

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN GEOGRAPHY TRAINING

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ABSTRACT

Not long ago the communication process was related mainly to foreign and bilingual language education but recently it gains more and more importance for geography training. And this is logical consequence of the fact that through communication the pupils develop their geography competency in geography training process. As an act of connection and using language to express themselves, the communication is the needed prerequisite for accomplishment of other competences, e.g. related to geographic knowledge and obtaining it, interpretation of geography problems and taking the proper actions, to cultivate value orientation and overall model for behavior in geography space. The discussion stimulates students not only to acquire geography knowledge but it has a special importance for communication in relation with the individual perception of geographical content and explaining the relationship between the cause and effect. Using communication, we add individual value to geographic knowledge. So consequently, the search for creativity and innovations in geography training process is meaningful only when the students possess communication competence. The current research explores the cultivation of student's communication competence and is made the attempt for didactic characteristic of communication in geography training process. It is important to study the opportunities for development of geographic communication competency and to focus on discussion as training method and developing the pupils' skills to assert their opinion.

Keywords: geography training, communication competence, methods of teaching geography

INTRODUCTION

In modern geography education, the communication process plays a very important role. This is not accidental, because through communication the students develop their geographic competence in the process of learning geography. As an act of connecting and linguistic communication between people, communication is a prerequisite for building other competences in students, e.g. related to geography knowledge and its acquisition, the interpretation of geographical issues and making adequate decisions, the construction of a value orientation and a comprehensive model of behavior in the geographic space. Through communication, each geographic knowledge acquires individual value. Therefore, the creativity and inventiveness sought in the geography training process would only make sense if students have formed communicative competence.

DATA & METHODS

What are the opportunities for cultivating geographical communicative competence? They are related to the overall methodology of the teaching and learning process. In the broadest sense, one can start from the "directive" teaching and the presentation of educational content by the teacher, go through the various teaching and learning strategies in the geography lesson and then get to the rational work with didactic tools of geography training. Of course, such a wide range of options could hardly be covered by such a study. In this sense, we confine ourselves here to the discussion as a method of teaching and to asserting a reasoned position on the part of the students.

By its very nature, discussion is a peculiar kind of exchange of views and ideas within a topic, aimed at achieving greater clarity and deeper knowledge. It differs from the ordinary conversation because it is carefully structured and its issues are clearly outlined [1]. As a training method, discussion is always aimed at achieving certain goals. In the training process, goals are defined according to the content and nature of the topic (activity) and include:

- jointly clarifying and deepening the knowledge of particular concepts and ideas;
- validation and systematization of concepts and data students are already familiar with;
- studying the similarities and differences in individual theories and concepts;
- performing situational analysis;
- solving theoretical or practical problems that require originality and alternatives [2].

The benefits of discussion are most often related to the development of important intellectual skills and abilities, such as: improvement and transfer of knowledge, evaluation of the topic, generalization and comparing, critical thinking, formulating assumptions, conclusions and attitude to arguments, stimulating participation, responsibility and linguistic expression of the position. The impact of the discussion is particularly favorable on organizing one's own thoughts and orienting oneself in contradictions. It stimulates creative thinking, combining partial decisions that lead to a better decision or better interpretation, develops objectivity and self-criticism. Even considering the fact that it can not only stimulate but also suppress some participants for various reasons, discussion remains the most representative strategy for active studying in the training process. It is particularly suitable for small groups of students and for differentiating the training.

In terms of the optimal number of students who can effectively participate in the discussion, opinions differ – between 4 and 7 trainees. Also, there are various number of discussion types: general, guided (directed), reasoning, researching, exploratory, evaluative. They are aimed at achieving different goals. What is of interest is the course of discussion which leads to the cultivation of geographic competence for argumentation, i.e. to derive a reasoned position on geographic issues.

The use of discussion in the process of geography training aims at development of self-thinking and self-acting people. This is done through three key competences:

- conceptualizing and systematizing one's ideas, clarifying and deepening the knowledge through definitions and examples;
- problematizing one's own ideas, drawing the boundaries of the applicability of arguments, realizing that an example may question the rule, but it is not enough to bring a new rule;
- the process of reasoning stimulates students not only speak from their personal experience but to transfer it to more common situations and concepts [3], [4].

In addition, four dimensions can be distinguished in discussions: substantive and subjective, structural and procedural [5]. What are the main differences between the discussion and the simple argument (conversation): the distinctive role of the subjects and the process in which the discussants respond to one another. The fact that the discussant relates his subjective viewpoint on the topic to the viewpoint of the other gives him the opportunity to distinguish his own argument (Fig. 1).

