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Dialogue in Polish Schools: An Important Problem of Education and Pedagogy (Based on the Author's Own Research)

ABSTRACT

The subject of this study is dialogue at school. The theoretical aim is to show dialogue at school on the basis of the literature of the subject, and the practical goal is to show how current and future school directors perceive the essence of dialogue. The qualitative research strategy was used, with the method of a group interview. In terms of the research group, the respondents were chosen randomly from among postgraduate students of the specialisation of management in education at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow. They included current and potentially future school headmasters. In this article, the essence of dialogue and its contemporary threats resulting from the conditions of modern life are presented. The author attempts to describe the contemporary Polish compulsory school in the context of undertaking a dialogue. This article also presents the analysis and conclusions of her own research, including the conclusions for further educational practice. These include the following suggestions: continuous improvement of communication skills among teachers and other participants of school life; learning about our own emotions and attitudes that condition dialogue and working on them; paying more attention to the benefits of the dialogue within educational institutions – developing appropriate strategies and adopting proper philosophies/discourses

KEYWORDS

dialogue, dialogue at school, contemporary threats to dialogue, the essence of dialogue, benefits of dialogue

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in order to improve and maintain dialogue; organizing free dialogue workshops throughout the country in order to increase the culture of dialogue of the Polish nation; taking into account the need to adapt the dialogue to the interlocutor, including people from foreign countries.

Introduction

The high number of articles and books on dialogue, including dialogue at schools, shows how valid and live the subject is. Most scientists dealing with psychology and pedagogy convince teachers and students to undertake dialogue, especially at the early school age, as they realize how important the initial experiences of communication relations are. They determine the ability to undertake dialogue in further life. However, dialogue is essential not only at an early age. It is well known how difficult it is to find agreement in a relation between an adult and a teenager, when a young person reveals its own way of seeing the world, often very different from the one presented by elder generations.

Dialogue is also essential at a mature age. A person's age does not determine their being a qualified speaker or a good listener. Dialogue requires some effort, continuous improvement and practice, even if failures occur.

Dialogue at school is an extraordinarily wide subject and it is impossible to fully explore it within this article. It is investigated by specialists, such as Marian Śnieżyński, known from his work on dialogue presented in his books: *Zarys dydaktyki i dialogu* [*Outline of Didactics and Dialogue*]¹ and *Dialog edukacyjny* [*Educational Dialogue*]². Also, dialogue is the subject of daily conversations, including those carried out in our families. Nevertheless, does it mean that we are proficient in dialogue? According to the author – we are not. We refer to dialogue because we, as individuals and as members of the society, feel it is not efficient and satisfactory.

Moreover, direct dialogue is not made easier by new communication technologies behind which we often “hide”. We can frequently

¹ M. Śnieżyński, *Zarys dydaktyki i dialogu*, Kraków 1998.

² M. Śnieżyński, *Dialog edukacyjny. Teoretyczne założenia a szkolna rzeczywistość*, Kraków 2005.

notice young people sitting close to each other, holding mobile phones and not talking to one another. At home, dialogue at the table is often interrupted by television or computer noise.

At school, dialogue is disrupted by the hierarchical relation teacher-pupil in which the latter is always subordinate to the teacher. There are only few teachers who implement the idea of a partnership dialogue with their students. For some teachers, this concept is inappropriate, unimaginable and even harmful. The necessity to grade pupils at school does not make the relation easier, and it often results in pupil's stress, school/social phobias and the lack of trust to teachers. Unfortunately, in the public, Polish school, no one has invented a verification system that would be different than grades, the idea of which is rooted in the behavioural concept. On the other hand, the lack of grades would cause chaos at school. The question is – how to assess pupils as not to distort relations with them?

Moreover, the way school looks like is its “voiceless language”. What is communicated by well-equipped, colourful, ground-floor, Finnish schools, with sofas for relaxation and the possibility to walk without shoes, as at home? And what is communicated by some Polish and French schools which are huge and grey, and in which there are not even children's pictures on classroom walls? We communicate a lot to pupils by the way in which schools are decorated.

