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MEDIA LITERACY OF A CHILD AT AN EARLY SCHOOL AGE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TEACHERS, PARENTS AND PERSONS PREPARING TO BECOME EDUCATORS

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Abstract: Forming digital media competences and media contents awareness should start from the young age. Only carefully designed and comprehensive actions give a chance for growth of responsible members of the information society. Media education takes place in the family, school and other environments in which children operate.

The aim of the qualitative and quantitative scientific explorations was to survey professionally active teachers, people preparing for taking up the profession of a teacher and parents, about media education in the early education process. 120 students of the University of Silesia (Poland) and Teacher Training College of Bytom (Poland) took part in the survey, as well as 32 early education teachers. 12 parents of children at the age of 6-8 took part in the interview.

80% of the respondents (N=152) who were surveyed believe that media education should be mandatory in the process of early education, at the same time both students (3,4 in the 5-point scale) and professionally active teachers (3,7) assessed its significance rather low. 88% of the surveyed teachers incorporate the elements of media education in their work. In the case of apprentice teachers – 65% of them want to implement those elements in the future. Teachers who were asked to provide a self-assessment, assessed their media competences and knowledge about media as good, while students assessed them as average. The section evaluating knowledge of the respondents revealed a diversified level of information held. The surveyed parents have a relatively low knowledge, at the same time in the interviews they present high expectations towards the school MLE.

The approach to the media literacy produces a practical pursuit to its accomplishment. The study was designed to show opinions of representatives of three environments that have a genuine influence – or will have one in the future – on the form of actions in this regard aimed at young learners.

Introduction

A member of a dynamically developing knowledge society is a person who has been aware for a long time that the space of contemporary life has been filled by media and new technologies for good. Regardless of the age, the interaction with media as well as mediated communication has become an everyday reality. The question regarding media literacy and media education is constantly valid in the light of a dynamically developing media civilisation.

The purpose of media literacy is to counteract the mechanisms of media and digital exclusion of persons who do not have relevant competences and thus are media illiterate in the mediatised, networked world. The role of media literacy is also to remove the differences in users' competences by increasing the level of knowledge and competences of excluded persons and thus make them fully and actively function in the society again (Ogonowska 2013, 10). Furthermore, the purpose is not only to incorporate the excluded persons, but to develop these competences throughout the entire life, shape a conscious, open and critical attitude characterising all media users.

Education actions regarding media literacy, as in the case of other sub-disciplines, may be organised in several ways. The following activities may be distinguished:

- formal – within institutions such as e.g. schools, universities, teacher training centres, by including media literacy in the curriculum;

- informal – within other educational or cultural institutions;
- accidental – contact with education without formalised or organised actions, e.g. at home during everyday activities (Muszyński and Stunża 2011).

The task faced by media educators was metaphorically described in Polish literature by Tomasz Goban-Klas. In his opinion, the users of new media should not surrender to the trend of "surfing the internet", they should rather learn to "navigate the network". His words were supported by the following description "surfing is a magnificent sport where one slides on the waves on a board, while navigating is a sea voyage with a designated purpose, requiring one to master the navigating art and using the instruments (compasses, maps) and knowledge" (Goban-Klas 2005, 257). This is what using media should be like – it should be intentional and rational. When analysing the media resources available today – their multiplicity and quality diversity – a competent selection consistent with the assumed outcome is crucial.

This process applies to each user and is quite widely discussed both theoretically in the ideas of such researchers as Bronisław Siemieniecki, Maciej Tanaś, Stanisław Juszczyk, Waclaw Strykowski, Janusz Gajda, Marek Sokołowski, Adam Lepa and others, as well as practically in literature and studies on the national/Polish level (see, for instance, Murawska-Najmiec 2015; "Wnioski i rekomendacje... 2014"; Morbitzer 2012; Lipszyc (ed. 2012; Frania 2012, Drzewiecki 2010) and the international level (see, for instance, Pelle 2016; Alexander 2016). However, from the point of view of this article, the object of interest was only a fragment of the topic, namely the media literacy of early-school children in the local environment of southern Poland.

With regard to the essence of pedagogy, media literacy has developed its own objectives constituting an essential element of the teaching practice, and it thus requires knowledge not only from the recipient, the child in this case, but also from the child's parents, supervisors, teachers, everyone who participates in the child's upbringing (Bis 2009, 51). We, as the authors, accept the fact that the opinions of these persons, their knowledge, competences and the awareness of the needs or their lack actually affect the practical execution of media literacy, for instance, at school and in the family.