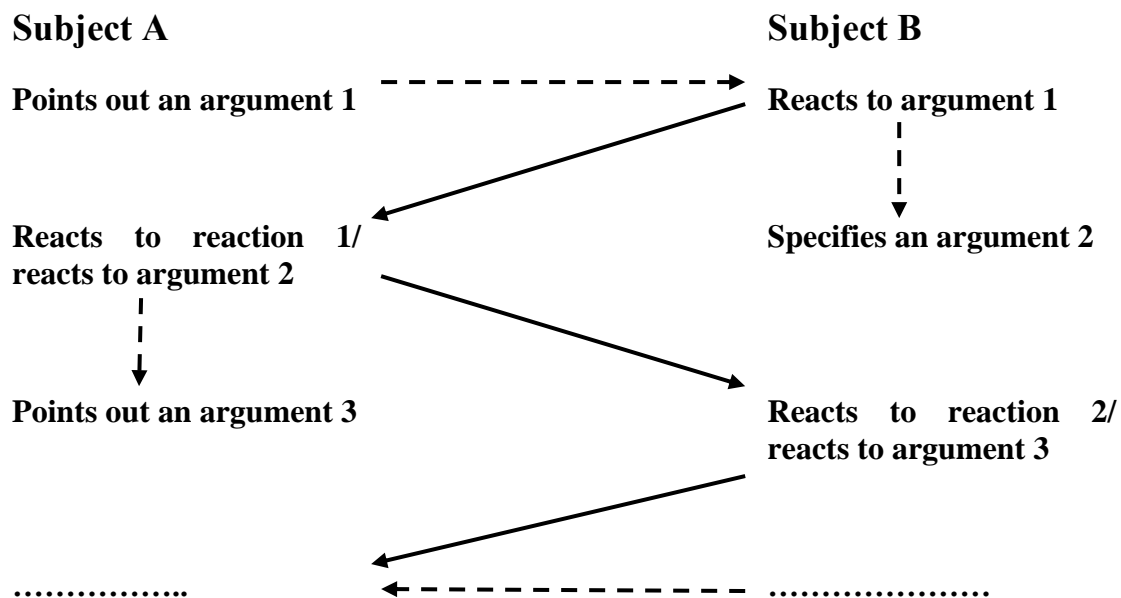


Figure 1. Course of discussion [4]

The fact that the discussion stimulates personal development is due primarily to the cross-referencing of arguments (which in a debate is not possible)-the arguments can be accepted as well as criticized. Criticism can take different forms - from the doubt that the argument seems unconvincing to the contradiction that requires the argument to be withdrawn and a new one pointed out. An unconvincing argument can be justified again or supported by additional facts. A particularly advisable option in the discussion is not to reject the contrary argument, but to support it with another additionally substantiated argument [5]. This is especially recommended for geography training, as issues that are addressed from a geographic point of view often do not have a single answer: regional conflicts, international relations, sustainable development.

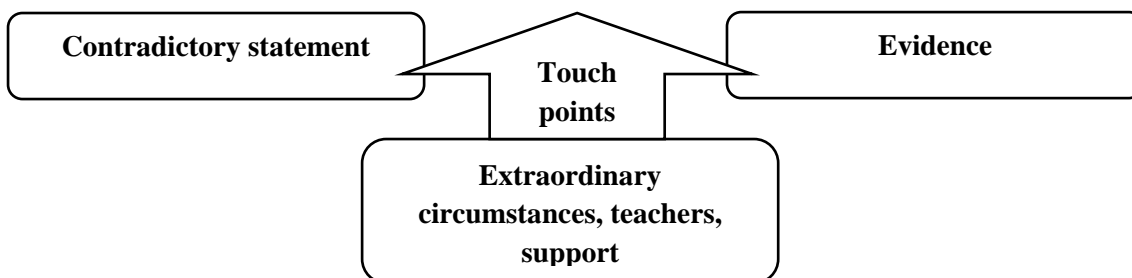


Figure 2. Fine structure of argument [7]

A key element of the discussion in geography training is a well-structured argument. Why is an argument so important? In the case of argument, disputed claims are confirmed or

refuted, but with the support of facts [6]. The point of the argument is for all partners to agree on a position through logical reasoning. In this sense, the underlying structure of the argument consists of three elements: a contradictory statement; evidence; touchpoints between the claim and the evidence. The elements have found a place in the so-called. "Fine structure of argument" (Fig. 2), [7]. In this statement, the operator (teacher) confirms the validity of the touchpoints (the "claim - evidence" relationship). The appropriate words for this are, e.g. controversial, probable, possible. In some cases extraordinary circumstances preventing touchpoints or support are permitted in discussion.