Finally, the dialogue: teacher-parents/parents-teacher is probably – according to numerous analyses carried out in Poland - one of the most difficult forms of dialogue between the sides engaged in school life. Is it limited to presenting grades by teachers and informing the parents of the achievements or failures of students, or has it got a more “human dimension”?

Marian Śnieżyński emphasises the importance of dialogue at school, claiming that “the requirement to prepare students for dialogue becomes an absolute necessity, integrally connected with the process of education of children and teenagers. Learning how to negotiate, ask questions, be polite in a discussion, defend one's own opinion, and respect other people's views, can bring a lot of benefits in the adult life”³.

³ Ibidem, p. 2.

These, and many other questions connected with dialogue at the Polish compulsory school, inspired the author of the article. The future headmasters' ideas and plans to improve dialogue at their schools are particularly interesting.

The essence of dialogue and its contemporary threats

At present, the teacher's task is no longer determining what is right, or being the authority in the pedagogical situation, as it does not make sense considering the wide range of changes taking place in the contemporary world. The teacher is no longer the only provider of knowledge, as one can easily access it himself/herself. The role of a pedagogue is to be a guide in the world of science and culture, and it is for a pupil who requires this. The teacher is an interpreter and translator of the cultural reality, not a law-maker. The teacher can suggest, but not impose anything on the students. Therefore, everyone who wants to become important to the pupils, should have the ability to interact with them in the process of direct and two-way communication⁴ – “its particular form is dialogue, which occurs when the receiver becomes the communicator and the receiver at the same time”⁵.

We should realize that dialogue is an elementary tool of the educational process and it is a chance for the development of both the teacher and the pupil. That can be achieved by providing authenticity, righteousness, honesty, and the intention to reach an agreement. Furthermore, in an authentic dialogue, everyone has the right to criticise the interlocutor's statements – the parties of the dialogue have equal status⁶.

It is recommended for teachers to be open to the dialogue with pupils. It is connected with the ability to share what the teacher feels

⁴ A. Matusz-Rzewska, *Nauczyciel-uczeń. O paradoksach wzajemnej komunikacji*, in: *Uczłowieczyć komunikację. Nauczyciel wobec ucznia w przestrzeni szkolnej*, ed. H. Kwiatkowska, Kraków 2015, p. 462.

⁵ M. Chodorowska-Chromiec, *Kompetencje komunikacyjne nauczyciela w pracy z uczniem*, in: *Nauczyciel kompetentny, Teraźniejszość i przyszłość*, ed. Z. Bartkiewicz, M. Kowalczyk, M. Samujło, Lublin 2007, p. 111.

⁶ Cf. J. Habermas, *Teoria działania komunikacyjnego, Racjonalność działania a racjonalność społeczna*, vol. 1, trans. A.M. Kaniowski, Warszawa 1999, p. 159.

for them, as well as for their words and actions. Therefore, being open is not revealing any private details from the past, but it is discovering reactions to the situations experienced together and explained in the context of past experience only if such explanation is necessary. The openness should be appropriate to the nature of the relation with another person, being not accidental, but rather a constant element of what is happening with people at a given moment. It should be two-sided and it should create the opportunities to strengthen the relation. It should be considered how the openness may affect the other person. Such openness should increase in difficult situations and, in time, it should reach deeper and deeper. Hasty openness can disrupt relations. It should be developed step by step⁷.

Dialogue can be disrupted by many causes, including personal impact, e. g. personality features connected with the inappropriate attitude to others, psychological and intellectual difficulties, problems related to establishing relations, immaturity, and reluctance to dialogue. The lack of dialogue can also result from cultural and social differences, when a person is unable to break the barrier of customs and traditions, language, etc. An individual may feel resistance in dialogue as a result of pressure or abuse experienced in the process of forming expectations of the person. It is often the result of following conservative principles in the relationship⁸. Paul Willis, in his ethnographical research, noticed that a group of pupils (children of factory workers) on purpose isolated themselves from the rest of the school. It was caused by their belief that their future roles are completely different from the ones offered by the school⁹.

In the current age characterised by the fast pace of life, we are facing the phenomenon of the “Ikea” generation – the one that gets everything ready for use. In such circumstances it is more difficult to work on dialogue; it is even hard to encourage young people to learn how to do it, as such learning is sometimes truly demanding.

