

Types of Consciousness of English Teachers in Lower Secondary Schools in the Light of Paulo Freire's Theory

Abstract

The ever-growing need for learning, especially the English language becoming lingua franca, has created a huge challenge for teachers of English. There have been many conceptions of the teacher's role and the work they perform, however, these notions do not constitute a perfect model of a teacher as an educator of many young generations living in the changing world.

The teacher's role is to have the ability to develop themselves, to be able to reflect on their actions, to be creative and to have a high level of critical consciousness. The article presents the results of the research into types of consciousness of English teachers in lower secondary schools according to the types distinguished by Paulo Freire.

Keywords: *Paulo Freire, magical consciousness, naive consciousness, critical consciousness*

Introduction

There are many books and publications about teachers, their work and about improvement of their teaching skills. Many conceptual categories connected with teachers and their profession have been created, so it may seem there is enough support to become a perfect model of the teacher, but the truth is there is not. The dynamics of the world and the changes that happen so fast in everyday life have a paramount influence on the process of education. In that case the teacher becomes a person who must notice these changes in order to put them into

practice. Not only does this skill need a good educational preparation, but also it requires lifelong learning and improving the skills. To a certain extent it demands some knowledge about people and their abilities, which allows for reflecting on one's actions to entail critical and creative change if necessary. The lack of teacher reflection means believing in being infallible, which may in consequence manifest schematic thinking influencing students.

Judging Polish education and recent reforms in a rather critical way, I deeply believe that there are some changes required, for instance, there is a need to convert too formal teacher-students relations into a partnership, which allows for treating students in a more subjective way, which in consequence makes dialogue possible. In such a dialogical attitude this is a person who is the most important agent thinking independently, taking part in various activities, developing creativeness and individuality in order to create their identity.

Such an educational challenge requires brave and critical teachers who, as Giroux points out, will have some distance to the surrounding knowledge and will draw information from travelling, borders transgression, migration, and global communication (Giroux, Witkowski, 2010: 97). Therefore, the person of the 21st century is a person who learns permanently, is ready to accept challenges, is very mobile and flexible, has an unusual easiness to adapt to the changing conditions and expectations (Plewka, 2009: 27).

Henryka Kwiatkowska also claims that the teacher should be such a permanently learning person because complexity and unconventionality are the main characteristics of many pedagogical actions in the classroom (2010: 7). It definitely means having a high level of critical consciousness. To be a good teacher does not mean having a limited knowledge of the subject, but seeing it from interdisciplinary perspectives. It also means having good abilities of functioning in the society, having some specific personality traits, the system of values, the level of motivation and, last but not least, what is important is an open attitude towards students, methods and techniques of teaching.

Obviously, it is necessary to study teachers' attitudes and, at the same time, their types of consciousness to see how they perceive the world, since they are the people who have an influence on young generations building the future. It is evident, especially for teachers working in lower secondary schools, because they have to cope with adolescents who do not wish to be created according to the stereotypes that have not changed for many years. Educating students in a clever way means acting in a way that ensures individual development, maintains their own identity and personal maturity. What is more, with such an attitude teachers are able to become respected in the student society.

Henry A. Giroux believes that teachers in lower secondary schools ought to do at least three things. Firstly, give the students alternative languages. Secondly, give them an opportunity to take part in the dialogue, and thirdly, make it clear that if students speak they must take responsibility for their words. Critical thinking and democracy should allow many different voices. Students should be given the right to think in a way different from their teachers'. It is fair. Making them think like the teacher would be against the rules of critical pedagogy (Giroux, Witkowski, 2010: 79).

The possibility for change and subjective treatment of students is only possible in the reconstruction of teachers' consciousness. It is high time they understood that the realization of the curriculum is not the most important thing, but they should pay greater attention to students and their individual needs. However, if teachers want to perceive and treat students in that way, they have to feel like subjects themselves, which may provide them with the sense of freedom, openness and decisiveness.

