Dialogic teaching at school

Nauczanie dialogowe w szkole

Summary
With the course of time educators and researchers have been faced with the problem of choosing methods of transferring information to their learners. In this context a classroom talk is supposed to be the most pervasive in its use and powerful in its possibilities. Especially valuable it seems to be in the school environment a large proportion of time is spent talking and listening. Dialogue is a form of talk, which is widely used as a teaching tool at school. Through dialogue, people are engaged in a practice to listen to different perspectives, promote cooperation, build skills and work on difficult issues. The most crucial consideration within dialogic pedagogy is the quality of communication, participation of pupils in the construction of their own knowledge and also it includes a motivational factor which deals with activation of pupils. In this paper I will try to enlighten the phenomena of dialogue and dialogical teaching (researched by prof. Robin Alexander), to describe the contributions made by Paulo Freire and Jane Vella to the research of dialogic teaching, to examine dialogue as a means of learning.

Streszczenie
Z upływem czasu nauczyciele i badacze natrafią na problem wyboru metody przekazu informacji swoim uczniom. W tym kontekście dyskusja w klasie powinna być najbardziej rozpowszechniona i dająca najwięcej możliwości. Szczególnie wartościowa jest ona w środowisku szkoły, ponieważ duża ilość czasu poświęcona rozmowom i słuchaniu. Dialog jest formą rozmowy szeroko używaną jako narzędzie nauczania w szkole. Poprzez dialog ludzie są angażowani do poznawania różnorakich perspektyw, promowania współpracy, ćwiczenia swoich umiejętności oraz rozwiązywania trudnych problemów. Najważniejszym czynnikiem w pedagogice dialogu jest jakość komunikacji, udział uczniów w budowaniu ich własnej wiedzy, a także motywacja sprzyjająca aktywności uczniów. W artykule próbuję wyjaśnić, na czym polega nauczanie poprzez dialog (badane przez profesora Robin Alexandera), a także pragnę przedstawić wkład wniesiony przez Paulo Freirego i Jane Vella do badań nad nauczaniem poprzez dialog, który jest również sposobem uczenia się.

Keywords: dialogue, dialogic teaching, learning
Słowa kluczowe: dialog, nauczanie poprzez dialog,uczenie się
Dialogue allows participants to have thoughts they could not have had on their own, yet to recognise these thoughts as developments of their own thinking (2009).

Dr Ann Game and prof. Andrew Metcalfe

1. Introduction

With the course of time educators and researchers have been faced with the problem of choosing methods of transferring information to their learners. In this context a classroom talk is supposed to be the most pervasive in its use and powerful in its possibilities. Especially valuable it seems to be in school environment a large proportion of time is spent talking and listening. Language not only manifests thinking but also structures it, and speech shapes the higher mental processes which are necessary for learning in school. Moreover, the quality of classroom discourse is of great importance because it sets an appropriate climate for learning and transmitting teachers’ expectations for their pupils’ thinking. The prime aim of education should be help pupils to use language effectively as a tool of thinking, and classroom-based involvement can make considerable contribution to the development of children intellectual ability and skills. Dialogue is a form of talk, which is widely used as a teaching tool at school. Through dialogue, people are engaged in a practice to listen to different perspectives, promote cooperation, build skills and work on difficult issues. Dialogue is a period of reflection on the subject in order to see things in a different way by getting supposition.

Applied classroom research in the UK, such as Dawes, Mercer and Wegerif’s Thinking Together project and Robin Alexander’s Dialogic Teaching, suggests that dialogic pedagogies are beginning to make inroads into traditional patterns of classroom communication in which learners are positioned as compliant supporters of the teacher’s purpose, their voices barely acknowledged. A growing body of research show that children learn more effectively and their intellectual achievements are higher when they are actively engaged in a pedagogic activity.

---


through discussion, dialogue and argumentation⁶. The most crucial issue within dialogic pedagogy is the quality of communication, participation of pupils in the construction of their own knowledge and also a motivational factor which deals with activation of pupils⁷. The effectiveness of educational dialogue is determined by the degree of academic goals facing the learning process. Dialogue can be understood as an exchange of not only words, but also emotions, actions or other means which can give a sense of dignity.

In this paper I will try to enlighten the phenomena of dialogue and dialogical teaching (researched by prof. Robin Alexander), to describe the contributions made by Paulo Freire and Jane Vella to the research of dialogic teaching, to examine dialogue as a means of learning.