⁷ Cf. M. Samujło, T. Sokołowska-Dzioba, *Język otwartości w relacji nauczyciel-uczeń*, in: *Uczłowieczyć komunikację. Nauczyciel wobec ucznia w przestrzeni szkolnej*, Kraków 2015, p. 443.

⁸ Cf. P. L. McLaren, *Antystruktura oporu*, in: *Nieobecne dyskursy*, part 2, Toruń 1992, p. 36.

⁹ Cf. W. Feinberg, J. Solis, *Szkoła i społeczeństwo*, trans. K. Kruszewski, Warszawa 2000, p. 62.

Piotr J. Śliwiński says that a man glides on the surface of the reality and concentrates only on stronger messages, staying with them for a short time and ignoring more subtle communicates¹⁰. Especially, we can notice how difficult it is for a young person to concentrate on a conversation with another person. It seems that they are not able to directly listen or talk to others. They manage to communicate with others better - and they do it mostly with their peers, not adults - by using social media communicators. They follow online conversations with many people at once (while doing other things, such as watching a film – they are often multi-task). Also, we can often notice young people sitting next to one another and not talking, but exploring the world of their smartphones. One of the results of such approach includes difficulties with oral examinations at universities. Students prefer written exams as they can “hide” behind a paper. They do not have to know how they should behave in a live conversation. They do not take responsibility for their words and do not have to look at the reactions to them. As modern societies, we lost the desire and value of a direct, slow-pace and authentic dialogue with another person, including conversations for pleasure and not only for individual immediate benefits.

On the other hand, according to Henryk Retter, communication is constantly deformed when, for example, voluntary communication gives way to psychological defence strategies, and interlocutors limit their activities to playing the roles of an offender and a victim. This kind of communication can be an expression of disturbed identity balance, sustained due to the necessity of protecting it¹¹.

The attempt to characterise the contemporary Polish compulsory school in the context of undertaking dialogue

Polish schools try to meet the expectations of the Ministry of Education (Polish abbreviation: MEN – Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej), which are mainly specified in the Act of 14th December

¹⁰ Cf. P.J. Śliwiński, *Zagubiony i odnaleziony w nie-miejscu*, in: *Kondycja człowieka współczesnego*, ed. C. Piecuch, Kraków 2006, p. 55.

¹¹ Cf. H. Retter, *Komunikacja codzienna w pedagogice*, trans. M. Wojdak-Piątkowska, Gdańsk 2005, p. 59.

2016, chapter 1, article 1, and connected with the dynamically changing world. These refer to: educational care for talented pupils by, e. g., providing the fulfilment of individual educational curricula, developing the students' willingness to take up various initiatives that will prepare them for active participation in the country's economic activities; preparing pupils for selecting their profession and further education by developing their interests and skills and organising after-school classes; and shaping their social skills and free time activities¹². Moreover, apart from the above mentioned activities, the school has many standard responsibilities with which it deals in various ways. The current direction in the Polish education – towards its decentralisation since 1996, and greater autonomy of schools (at the same time, their greater responsibility for the way they function), result in substantial differences between schools in different regions of the country and within particular schools.

Some scientists claim that schools struggle with various problems that results in their partially negative reputation. The school is a place where conservative rules in the relations between teachers and pupils are used. It happens that pupils are required attitudes they are not able to present because they do not understand them. At the same time, teachers are not attached to their school, they are uncertain about their future, frustrated and passive¹³. Some problems occur due to the organisation of schools, educational methods, attitudes of teachers and pupils, their relationships, as well as financial insufficiency and negative impact of the peer group¹⁴. Such situation is confirmed by the research of Maria Dudzikowa and Renata Wawrzyniak-Beszterda in their work "*School Experience of First Year after the Educational Reform*" ("*Doświadczenia szkolne pierwszego rocznika reform edukacji*"). The authors presented the results of the research on the students who declared not feeling well at their school, did not trust their teachers, and could neither express their thoughts nor influence what was happening at school. Moreover, the students (both

¹² The act on the education system of 14 December 2016., chapter 1, art. 1, section 1, 3, 5, 8, 18, (Journal of Laws 2017, item 59, article 1).