Background theory

The research was based on Paulo Freire's theory and his attitude towards the process of education. Henryka Kwiatkowska points out that independent thinking is essential in the teacher's work, which cannot be based only on someone else's experiences. Such thinking is needed since the conditions and problems of this kind of work do not stay intact (2010: 10).

Over the years, the thought and work of a Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, have spread from the North East of Brazil to the entire continent, and have made a profound impact not only on the field of education, but also in the struggle for national development. He has perfected a method for teaching illiterates that has contributed to that process. In fact, those who, in learning to read and write, come to a new awareness of selfhood and begin to look critically at the social situation they find themselves, often take the initiative in acting to transform the society that has denied them this opportunity of participation (Shaull, 2008: 29). Paulo Freire's thought represents the response of a creative mind and sensitive conscience to the misery and suffering of the oppressed around him. Born in 1921 in Recife, the center of one of the most extreme situations of poverty and underdevelopment in the Third World, he was soon forced to experience that reality directly. His early sharing of the life of the poor also led him to the discovery of what he describes as the "culture of silence" (Shaull, 2008: 30). Confronted by this problem Freire turned

his attention to the field of education and began to work on it. Over the years, he has engaged in a process of study and reflection that has produced something quite new and creative in educational philosophy (Shaull, 2008: 30). The time for experimenting, creating and trying something new has come without being afraid of making mistakes. That is why the need to refute school as a place of transfer of knowledge and its verification by means of tests has become inevitable.

The main aim of the research was to discover and distinguish the types of consciousness among English teachers in lower secondary schools in Szczecin. According to P. Freire's assumptions, I took into account three types of consciousness: **magical**, **naive** and **critical**.

Freire developed a three-step model of development leading to critical consciousness. The three levels, magical (intransitive), naive (semi-transitive), and critical (transitive) thought, sometimes exist in a pure state but can overlap (Shor, 1992: 126).

Magical consciousness denies the power of human beings to change their lives or society. It is a static condition of fatalism which rejects human agency, denying that people can transform their conditions. The intransitive person thinks that what happens in society and life is controlled by inscrutable or divine forces, by an all-powerful elite, or by dumb luck and accidents. This kind of attitude leads to a disempowering conclusion: ordinary human beings cannot control, understand, or change the way things are. Life is the way it has to be. The powerful forces in life and society will do whatever they want, no matter what you think or say. Such people accept or celebrate the status quo, have the most closed minds (Shor, 1992: 126).

Naive consciousness lies in the belief in cause and effect and in the human power to learn and to change things. But the world is thought of in isolated pieces, as if life and society existed in unrelated parts. The semi-transitive individual seeks to change things one at a time. She or he does not connect the pieces of reality into meaningful wholes but rather acts on parts in a disconnected way. Such a view of the world does not perceive how separate parts of society condition each other. This type of consciousness is partially empowered because it accepts human agency in the making of personal and social change. It presents one-dimensional, short-term thinking that leads to acting on an isolated problem, ignoring root causes and long-term solutions (Shor, 1992: 127).

Critical consciousness allows people to make broad connections between individual experience and social issues, between single problems and the larger social system. This critically conscious individual connects personal and social domains when studying or acting on any problem or subject matter. In education, critically

conscious teachers and students synthesize personal and social meanings with a specific theme, text, or issue. The problem of literacy, for example, is addressed in a context related to the everyday life and language of students. It suggests that people can learn what they need to know to act in a transformative way on the conditions they discover in school and society. With critical consciousness, students are better able to see any subject as a thing in itself whose parts influence each other, as something related to and conditioned by other dimensions in the curriculum and society, as something with a historical context, and as something related to the students' personal context (Shor, 1992: 128).

Problem Statement

Needless to say, the main aim of education is the student's multilateral development. Such an aim can be achieved only thanks to open-minded teachers who can understand their work and see it from many different perspectives. While it is a well-known fact that in many Polish schools there is still the "culture of silence" which destroys personal development, it should be the main aim of teachers' work to overcome it.