2. The notion of dialogue

The concept of dialogue has held the central position in the Western views of education since the teaching of Socrates. According to the Greek philosopher the dialogue can be described as:

It is a dialectical method, often involving an oppositional discussion in which the defense of one point of view is pitted against the defense of another; one participant may lead another to contradict him in some way, strengthening the inquirer’s own point⁸.

We think that dialogue is an unproductive debate between people trying to defend their points of view against one another. In dialogue people intend to define why some exchanges of opinion may exist. But the central goal of dialogue is a way to perform genuine meeting and inquiry, which is very necessary to every person because of her/his nature⁹. In addition to listening to our partner’s descriptions, we learn about “how we are in the world”, how we influence on others as we are always in a relationship to other people¹⁰. The analysis of dialogue, mainly linguistically, leads to the understanding of this phenomenon as a sequential exchange of replicas made by several people.

Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin, defines dialogue as a phenomenon that penetrates the very structure of words themselves. Words, expressing different meanings, are shaped in dialogic interactions with ‘alien’ words at the moment of utterance. Besides, dialogue cannot be understood as a precondition for le-

---

⁶ The same, p. 2.
arning but it is rather necessary for the construction of knowledge and human development generally\textsuperscript{11}.

When we speak about dialogue it is worth telling the difference between the two similar terms “conversation” and “dialogue”. Conversation mostly consists of a sequence of unchanged two-part exchanges as participants talk to each other. Classroom dialogue whereas makes attention and engagement obligatory and puts thoughts into a meaningful sequence. Besides, the act of questioning is an issue which differentiate conversation from dialogue. Robin Alexander thinks that conversation in its nature tends to be relaxed and lead nowhere, but dialogue is characterized by changing of ideas which leads into ‘coherent lines of thinking and enquiry’. It is called dialogic principle of cumulation\textsuperscript{12}.

3. Dialogic teaching researched by Robin Alexander

Dialogic teaching is characterized by lengthy interactions between a teacher and a pupil or a group of pupils in a context of collaboration and mutual support\textsuperscript{13}. These interactions can occur in the context of the whole class or group and are designed to help the child to build understanding, practise thinking through expressing concepts and his/her own views\textsuperscript{14}. During dialogic teaching interactions teachers deliberately model and teach strategies for reasoning, negotiation and enquiry\textsuperscript{15}. The genuine acceptance, sincerity and individual approach to each pupil are required from a school teacher. Working upon a common goal gives the classroom an identity of community. Dialogue could help establish a sense of continuity and progression to maintaining one “community” ideal throughout school\textsuperscript{16}.

Robin Alexander states that the principles of dialogic teaching that relate to the conduct and ethos of classroom talk (collectivity, reciprocity and support) might be considered as prompts for creating contexts where children feel free to explicate and test their understandings without fear of ridicule and they will know that their ideas will be accepted seriously\textsuperscript{17}. According to the mentioned above author dialog can be understood as part of a wider conceptual framework of pedagogy, which gives teachers a chance to change the nature of activities and discourse.

\textsuperscript{11} Wolfe, S and Alexander, R. J. Argumentation and dialogic teaching: alternative pedagogies for a changing world, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{12} The same, p. 8.


\textsuperscript{14} The same.


\textsuperscript{17} Wolfe, S. and Alexander, R. J. Argumentation and dialogic teaching: alternative pedagogies for a changing world, p. 10.
into the one where children are engaged and influence the motivation process for study. Robin Alexander defines dialogic teaching as not only “communication skills”, but also a professional viewpoint on the issue. It makes us think over again the techniques we use for teaching, the classroom relationships we support, the way pupils perceive the information presented. Like other techniques, dialogic teaching is based on principles and evidence. Dialogic teaching includes 4 repertoires: a) teaching talk; b) learning talk; c) talk for everyday life; d) classroom organization.

Dialogic teaching particularly gives the best chance for children to develop their diverse learning talk repertoire which should include 5 criteria:

a) collective: teachers and children address learning tasks together, whether as a group or as a class;
b) reciprocal: teachers and children listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints;
c) supportive: children articulate their ideas freely, without fear of embarrassment over “wrong” answers; and they help each other to reach common understanding;
d) cumulative: teachers and children build on their own and each others’ ideas and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry;
e) purposeful: teachers plan and steer classroom talk with specific educational goals in view.

In dialogic teaching questions are carefully framed to encourage good answers and reflection, the teacher’s role is to make contributions into a coherent whole, leading children to find meaning and think over further questions, answers are as stimulus for further questions in a long chain of dialogue.