¹³ M. Michalicka-Ipnarska, *Szkola, jakiej potrzebujemy*, in: *Uczłowieczyć komunikację. Nauczyciel wobec ucznia w przestrzeni szkolnej*, ed. H. Kwiatkowska, Kraków 2015, p. 482.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 483.

junior high school and secondary school pupils were investigated) are surprised at the fact that teachers expect them to manage their own process of learning, which reveals how strongly they are attached to a passive attitude – to the image of the person who only memorises knowledge and presents it when needed¹⁵. Such a person would not be able to ask questions or perform a critical reflection on theoretical subjects.

Others see the school as a place where they can experience mutual understanding, inspiration to teach and learn, and develop themselves. School experience depends on a particular school, how it is managed, its atmosphere, as well as the individual's ability to establish relations and carry out dialogue – listening and speaking skills, as well as the ability to talk in such a way so that others listen to us.

Marta Michalicka-Ipnarska, in the article “*The School We Need*” (*Szkoła, jakiej potrzebujemy*) presents the school that functions according to the rules different than in most educational units. There is a mutual understanding among teachers and pupils in this school. Teachers understand the students' resistance: “it is good that they have something to be against, because such resistance facilitates their development”. The teachers are aware of their tendencies resulting from their professional responsibility: “we tend to steer the students and give them ready solutions”. Such an honest way of perceiving themselves is more beneficial for the teachers and pupils, because it makes it possible for the pupils to be more open in asking questions, searching for knowledge on their own, and creating - or at least co-managing – their process of learning. Teachers are willing to work in such a school, because their work is not only intellectually developing, but also nice and pleasant due to good relationships: “from the beginning I wanted to work at this school, mainly because of the people - they have interesting hobbies and are full of energy”. In such a school there is a dialogue among pupils, teachers and the school management: “students of this school know what they want, they are not afraid to talk to the headmaster or the class teacher, as they are their partners in communication”¹⁶.

¹⁵ M. Dudzikowa, R. Wawrzyniak-Beszterda, *Doświadczenia szkolne pierwszego rocznika reformy edukacji. Studia teoretyczno-empiryczne*, Kraków 2010, p. 121.

¹⁶ Cf. M. Michalicka-Ipnarska, *Szkoła, jakiej potrzebujemy*, op. cit., pp. 490–492.

There is still a question of the number of Polish schools in which there is no place for dialogue due to hierarchical relations, anonymity, personal problems and many other factors, and the number of schools where everyone is a partner in a possible conversation conducted in the atmosphere of respect and understanding. It is likely that all participants of school life would rather choose the second option. However, it should be remembered that each person has an influence on taking up dialogue at school or abandoning it.

Meanwhile, a question appears how to organise school as an institution. School management demands its internal integrity. It is necessary to concentrate on the integral functioning of the entities that constitute its internal life. None of the participants of school life should be depreciated¹⁷. Such respectfulness is the basis to promote dialogue, including dialogue in Polish schools.

Substantial guidelines for teachers on how to improve dialogue with pupils

It should be remembered that dialogue is important, because it is one of the factors of correct personal development of pupils. Personal development is one of the superior aims of school¹⁸.

First of all, the attention should be paid to the subjective treatment of pupils. Children and youth, the same as adults, are willing to learn, know more, and compete with one another, but they also need to cooperate and, above all, desire subjective – “human” treatment. It is worth to build the organisation of school education on this desire¹⁹. The rules of individual treatment in education should be followed in case of all the entities of school organisation, including parents, grandparents, specialists cooperating with schools, and others²⁰. It is

¹⁷ Cf. T. Gumuła, T. Dyrda, *Wybrane problemy edukacji szkolnej w Polsce*, in: *Szkoły, nauczyciele, uczniowie. Dyskusja o programie, metodzie, uczeniu się w Europie*, ed. T. Gumuła, T. Dyrda, Radom 2009, p. 38.

¹⁸ Cf. R. Parzęcki, *Funkcje pedagogiki w warunkach XXI w.*, in: *Wyzwania współczesnej pedagogiki*, ed. D. Becker-Pestka, E. Kowalik, Warszawa 2015, pp. 19–20.