Critical consciousness is a priority principle in becoming a teacher – not the one who is only qualified by profession, but also the one who becomes a teacher through practice and reflection. It is hard to suggest guidance on how to become critical, however, in my research I wanted to give a suggestion for determining the type of our consciousness.

Among many professional skills which can be developed thanks to the type of our consciousness we can distinguish those that allow teachers to create and verify their own opinions through dialogue, those that let them become innovative and brave in making decisions that will make them free from limitations and stereotypes in thinking and acting (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 1997: 8). All types of consciousness determine the way of thinking, perception of teachers' relations to the world including the knowledge and the way they teach and learn and how they behave in everyday life and at school.

The types of consciousness of English teachers in lower secondary schools should be examined with regard to their attitudes towards different issues to have a thorough picture of the situation. One has to bear in mind that each teacher does not possess one attitude towards different issues, so in consequence they cannot present a single type of consciousness. In some they may show critical attitudes and in others they may have naive or magical consciousness.

Methodology and research sample

In order to gather data I applied the method of an opinion poll, which allowed me to distinguish and qualify the teachers according to their types of consciousness. The questionnaire was my own idea built on the basis of P. Freire's view of the teacher and concerned the following areas or attitudes:

- reasons for becoming a teacher of English;
- state of knowledge concerning psycho-physical development of lower secondary students;
- need for using additional didactic equipment while teaching in order to stimulate the student's imagination;
- aims of teaching;
- possibility to achieve the aims of teaching;
- preferred style of work;
- forms and possibilities of self-education;
- possibilities of changes and transforming the surrounding;
- possibilities of achieving successes and the causes of failures.

Sixty-nine teachers working in lower secondary schools in Szczecin took part in the research (62 women and 7 men) in the school year 2009/10, which constituted 50% of the population.

While conducting the research I assumed that factors such as education, age, seniority and the teacher's degree could differ in the population. The teaching profession is still mainly a female domain. Similarly, the level of education did not reveal any significant differences because the whole population had a higher education. In most cases it was English studies, but there were also such faculties as, e.g., sociology, pedagogy, mathematics, economics, etc.

The population was not very diverse as far as age, seniority and the teacher's degree were concerned. In my research I categorised the teachers' age according to W. Dróżka's classification: up to 28 years old, 29–35, 36–49, 50 and over (Dróżka, 1991: 28) (Figure 1).

The biggest group comprised the teachers between 29–35 years old, which constituted 52.2% of the population, and the smallest group consisted of the teachers up to 28 years old (4.3%). The average age of the teachers was 33.5. It has its explanation in the Polish educational transformation after 1989. As a consequence, the Russian language was replaced by the English language at schools. Only a few Russian teachers retrained and as a matter of fact teachers of English were the generation of the 1990s; that is why they are now the most numerous group.

As far as the teacher's degree is concerned, there are four degrees in the Polish education system: a trainee teacher, a contract teacher, a nominated teacher, and a certified teacher.

Figure 1. Teachers' age

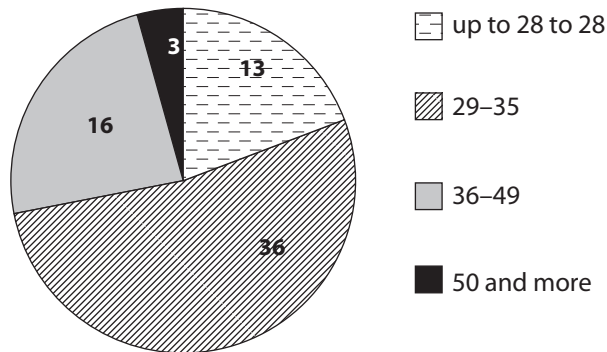
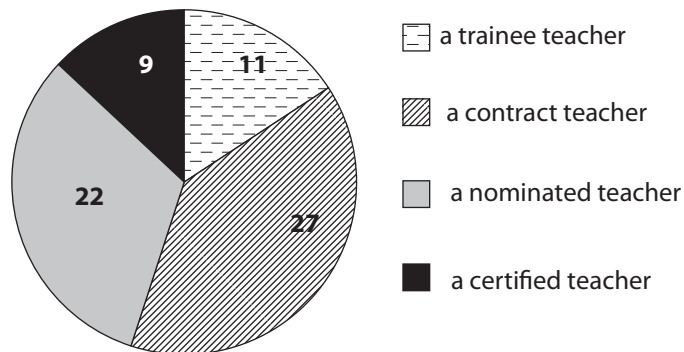


