotional dimension (attitudes): "Learning to be". Intercultural education should, in its assumptions, deepen self-awareness and understanding of one's own cultural background. At the same time, it must shape attitudes of respect and tolerance for "otherness and others", as well as the equality and the right of each person to be different.
- the practical dimension (skills): "Learning to do". In the context of intercultural education, it is necessary to develop the ability to use appropriate factual or strategic knowledge in situations where intercultural problems need to be overcome, and frequently complex tasks need to be carried out together (Neuner 2014, p. 30).

The overall components should imply the implementation of the idea of "Learning to live together", which would indicate the context of coexistence with "Others".

Another concept that is useful in the understanding of this competence is Patrick R. Moran's "Cultural Experience" model, which assumes that this experience takes place on four levels: Knowing About, Knowing How, Knowing Why and Knowing Oneself (*ibid.*, p. 15–19). Recognising all of the contexts mentioned here becomes a condition for shaping multidimensional relations with the "Others".

With regard to the development of these competences, three principles can also be pointed out, which are helpful in the activities undertaken as part of intercultural education. They are, above all (Neuner 2014, p. 31, after: *Intercultural education: managing diversity, strengthening democracy* 2003, p. 36):

- focusing on differences instead of common traits, which should be understood as openness to the "different" and "unknown";
- cultural relativism (equality of cultures), which states that the values and norms of one culture cannot be used to evaluate other cultures;

- reciprocity – exchanges, interactions and mutual trust between different entities.

Media competences are somewhat differently operationalised in the literature on the subject. When undertaking their description, it is worth referring at the beginning to the functions performed by contemporary media. The most of these include culture-creating functions – the function of disseminating diverse content (frequently combined with the process of sharing and explaining – serving an explicatory and compensatory function); the stimulating function, which consists both in stimulating the viewers to more active reception of the content broadcast on the screen, as well as encouraging them to participate more fully in culture; the pattern-creating function related to the promotion of specific lifestyles, models of action, ideals to be pursued; and the interpersonal function, thanks to which an opportunity was created to get to know the life of distant countries and people from different cultural circles (Gajda, 2002, p. 43–46). All these aspects illustrate the multitude of fields of influence of contemporary media, which today are becoming an inseparable companion of human life. The virtually unlimited access to information possible today, which carries both opportunities and risks, requires shaping media competences, understood as a harmonious composition of "knowledge, understanding, valuing and the efficient use of the media" (Strykowski 2004, p. 33). Media education usually faces two general tasks, referring to two components of the term "media", i.e. media messages – which is connected with preparation for conscious, critical and valuing reception, as well as, more and more often, creation of all kinds of media messages (cultural purpose) and preparation for efficient use of media as tools for diversified intellectual work (in this respect media will be treated as means of communication and forms of learning. This objective is described as technological or tool-oriented) (Strykowski, Kąkolewicz, Ubermanowicz 2008).

The authors of reports commissioned by UNESCO indicate that the media can discover an important role in the process of protecting values, as well as making the values of various cultures accessible. They can also be conducive to cooperation and international cultural exchange. The communication techniques currently being developed can also facilitate transnational discussions on the most important problems of the world, such as peaceful coexistence, protection of individual rights, counteracting discrimination in various fields, as well as international economic cooperation. Initiatives developed on this basis may also play an important role in the implementation and success of various types of global educational programmes aimed at education for peace – possible thanks to the knowledge and understanding of other cultures in the context of one's own culture (Kubiszyn 2007, p. 84, Golka 2001, p. 215–227).

Media competences and intercultural competences in the education of teachers – areas of possible links

As can be seen from the description above, both types of competences are presently becoming significant in relation to teacher education. It seems particularly valuable to emphasise certain connections between them, all the more so as one can get the impression that both in formal teacher education, as well as in studies and guides constituting the skills and tools for shaping their intercultural competences, more importance is attached to developing their awareness and providing tools concerning the functioning of foreign language-speaking children in schools or ways of preventing the exclusion of students who are "Other" in terms of nationality, ethnicity or language in the school space. Meanwhile, the issue of the links between multiculturalism and the media does not seem to be taken sufficiently into account in the formal education of teachers and pedagogues. Therefore, it is worth pointing out some postulates for pedagogical practice. In this respect, the integral shaping of intercultural and media competences of teachers could assume, considering the cognitive, pragmatic and emotional aspects, dimensions understood as follows:

- The cognitive dimension (KNOWLEDGE): "Learn to know" – acquiring knowledge about socio-cultural diversity and cultural practices undertaken by different groups and how to present minority groups and their practices, as well as in the media (Where to look for this type of information? How to analyse and select these messages?);
- The emotional dimension (ATTITUDES): "Learn to be" – implying a willingness to communicate with "Others", including curiosity, openness, willingness to give up thinking based on prejudices (What attitudes can be triggered by contact with "Others" and certain media messages about them? What resources can be particularly useful in shaping openness towards "Others"?);
- The practical dimension (SKILLS): "Learn to act" – interpreting the links between cultures (which are also depicted in different ways in the media) and establishing the importance of these links for pedagogical practice; planning and implementing classes on multiculturalism and anti-discrimination education including media competences; developing and promoting projects, programmes, campaigns and other intercultural initiatives on the Internet (especially in social media); taking action "for Others" and "with Others"; responding to cases of discrimination, including that occurring in the mass media.