¹⁹ Cf. J. P. Sawiński, *Jak zwiększyć skuteczność szkolnej edukacji. Poradnik dla edukatorów i nauczycieli*, Warszawa 2015, p. 175.

²⁰ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 177.

exactly in this way that we prepare the school environment, including the youngest children, to participate in dialogue. It is because there is no dialogue where there is no respect for the other person's dignity, no acknowledgement of his/her otherness and uniqueness, and no respect for their experiences, skills, passions, motivation to learn and a variety of deficiencies and problems.

Janusz Bielski refers to the essential determinants of dialogue with pupils, and among them there is the ability to adapt to the interlocutor, respecting the pupil's different point of view, listening skills and empathy, a positive attitude and acceptance for the pupil, as well as the teacher's culture of conversation and sense of humour²¹. As for the adjustment of language to the interlocutor, the author underlines using such words and phrases which are understandable for the pupil at a particular moment. It often results from the simplification of message, but it is necessary for the pupil to follow the teacher's way of thinking. In time, the teacher shall be able to use more sophisticated words, provided that he/she will explain their meaning to the pupil. The respect for personal differences is characterised by the author as the ability to acknowledge the pupil's individuality, avoidance of imposing the teacher's view on the student, and the ability to conduct an interesting and substantial discussion which leads towards common findings that are satisfactory to both sides. It should be considered that at present we are dealing with the generation that rejects the authoritarian enforcement of views and opinions. Therefore, we should use such a form of dialogue which activates the pupil's mind. This should be an authentic dialogue – a friendly, and not authoritarian communication with children and youth. The teacher should be open for what the pupil has got to offer. And empathy will allow the teacher to be sensitive to the pupil; to understand and feel the way he/she feels. Positive attitude will enable a relationship without prejudice. Language culture means the teacher's appropriate intonation, selection of words and clarity of communication. Moreover, a sense of humour shall make it possible for the teacher to maintain good relationships with the pupils. Pupils like such teachers very much²².

²¹ Cf. J. Bielski, *Nauczyciel doskonały. Kształtowanie się nauczycielskiego zawodu. Warunki, kryteria i mierniki efektywności pracy nauczyciela*, Kraków 2017, pp. 57–58.

²² Cf. *ibidem*, p. 58.

Zofia A. Żukowska emphasises the importance of the direct contact with the pupils, i. e. mindful and joyful staying with them in various situations at school. The author says that the teacher's natural contact with the pupils should not be blocked. Mainly children, but also youth, instinctively seek contact with adults - they want to be heard, noticed and appreciated. The adults' role is to notice and meet their needs. Ignoring the students' needs is a kind of violence²³.

Methodological bases for the author's own research

The subject of this study is dialogue at schools. The theoretical aim of the study is to present dialogue at school based on the literature of the subject, while the practical purpose is to demonstrate how the essence of dialogue is perceived by a person who plans to work at school (as well as the one who works there already) as the headmaster. The main research problem is: How school directors perceive dialogue at school? The strategy of qualitative research was used, while the method was group discussion, also called group interview, which – according to Tadeusz Pilch and Teresa Bauman – is not a method frequently used to gather research data in our country (it is more popular in Germany), yet it has some advantages. It gives us the opportunity to observe particular social conditions that occur in didactical and educational situations²⁴, including the situations connected with taking up dialogue at schools. Group discussion was used as a method so that the interviewees could present their point of view in a free and easy way, which required the interviewer to listen carefully, and not to ask questions – including those to which one can simply reply “yes” or “no”²⁵.

The author is aware of the fragmentary nature of this study. It would be interesting to carry out more detailed research, including the analysis of a larger research group.

²³ Cf. Z.A. Żukowska, *Dialog zamiast kar*, Podkowa Leśna 2015, p. 20.

²⁴ T. Pilch, T. Bauman, *Zasady badań pedagogicznych. Strategie ilościowe i jakościowe*, Warszawa 2001, p. 338.

²⁵ D. Kulinowski, *Jakościowe badania pedagogiczne. Filozofia. Metodyka. Ewaluacja*, Lublin 2010, p. 208.