Outline of the author's methodological own research

Entities initiating the process of implementing media literacy or the strategy of deepening the media awareness and competences among early-school children are extremely important, as we tried to demonstrate above.

The purpose of the conducted quantitative-qualitative research was to examine the opinions of active teachers, persons preparing to become teachers as well as parents on the importance of media literacy in early school education* .

Formulating the research problems makes it possible to arrange the scientific explorations and refer them to the designed objective. The research problems, formulated in the form of questions regarding a fragment of the research presented in this article, relate to three groups of examined persons. They should be particularised as follows:

- What is the attitude of professionally active early school education teachers towards media literacy?
- What is the attitude of persons preparing to become early school education educators and teachers towards media literacy?
- What is the attitude of parents of early-school children towards media literacy?

When searching for the answers to the formulated research problems in the exploration process, we adopted a scheme of the primacy of the research method in relation to more detailed terms: "research technique" and "research tool". A diagnostic survey was the method, a survey was the technique, and a survey questionnaire was the research tool. It included both open questions – asking for subjective opinions and closed questions – with a selection of answers, introducing the proper question, as well as questions with a scale of estimates (Rubacha 2008, 173-175). The survey questionnaire was created in two versions. One of them was intended for the students of pedagogy of the first and second degree (who prepare to become educators, teachers, teachers of initial classes), while the second one was addressed to professionally active early school education teachers. The questionnaire for teachers consisted of eleven questions. Six questions were closed questions, only one of them was a multiple-choice question. One of the closed questions was expanded with the possibility to present a subjective statement, a short justification of one's choice (it thus contains the features of an open question). The questionnaire also included four questions with a scale of estimates. The questionnaire for students contained the same set of questions, but they were adequately adapted to the group of the respondents. According to the division of surveys used in the social research taking into account the distribution method, the author's own tools are classified as background surveys. This type applies to questionnaires which are distributed directly by the

* The research presented in this article regarding the opinions of teachers and students is a fragment of the diploma paper by Wioletta Hadzik entitled "Stosunek do edukacji medialnej studentów pedagogiki i aktywnych zawodowo nauczycieli zintegrowanej edukacji wczesnoszkolnej" [Attitude to media literacy from the students of pedagogy and professionally active integrated early-school education teachers], prepared under the supervision of dr Monika Frania in 2015 at the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology at the University of Silesia in Katowice. The research results used are a fragment of explorations and have not been published previously.

The research conducted among the parents to whom this article refers is not part of the above the diploma paper.

researcher in a given environment (Sztumski 1999, 114). In the case of the described research, this is the environment of employees of primary schools and university students.

Additionally, an interview was conducted among the parents of early-school children with the use of the questionnaire. The interview was open, oral and concerned opinions on media literacy in aspects raised in the other tools. It contained eight open questions.

The research sample in explorations covered intentionally selected representatives of three populations: students of pedagogy at two Polish universities in Silesia, teachers at primary schools in Silesia as well as parents of early-school children. The first group of the respondents were students from the University of Silesia in Katowice (Poland) as well as the Teachers' College in Bytom (Poland). 120 students participated in the research. 80 students of the first degree – the bachelor degree, including 48 students of the 2nd grade and 32 students of the 3rd grade. All of them were full-time students. There were 40 students of the second degree – the master's degree, including 32 students of the 1st grade of full-time studies and 8 students of the 2nd grade of extra-mural studies. The questionnaires were completed by 119 women and one man. Students of the University of Silesia were the majority of the respondents – 83% (100). They included students of the 2nd and the 3rd grade of bachelor's studies as well as students of the 1st and the 2nd grade of master's complementary studies. This university is one of the largest universities in Poland, and it has a 40-year old tradition. It consists of 12 faculties, almost 70 programmes and more than 200 specialisations. Currently, it educates approximately 35,000 students (www.us.edu.pl). This university is located in Katowice, which is the 10th biggest city in Poland in terms of size, it occupies 164.5 km², and is inhabited by 325,000 people. Katowice belongs to a unique space on the European scale referred to as the Silesian Agglomeration. It is also the capital city of the Silesian Province (website.katowice.pl 2015). In turn, students from the Teachers' College in Bytom constituted only 17% (20). This group of the respondents included only women, students of the 3rd grade of bachelor's studies. The Teachers' College was established in 1992 and is a public teacher training centre. It educates in the full-time system – 6 specialisations, as well as in the extramural system – 3 specialisations, but only in the first degree (www.kolegiumbytom.pl).