Paulo Freire and Jane Vella

The role of dialogue in the process of teaching was clearly described by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and influential theorist of Critical Pedagogy. Freire wants teachers to treat learners as co-creators of knowledge, and allow people to want to be more fully human. He distinguished two methods of cooperation between the teacher and his/her pupils and defined their effects. According to the problem posing method a particular attention is drawn upon the dialogue: the teacher interprets pupils as partners of the conversation, in the course of which

everyone can ask questions or express his/her own points of view. The presented method was developed to provide a humanistic alternative to the psychological, prescriptive approach manifested in most Active Health Programs. Paulo Freire thinks that dialogue is a theatrical and literary form consisting of written and spoken exchange of conversation between two or more people.

Paulo Freire considers dialogue as a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they alter it. Being communicative human beings we are able to know that we know. Besides, we are ready to accept that we cannot know something. In such a way, through dialogue, reflecting our knowledge, we can act critically in order to transform reality.

If we analyze dialogue as a teaching tool it is worth mentioning the work of Dr. Jane Vella, the founder of Dialogue education, who demonstrates an outstanding dialogue education practice and exceptional potential for furthering the influence of Dialogue education learning. For her research Dr. Jane earned an award on the August 15, 2013. The award embodies Jane Vella’s understanding of this educational method, best espoused in her statement: *The means is dialogue, the end is learning, and the purpose is peace*. In her book *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach* she outlined twelve principles of dialogue education. Her learning principles were used in a variety of adult learning settings, in different countries. Vella said very often that a dialogue in her reflection is a means of change, which can make a great contribution to the development of higher education. According to Jane Vella’s practice in classroom, educators often conduct monologue with each other and with their students. Because at the course of speaking when they change their views in reality it could look like as they speak dialogically.

### 4. Dialogue as a means of learning

Dialogue is a mutual learning process for the teacher and his/her pupils. Educators have been treated dialogue as a means of improving understanding, cognition and learning. Besides, there is a deeper way in which dialogue underlines learning. According to Gadamer, each interlocutor bring to dialogue their own

---


26 The same.

27 Ehiobuche, C., Tu, H., Justus, B. *Dialogue as a tool for...,* p. 303.
unique perspective or horizon of expectations, ideas, prejudices. Without horizon, thinking and understanding could not be possible. Horizon of another person has the potential to reflect back to me my prejudices and in such a way to help me be more conscious of the narrowness of my own understanding. Gadamer emphasizes that horizons only “supposedly [exist] by themselves.” It can be analyzed accordingly as a way that every person has his/her own horizons which have been educated by cultural tradition.

In the course of learning we may come across text and its functions while analyzing it. Concentrating on dialogic function of the text/utterance, Mikhail Bakhtin emphasizes that it is as “a generator of new meanings”. As a result this function of the text/utterance anticipates innovation and creativity. The new meanings appearing in the process of dialog speech may open up new possibilities for further analysis. In any case, dialogic function is inclusive of alternative perspectives and leads to a deeper insight of the topic.

The dialogue in learning is defined as a form of pedagogical interaction of teacher and pupil in the learning situation, in the course of which informational exchange, mutual influences and relations occur. The effectiveness of educational dialogue is determined by the degree of educational achievement and training goals facing the learning process. Educational dialogue has a dual nature: providing knowledge with its scientific direction and nurturing impact in the individual of pupil through understanding of dialogic social consciousness. With a dialogic approach the traditional roles of teacher as an ‘expert’ and pupil as a ‘learner’ are revised in favour of a more democratic and imaginative relationship and what other may interpret as collaborative association.

5. Conclusion

Dialogic teaching is extremely significant and necessary for pupils in the classroom as it is the effective method to listen, understand other people’s views and cognize pupil’s reflection on the world. Besides, the aim of dialogue is not to find the truth but to explore more possibilities, to stimulate for further analysis. Dialogue can be understood as a phenomenon that penetrates the very structure of words themselves. In comparison to conversation dialogue seeks to make attention and engagement obligatory and make thoughts into a meaningful sequence. According to Robin Alexander dialogic teaching includes 4 repertoires:

teaching talk, learning talk, talk for everyday life and classroom organization. The role of dialogue in the process of teaching was clearly described by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and influential theorist of Critical Pedagogy, and Jane Vella, the founder of dialogue education. Dialogue as a means of learning is defined as a form of pedagogical interaction of teacher and pupil in the learning situation, in the course of which informational exchange, mutual influences and relations occur.