Analysis of the results of the author's own research

The analysed research was carried out among groups of teachers, mainly from Lesser Poland, but also from Silesia and Podkarpacie, who attended postgraduate studies in Organisation and Management in Education at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow during three editions in the years 2015–2018. Fifty-seven teachers participated in the research. The interviewed teachers were deputy headmasters, temporary assistants of headmasters, or teachers delegated by their headmasters to prepare for being headmasters in future (e.g. after the current headmaster retires).

When asked how they improve the dialogue culture at their schools, the teachers responded that they do not do anything special - dialogue at school takes place anyway, and its quality is satisfactory. Six interviewees tried to initiate dialogue and indicated individual, interesting activities, which can be an inspiration for further practice of dialogue at schools. It is disturbing that only six out of nearly sixty people expressed their own ideas on dialogue at schools, while the others had nothing to say on this topic.

Some interviewed teachers are aware of the importance of dialogue at school. They are convinced that effective communication is essential for maintaining positive relations, good atmosphere at school, and enables an appropriate process of education. Moreover, the interviewed teachers try to be initiators of dialogue. They are aware that they should encourage pupils and parents to open and authentic talks on various topics. Here is a sample utterance:

I have regular conversations with parents, not only about achievements and difficulties of their children, but also about other things, including class organisation, difficulties they have with children, the joy they experience with them, and even social issues. It was not like that from the beginning. Every time the children were starting their first class, I tried to integrate with children and their parents (an early education teacher in a public primary school in Krakow, with 7-year work experience).

It seems to be a positive fact that a teacher can be inspired to dialogue by others, including people perceived as authorities:

During my studies, a couple of professors specialising in the field of dialogue drew our attention to the importance of dialogue at schools and preschools. I think that I took this advice to my heart. However, the fact

is that, due to my deep Catholic faith, respect for another person and talking with them was always very important to me (an early education teacher in a public primary school in Krakow, a graduate of master's and bachelor's studies at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, 3-year work experience after master's studies).

The interviewed teachers emphasise the importance of setting good relationships among teachers, which has a direct influence on the relations with pupils:

At our school there is such a group of teachers that we can understand each other very well. Each of us is a part of the team, and we really decide, together with our headmaster, on the shape and development of our school. This makes us truly involved in our work. Personally, I transfer these partnership relations to my pupils. It helps me to understand them better and show more patience and empathy, because I get the same from my principal and other teachers. I have worked in three schools by now, and this is the only one in which such dialogue is performed. From what I hear from my colleagues from other schools, I know that at some schools there is a lack of understanding and the atmosphere is not so good. At our school, it is nearly perfect (a history teacher in a public secondary school, 25 years of work experience).

It should be emphasised that for some of the interviewees, the important aspect that integrates them with pupils and parents is their hobby which they try to share with others, and which is used to create opportunities to start dialogue:

Dance is my hobby and I found that organising dancing events for children and parents at school once a month is the best way to establish deeper relationships with them. Dancing releases positive emotions; when we dance, we are authentic and we do not pretend anything. I think that dance brings people closer, so it is worth to meet and dance together. At the beginning, the parents were surprised at my suggestion and most of them were reluctant, but when they see that I am not discouraged, they take the challenge. It gives us lots of joy and fun. During our parties I organise games and competitions with prizes. My openness and readiness for conversations and sharing the activities I enjoy helps me maintain good relationships with the parents (an early school teacher in a public school in Krakow, 7 years of work experience).

Here is another utterance showing an interesting way of using one's hobby:

I am a Polish language teacher and teaching is my hobby. I have always known what I want to study and where I want to work. Reading, but also

writing, is the way of living for me. Through literature, e. g. characters from a novel, a tale etc., I can show my pupils good and bad examples, I can teach them norms and values. I think that secondary school students are mature enough to choose books on their own. They often recommend books to me and to their class, and I read them to be able to talk to them. It makes us all really happy. I am glad that they read books without pressure and choose reading as a form of relax. They feel important when they can recommend a book to teacher and I read it, and then we can all discuss it. They can also decide which plays in the theatre we shall see, which takes more time as there is always someone who wants to see something different, but, in the end, everyone is happy. We discuss, find compromise, respect the preferences of others. I feel that they are partners in our conversations. The lessons are never boring - they are interesting and dynamic. In a public school, where I used to work at the beginning of my career, I did not manage to work out such a good atmosphere. Students were reluctant, we all treated one another more anonymously, and I did not have enough courage and experience to teach using my own methods – through dialogue (a Polish language teacher in a private secondary school, 20 years of work experience)