The teachers are the second group of the respondents. The research covered 32 women teachers at various stages of their professional development: 5 teacher trainees, 8 contract teachers, 5 appointed teachers and 13 certified teachers. The least experienced respondent has not even worked for a year, while the longest working teacher has worked for more than 33 years. The majority of the respondents, 11 of them, work in Katowice. They are more than 1/3 of the respondents from the teachers' group.

The questionnaire interview involved 12 parents of 1-3 grade children from the Silesian Province, including from the capital city – Katowice, and from the neighbouring cities. The majority of them, 9

respondents, are mothers. Only in two cases the parent participating in the research had more than one early-school child.

Since the presented research was of a slightly wider nature, the subsequent section will present only the most important results.

Opinion on media literacy by active teachers and persons trained to become teachers

This passage refers to the results of explorations among professionally active early school education teachers as well as among pedagogy students preparing to become teachers. The selected research results obtained in the diagnostic survey are presented below with regard to three selected aspects:

- a) opinions on the importance of media literacy in early school education and the presence in school education; recommendations from entities responsible for media education;
- b) the implementation of media literacy during practical classes;
- c) self-assessment of media competences and knowledge about the media.

As far as the first aspect is concerned, the students were almost unanimous, as many as 80% (96) of them answered that media literacy should be obligatorily implemented at school. Only 20% (24) of persons were of the opposite opinion. The teachers' answers are similar to the students' opinions. 78% (25) of the respondents opted for the obligation to implement media literacy. 22% (7) were against, which is as many as 1/5 of the respondents. When it comes to the aspect related to separating media literacy as a separate subject, the students' opinions were diverse. 41% (39) of them believe that it should be implemented as a separate area, while 59% (56) of them are of a different opinion and they are a slight majority. When it comes to the teachers, the difference is visible again. Only 32% (8) of the teachers said "yes", while 68% (17) of them answered "no".

The above results show that media literacy, both in the opinion of students and teachers, should be obligatorily implemented in early school education. However, it is not necessary to introduce it as a separate subject at school. This may be examined in two ways. First, professionally active early school education teachers often complain that they have too much on their shoulders, the curriculum is overloaded, and there is too little time to pursue it. Students preparing to become teachers are also aware of the reality of the Polish education. It may be suspected that the fear against more and more duties contributed to such answers from the respondents. However, introducing a separate subject related to media literacy would enable the implementation of the curriculum. This would involve specific guidelines which would limit the problem with choosing relevant content, issues adequate for early-school children, as well as such topics which would have a practical application. The conducted explorations also indicated a conflict in the examined groups. 80% of the respondents (N=152) taking part in the questionnaire believe

that media literacy should be mandatory in initial teaching, while both students (3.4 on a five-grade scale) and professionally active teachers (3.7 on a five-grade scale) assessed its importance as rather low.

The entity responsible for this task is a very important aspect in actions for media literacy. Therefore, the following question becomes crucial: who should educate the youngest in this field?

As much as 89% (107) of students stated that this task should be entrusted to the school. They also assigned an important role in the teaching process to the family – 63% (75). The media ranked at the 3rd place – 25% (31). The lowest number of answers indicated the role of peers – 10% (12). One person chose the answer "others" (this person believes that media literacy should be taught by outsiders, not connected with the media).

The school is also the most important institution in the introduction to media literacy according to active teachers, such response was selected by 91% (29) of them. As in the case of students, they also assigned great significance to the family – 84% (27). However, the percentage difference is definitely smaller here. When it comes to the media, we may again a great convergence of answers. The media obtained 28% (8) of the teachers' answers, namely only two percent less than in the students' case. The peers were again ranked last – 6% (2).

The research thus showed that the responsibility for implanting the grounds of media literacy should be divided between the teachers, or the school in a wider perspective, and the family. These are the two basic environments of a child at this stage of development. Family as the first environment with which the child is in contact should implant the grounds which may then be continued by the school in the future. The question regarding the parents' level of knowledge and awareness in this respect remains open.

When analysing the media literacy from various aspects it is also worth focusing on its practical execution. Information included in the core curriculum indicates that it should be implemented at the stage of initial education and in future education. Prior results showed that it is important in the awareness of the respondents and it should be implemented but how does this compare to the actual situation? Persons preparing to become educators, teachers, were asked about their plans related to the implementation of media literacy in their future professional work. The largest number of the respondents, as many as 65% (78), stated that they would use these elements in their classes. Only 7% (8) do not plan such activities. 28% (34) of students claim that they have not thought about it yet. It is worrying that so many students have never thought about the implementation of media literacy elements in their future work.