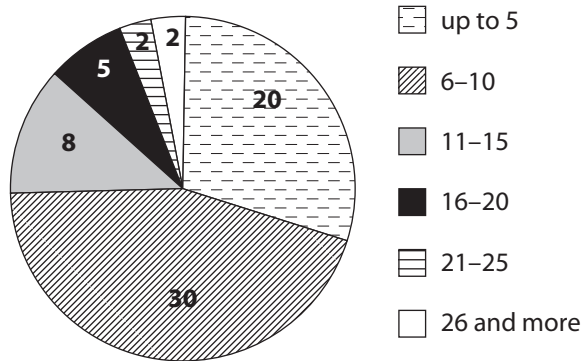
Figure 2. Teachers' degree



The biggest group included contract teachers. There were 27 people (39%) with this type of degree. The smallest group consisted of certified teachers, which was only 13% of the population (9 teachers). As mentioned before, such small variations were caused by the educational transformation.

The last variation was the teacher's seniority. Again with the reference to the historical transformation, the majority of the teachers have worked between 6 and 10 years (38%). Only a few teachers have worked for a longer time.

Figure 3. Teachers' seniority



To sum up the characteristics of the study population, it was clear that due to the transformation the biggest group of the teachers of English working in lower secondary schools in Szczecin were teachers between 29 and 36 years of age. At this level the dominant degrees were contract and nominated teachers who have the average experience of 6 to 10 years.

The research took place in Szczecin in the biggest city of the Zachodniopomorskie province, which is also a border city. The choice of this place had been made for the following important reason: the possibility of crossing the border and, as a consequence, culture transgression, which lets teachers become open to different norms or habits. It also brings the possibility of breaking most of the barriers and that is a significant stage in the social development, building the critical consciousness.

Research results

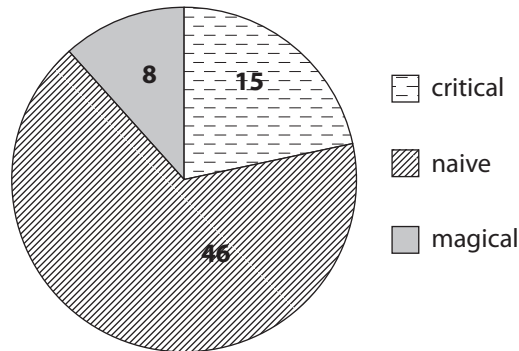
The analysis of the material I gathered and its results revealed that the naive type of consciousness prevails in lower secondary schools in Szczecin.

Among the study population there were 15 teachers with critical consciousness (22%), 46 teachers with the naive type of consciousness (67%) and 8 teachers with the magical type of consciousness (12%).

The teachers who were classified for the group of the critically conscious motivated their choice of profession with the interest in the English language and the willingness to work with the youth. They knew exactly the psychophysical development of adolescence and were open to dialogue and problems of students. They

were also strict towards themselves, which means they had high self-requirements. They were aware they had to be up to date to meet their students' needs.