Moreover, the interviewed teachers presented the result of their attempts to use dialogue, emphasizing mutual understanding and support, as well as undertaking essential activities together:

The parents have no problem to ask for advice if they need some, and I am also ready to take advantage of the parents' comments on their children, e. g. on how he/she behaves at home, because it helps to be consistent in upbringing at school and at home. I feel acceptance, support and appreciation from the parents. However, after the first three years, I had to change the school as the school headmaster (and also some more experienced teachers) did not accept my style of establishing close relationships with the parents and she often criticised me for that. The headmaster suggested that I should change the style of leading my class for a more "considered and professional" one. In my current school, my way of implementing integration and dialogue is accepted, and even admired. I have encouraged my colleagues to use a similar approach (an early education teacher in a public school in Krakow, 7 years of work experience).

The teachers also give examples of foreign good practices in the scope of dialogue:

Furthermore, during the classes on comparative pedagogy, I have learned more about education in Great Britain, including, first of all, the fact that dialogue with pupils is practiced at schools not only during the lesson with the class teacher – as it is in our country, or if a pupil has particular

problems, but more frequently, while teaching a particular subject, and whenever such need occurs and spare time is available (an early education teacher, a public school, Krakow, a graduate of master's and bachelor's studies at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, 3 years of work experience after bachelor's studies).

Another opinion on this subject:

This reminds me of a Finnish style – work and education without stress, and still very efficient (a history teacher in a public secondary school, 25 years of work experience).

This teacher added that he knows the Finnish education system, including Finnish culture of dialogue, not only from books, but also from the experience gained during several school exchange trips.

Some of the interviewed teachers, as in the case of the following early education teacher, use their knowledge in educational practice:

Just like in Great Britain, every day I gather children on the carpet where we place colourful cards which we had prepared before (it is important that we did it together), and we use them to describe the children's current emotions. Children choose cards and talk about what they feel and why. They do not have to take part in this game, but most of them are usually willing to talk about what they are experiencing. We also discuss other issues connected with the class life in the circle. This method works excellent. I know that I teach them how to listen to each other and how to dialogue with others (an early education teacher, a public school, Krakow, a graduate of master's and bachelor's studies at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, 3 years of work experience after bachelor's studies).

One of the teachers emphasises the essence of asking questions as a particular “tool” to conduct dialogue, but - in a wider context – also as a concept:

I try to teach my students not to be afraid to ask questions. I think that it is an important element of dialogue, but it turns out that sometimes it is very difficult. In order to ask a question in a clever manner, one should listen carefully, reason properly, and even have a certain knowledge of a given subject. Pupils are not used to asking questions. I remember that my own children (two), before they went to school, were constantly asking me and my husband about different things. When they went to school, all the questions disappeared. We even started thinking and worrying why it happened. We found out that they cannot ask questions at school. It may even be understood that teachers think they have no time for questions with such a big group. We can imagine how the lesson

would look like if each pupil asked even one question for a given topic. However, I think that we should find time for teaching the children how to ask questions. Personally, I am not afraid that I will not have an answer to some of them and that I will lose the pupils' respect. I teach them that if we do not know something, we will search an answer the question together, and that everyone can have a different view on each topic. This methodology is very effective in my work at school. I am happy to hear how my colleagues from the university cope with dialogue with pupils, and maybe I will be able to implement some of their ideas (a teacher of a junior high school in Rzeszów, 12 years of work experience).