When arguing during a geography class, students do not simply take into account available knowledge. They use it as a basis to support a particular contentious claim, or apply it in another specific argumentative context. Contradictory thesis can be placed in all thematic areas of geography, and can also be explored in a discussion. From nature geography's point of view, factual argumentation and measurable data are recommended, and in the case of human geography - factual argumentation, references to normative documents, accepted values and norms. Therefore, many socially relevant and current controversial issues of contemporary life are integrated into geography training. Social values and norms also play an important role in arguing questions such as: how should nature be protected, how should agriculture be developed, how should cities and villages be developed, how should natural resources be used, etc. The aim is to provide students with arguments to explore different perspectives on the geographic topics and problems, to be able to state their own position and attitude towards them. This, in the end, is a prerequisite for their further development as responsible citizens in a democratic society, who, by reasoning, will be able to defend their position convincingly.

The above mentioned leads to the following conclusion: Geographic argumentative competence means that students have the skills and abilities to: understand oral and written argumentation in a geographic context; create their own argumentation; show adequate response under conditions of interaction with other geographic arguments; responsible and successful use of arguments in different situations [4].

The effectiveness of student argumentation and their participation in discussions is largely a responsibility of the teacher. He must have a thorough knowledge of the subject. An important prerequisite is to maintain a constructive focus on the debate by inviting students to stick to the topic. The teacher should not intervene frequently during the discussion. The teacher's intervention is only on condition that he or she must encourage participation, toss ideas, prevent deeply missteps, and tactfully direct an active debate. Certain discussion points can be recorded on the board so they can be in the students' operational consciousness – keywords, ideas and relationships. This has a positive effect on the focused and active discussion of the topic. In the final stage, the teacher systematizes, summarizes and clarifies the original ideas and opinions of the participants. It is widely believed that there is no need for prior preparation in order to have a discussion. But we do not agree with this statement because then the discussion would be a waste of time. The better the students are prepared to participate in the discussion, the better the results will. Prior knowledge of opinions, articles, materials and books related to the discussed topic contributes to effective participation and to maximizing the benefit of the discussion. It is the teacher's task to select and recommend appropriate preliminary sources.

DISSCUSION

Numerous methodological guidelines have been developed to conduct the discussion in the training process, but they do not reach the point of its evaluation. Should the discussion be evaluated? The answer to the question is a definite „yes“. Just like the teacher's presentation (the presentation of the teaching content) can and should be evaluated, the same can and should be applied to discussion, although the criteria and indicators are different. Both the discussion as a whole and the participation of each student in it can be evaluated. Evaluation, however, is difficult because not everything that is expressed in the verbal dispute is an integral part of the discussion in the above-mentioned sense [5]. Table 1 shows an example form for evaluation/self-evaluation. The criteria (indicators) may vary, be formulated differently, be more or less in number. It depends on the information seeker's interest in the discussion effectiveness. Participants may be offered a questionnaire with evaluation questions or judgments such as: (1) I think the discussion... (followed by a few closed possible answers); (2) the discussion leadership was... (followed by closed answers), etc. The purpose of these forms is to achieve rapid evaluation. The information can be used for various purposes: getting to know the students' assessments of themselves; differentiation of groups of students according to their activity in the discussion; conclusions for individual categories of students; conclusions for the guidance of the discussion, etc. The value of evaluation information is always great.

Class:

Name of participant:

Instructions: Rank your participation in the group by placing a cross in the scale of the rating scale (1 to 5, where 1 = very ineffective; 2 = somewhat ineffective; 3 = not sure; 4 = somewhat effective; 5 = very effective) for each criteria presented on the left.

Table 1. An example form for evaluation/self-evaluation [8].

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5
1. What overall score would you give to the discussion?					
2. How have past events influenced your interest in the topic?					
3. How effective does your group seem to be working on the conclusions of the discussion?					
4. How well was organized the participation in discussion?					
5. How effective is your group's solution?					
6. How effectively has the group considered your opinion?					
7. How effective was the guide to make it easier for you to express your opinion?					
8. How effectively did you encourage others to speak?					
9. What were the two main points and the two main problems of the discussion?					

CONCLUSION

The benefits of discussion as a method of geography training are undeniable. Not only does it stimulate the acquisition of geographical knowledge but it is also related to the development of very important intellectual skills and abilities in students. Discussion remains the most representative strategy for active learning in the training process, yet practice proves that it is not used frequently. Whatever the reasons are, the discussion should not be ignored. At the very least, it aims at forming self-thinking and self-acting people in the process of geography training who will be able to become successful in the modern social life.

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