Figure 4. Types of consciousness among teachers of English in lower secondary schools in Szczecin



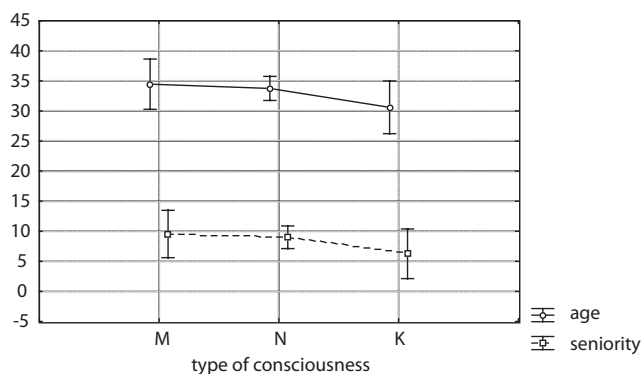
The largest group were the people who had become teachers because they had not seen any better chance for employment. They knew the characteristics of adolescence more in theory than in practice. They preferred talking and being listened to to having a dialogue with their students. They needed to be told to educate themselves and they did not like to be leaders.

The group with the magical type of consciousness, which presents the fatalistic vision of the world, had become teachers due to the fact they had not been offered any better employment solution. They were not aware of the changes that happen in the body and mind during adolescence. They were the type of people who believed that it was not the proper time for experiments and creating identity. They were deeply rooted in the banking model of education, so they did not see the need to communicate with students. For them self-education did not have any sense and was rather a waste of time.

Having focused on the variables mentioned earlier, such as age, seniority, background education and degree, it appeared that the two latter ones did not differentiate the population, however, it was possible to show some differences as far as age and seniority were taken into account.

The teachers with magical consciousness were between the age of 30–38 and seniority between 5–14 years. The teachers with the naive type of consciousness were between 32 and 36 years of age and seniority between 7 and 11 years. The teachers with critical consciousness were aged between 26–35 and with seniority

Figure 5. Relation of age and seniority to the type of consciousness [blue – age, red – seniority]



between 3–10 years. The research showed that the teachers with critical consciousness were the youngest ones. To a certain extent the reason for that was that they were educated by means of a banking concept of education and they were able to notice the disadvantages of it. In contrast, they tried to use a problem posing method in their way of teaching and dialogue. The remaining teachers were a bit older and probably they approved the banking concept of education and saw a lot of advantages in maintaining an of army discipline in class.

Conclusions

Teaching others is an experience thanks to which teachers can learn a lot themselves, which is the real aim of education. Motivations for becoming a teacher are very complex. However, there is one substantial feature characteristic of all the teachers' work – it serves community and has a significant impact on every student they take care of. The stories about teacher-masters are proof of what they can do and achieve as teachers. Most of us, if not all, have experienced the teacher's influence on our lives, especially when they aroused our interest in something or helped us to become open to different beliefs and values (Christensen, 2008: 570).

Shaping education and attitudes to the methods and aims of teaching in a critical way is only one of many conceptions dealt with by pedagogy, however its assumptions are very convincing for better and more effective education.

According to P. Freire, critical pedagogy allows us to take into account different issues in a subjective way, which gives us an opportunity to fight with many different forms of oppression. Such actions can only be successful thanks to conscious liberation from oppression, so in consequence it requires critical thinking, especially in the process of education.

The results of the research confirmed my observations concerning behaviours and attitudes towards students and teaching. Naive teachers are the biggest group of the population and they are people who try to be so-called neutral, who can stay in a safe place and situation. They know that there are some changes needed in the area of education, but they are not bold enough to act as leaders. This is the group of teachers that should be paid the most attention to. In order to become more conscious and critical they ought to have some lectures, workshops, training or different forms of consulting organized. They should be given a special program of schooling.

There were only 22% of teachers with the critical type of consciousness. It is not a lot, however, it gives hope that there is a group of leaders who can set examples and can encourage the rest to act.

There were also teachers with magical consciousness with no special attitude to the issues concerning education since they do not believe in any possibility of change. They are not ready even to listen to talk about any changes that may redesign or have an influence on reality. It is a very dangerously thinking group, which may need a lot of effort to be convinced to alter anything.

Teaching is hard work; that is why teachers should be intellectuals who realize that teaching is a form of mediation between different people. It is also much more complex than the mastery of some kind of knowledge or following of the curriculum (Giroux, Witkowski, 2010: 93).

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