On the other hand, one of the teachers indicated the importance of mutual openness in establishing dialogue:

I cannot believe what the previous speakers said about the advantages of using dialogue at their schools. It is completely different in my school. The most difficult dialogue is not only with children, who - due to their disabilities - cannot understand everything, but with their parents. Most of them are from a dysfunctional environment. We are not able to teach them the basic values and rules, for the good of them and their children. They completely reject that. Personally, I do not take up too many conversations anymore. I have noticed that I limited contacts with the parents to protect my psychological condition and health. I do not even "fight" with them to provide the children with the basic school equipment. We have to deal with everything on our own. When a pupil does not have a given thing, others lend it to him or her. I do not see any opportunities for changes in this school. I think that I am burnout. I keep on improving my professional competences to find another job. I have no partners for conversation (a teacher in a special school in Krakow, 30 years of work experience).

Summary and findings for further educational practice

The interviewed teachers used dialogue with the youth based on their hobbies, which, in some cases, were a part of the subject taught. This was probably a way to find the common language with the students, as well as with their parents. Such a *flow* made it possible for them to stay joyful and authentic. This, in turn, resulted in the creation of such an atmosphere in which the students felt very well and were willing to talk to teacher on various topics.

Even though the interviewees belong, due to the nature of their current studies, to a group of future school principals, during the

interview they did not present any complex solutions to improve dialogue at schools between all members of the school community, including the parents. They did not suggest that they had such ideas. The interviewees did not even mention that they were willing to develop a plan for improving dialogue competences at school. The ideas that were presented during the interview were not too extensive, but – from what the teachers reported – effective.

Among the teachers who presented some interesting ideas for maintaining dialogue, the awareness of its necessity was evident. This can result in searching for systemic and effective solutions in the future, when they will be working as school principals.

Everyone emphasized the importance of good atmosphere at school, which, on the one hand, is the result of undertaking dialogue and mutual understanding, and, on the other hand, facilitates dialogue. There is a feedback mechanism between both of these variables.

Moreover, some schools are so difficult and impossible to reform, that despite many efforts made by the teachers and the headmaster, dialogue cannot be carried out. This is very depressing for teachers, who finally accept the failure and either become passive or start to look for another school with better dialogue opportunities.

It is recommended that teachers constantly improve their communication competences in their whole professional career, taking part in workshops and studying proper literature. This is because communication skills are key competences in the process of education.

- Schools should pay more attention to developing specific strategies for the improvement and/or maintenance of good conditions of dialogue between all the participants of the process of education. Such a plan requires the commitment of all the teachers and the principal. It should be prepared in a written form and regularly upgraded - at least once a year. It is also recommended to evaluate the process of implementing the plan.
- The school should try to establish an approach that will promote dialogue, non-violent communication, empathy, etc. This would be a model and baseline for maintaining dialogue at school. Such a model could be developed with the support of scientists who would be invited to cooperate with the school.

- It would be good if the teachers cared for their personal development in terms of knowing their own emotions, consequences of activities, dealing with emotions, including frustration, which occurs in the case of the accumulation of tasks or the lack of success of some pupils. A teacher who is overworked, stressed and afraid of losing his/her job, burnt-out, and burdened with similar problems, would not be willing to enter into dialogue with their pupils. Such a teacher would present inappropriate attitudes, including aggression and resignation from the relation.
- It would be good to organise public, free dialogue workshops for all citizens. It is likely that some of the parents would take advantage of such an offer, and it would be easier for teachers to communicate with them.
- As a part of pedagogical, psychological and sociological studies, there should be a course containing one subject (or a couple of subjects, or it can be a multi-subject course) during which the students would be able to gain not only theoretical, but – what is crucial – practical skills concerning dialogue.
- Perhaps it would be good to adjust one's language to a given interlocutor – e. g. to the way of speaking used by disadvantaged groups, in order to establish contact with them and gradually teach them dialogue on a more advanced language level.
- It should be taken into consideration that more and more foreigners are coming to live and work in Poland, and their children are already at schools or will go to school in a short period of time. There should be a particular consensus between openness to them and assimilation requirements. They should not feel rejected due to their being different, but, on the other hand, their substantially different behaviours, habits, etc. should not disturb the process of education. Such a fair situation would support dialogue. There is also the problem of language, which is often a huge barrier to overcome. The author, based on his own experience abroad, noticed that if the teacher uses at least a couple of words in the child's language, the student feels accepted and encouraged to learn the language of the country of residence.

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