In this context, the previously quoted "key statements" – *Knowing About; Knowing How; Knowing Why; Knowing Oneself* – should be considered in relation to specific issues, which – reflected in the media space – concern key themes concerning relations with entities that differ from us. Therefore, the surrounding reality should not only inspire, but also force pedagogical education to take up the following topics:

– *Internet as a tool for indoctrination and "cultural extremism"* (Wawrzak-Chodaczek, Urbanek 2015, p. 50). This may raise the following questions: What are the consequences of the functioning of such messages as described above for relations with "Others"? How is the image of representatives of different groups, such as religious, ethnic or national, created in the media? How are the representatives of these minorities perceived by children, youth and adults?

– *Internet as a place of multiple exclusions.* This provokes the search for an answer to the following question: Why are representatives of certain groups promoted, both "in real life" and in the media environment, while others are overlooked or negatively valued?

– *"Otherness" as an element used in advertising (shockvertising).* Here, it is worthwhile to reflect: What role(s) does the "Other" play in advertising messages? What consequences can their media presentation have on the perception of these groups' representatives?

– *Cyber communities that are "Pro-integration" or exclusionary towards the "Other" and "otherness".* We can wonder here what role they play for members of such groups? What consequences does participation in these virtual communities imply? What needs of the participants of a virtual space can be satisfied on their grounds? Which e-communities – due to their educational potential – can be used to achieve important goals of intercultural and anti-discrimination education?

– *Escalation of xenophobic and racist content in the media (hate speech*, e.g. promotion of Islamophobic slogans, often in the form of "viral" memes. The following problems can be addressed here: What is the sense and meaning of such messages for Internet users? How to counteract hate speech in the media? What strategies and tools for preventing this phenomenon are offered by virtual reality?

– *Transmission of intercultural meanings in travel and tourism programming.* The following issues can be addressed here: how are "foreign" and "exotic" cultures presented in their context? Which of these programmes make an effort to demolish the paternalistic system of intercultural relations?

– *Students persecuted for their "otherness" (resulting from religious, national and ethnic differences, among others) in educational institutions – transferring violence into "the real world" – the offline sphere (media perceived as a tool and space of peer exclusion).* It is worth addressing the following issue here: How to prevent and reduce the extent of discrimination in school and outside this space? (see Gawlicz, Rudnicki, Starnawski 2015),

Taking up such topics as those presented here may contribute to a more complete development of the above-mentioned competences in teachers. Their consequences should be the monitoring and diagnosis of the level of development of the intercultural and media competences of pupils. It is also connected with an attempt to answer the following questions: What is the level of students' knowledge about "Others'? What sources of information do they use? Do they participate in programmes/projects involving the development of these competences? If not, what are the barriers to the implementation of such activities? What resources can be used here? To what extent to current and future activities prove to be effective and responsive to pupils' needs?

All of these issues can and should be developed by teacher candidates during their formal academic education. The shaping of these competences should take place during seminars and exercises, during which space will be created for discussion on current issues of media socialisation in relation to the shaping of images of "foreign" and "other" cultures. This should also be reflected in workshops on the creative use of information technologies in pedagogical work, considering the issue of "multicultural content" in contemporary media. It is worth emphasising that individual efforts to participate in projects, programmes, campaigns, lectures, exhibitions and other activities developed in the local community, for example by non-governmental organisations, also play a significant role here. Looking at their subject matter, it can be seen that the issues they address seem to be more and more often an expression of critical thinking about the links between multiculturalism and the media.

It is also worth referring to the concept of intercultural competence development present in the training programmes. Assuming that they are enriched with a "media component", they should contain the following "ingredients":

- In the EMOTIONAL dimension: promoting empathy, awareness-raising and sensitivity to intercultural and multicultural issues, including those present and promoted in the media. It is worth stressing here the important dimension of intercultural education, which is the transcultural process of mutual learning – an experience covering the whole life, which enables one to gain tools of understanding, impact on the environment, participation and cooperation with others (Szczurek-Boruta, 2011, p. 158).

- In the COGNITIVE dimension: deepening knowledge and understanding of intercultural issues transmitted by various actors, including radio, Internet, press and television;
- In the PRAGMATIC dimension: developing individual practices: effectiveness, efficiency and honesty of actions taken in intercultural conditions – the observation of these actions taken by various actors, including intercultural contacts in the media, becomes significant here;
- In the dimension of COOPERATION: supporting the transition from individual practice to broader activities that shape social practice (Neuner 2014, p. 37).

Attention to, and not ignoring, these increasingly important social issues should accompany not only the daily choices of teachers, but also the organisation of their professional activities. It becomes pedagogically significant to constantly search for strategies and educational methods helpful in shaping the competences described here to a degree adapted to the needs and expectations of the groups involved in their development.

As P. Blasi notes, "in order to stay alive and develop in the knowledge society, we need the help of appropriate individuals with strong interpersonal skills (...) An expert or professional who is not sensitive to others (...) is more an obstacle than help..." (Blasi 1999, p. 29). According to UNESCO, school – one of the most important social institutions – has the task of developing pupils' potential by transferring knowledge, as well as shaping competences, attitudes and values that empower them for life in society (UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education 2007, Brotto in. 2014, p. 11). In an increasingly diverse world, can teachers and educators develop these competences in their pupils without themselves taking care of shaping them and constantly deepening "intercultural self-reflection"?

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