The teachers were asked the same question, but they were not asked about plans but about implementation. Almost all the teachers, 88% (28), answered that they used media literacy elements in their work. Only 12% (4) gave a negative answer. The negative answers may result from several factors:

- the teachers' ignorance and fear of conducting classes in a field they do not know;

- the lack of knowledge of the core curriculum, or its incorrect interpretation;
- the lack of willingness to conduct classes, professional burnout;
- the lack of willingness to develop, to learn about a relatively young field.

When comparing the answers of teachers and students, we may see that the vast majority either implement media literacy elements or plan to use them in their future professional career. In the question regarding the frequency of actions in this field – the majority of teachers – 57% (16) – chose the answer "once a week". 25% (7) of them answered "once a month". Only one teacher admitted that he used its elements less frequently than once every quarter. 14% (4), namely the remaining teachers, use media literacy more often than once a week. The answer "every quarter" was not chosen.

It is beyond doubt that knowledge in a given field is necessary to be able to conduct classes in that field in a reliable manner. Additionally, one's knowledge should be continuously widened and updated in such a dynamic field. Media competences in the research were understood as knowledge and analysis of media phenomena, evaluation and the ability to use the media as well as the combination of these aspects in a harmonious manner (Bednarek 2012, 105). The respondents were asked to self-assess themselves in the scale from 1 (insufficiently) to 5 (very well). When answering, the respondents could choose non-full grades, for instance 3.5. Respondents from the group of students assessed their own level of media competences as moderately high. The majority of them, 39% (47), graded themselves as sufficient (3). In turn, 29% (35) of the examined graded themselves as good (4). There were also extreme grades. 4% (5) graded themselves as insufficient (1), and only 9% (10) graded themselves the best – very good (5). With regard to the self-assessment of the level of knowledge with regard to the media, the largest number of students graded themselves 3 (sufficient) – 38% (46) and 4 (good) – 33% (40). The same number of the respondents graded themselves 2.5 and 3.5 – 3% (4). The lowest number of students indicated the grade 4.5 and 1 – 2% (2), and no one chose the grade 1.5. 7% (8) chose the highest grade – very good. The results show that the majority of the students have in their own opinion at least basic knowledge in a specified field.

The teachers also assessed their level of knowledge on the media. The lowest chosen grade is 2, indicated by 6% (2) of the respondents. 22% (7) of the respondents chose 3 (sufficient), 4 (good) – 38% (12) and the highest grade – 5 (very good) was chosen by 28% (9). There were also such grades as 3.5 and 4.5 which were chosen by 3% (1).

The aspect of the relation between the level of competence and knowledge about the media and programmes preparing teachers for the profession was interesting from the point of view of these explorations. When analysing the answers given by university students and their current subjective assessment of preparation they owe to various classes in the curriculum, it is worth starting from the

comparison of limit grades. It is alarming that only 2% (3) of the students decided to choose the 5th grade in the scale when as many as 12% (14) chose the 1st grade. The largest number of the respondents – 33% (40) answered 3, and almost as many – 26% (31) – chose the 2nd grade. Grade 4 was chosen by 18% (21). The average grade from the students is only 2.7, which would not even be enough to pass a test from a demanding lecturer. The fault may be seen in the insufficient preparation of classes at the university, which would enable the students to appropriately prepare to conduct classes in this field. The programme of classes does not include the subject media literacy as an obligatory one, and the classes including its elements are not comprehensive in terms of the topic, they are held during the last year of the studies, or are too general. It may also be presumed that the students incompetently draw conclusions from the classes and thus feel unprepared. What were the answers from the students regarding the participation of other forms of education in their preparation to conduct classes related to media literacy? The majority of students – 55% (65) – denied any other influence on their preparation. The remaining 46% (55) claimed that they tried to raise their competences.

The teachers indicate other forms of searching for knowledge regarding media literacy. The educators most often pointed out self-education – 75% (24) and workshops – 50% (16). However, participation in other forms in their case is definitely more frequent. Training courses were selected by 44% (14), courses – 34% (11), and Internet courses – by 25% (8). The answer “scientific conferences” was chosen by the smallest number of times – only 13% (4). 6% (2) of the teachers also chose the answer "other", in which they indicated – "adult children" and "studies".

Opinion on media literacy by the parents of early-school children

The family is an important pillar in activities preparing the child to live in the knowledge society. The parents are the first persons who have the possibility to deepen the media competences of their children. They teach the young how to interact with media messages, information and new technologies. It may be assumed that their opinions on the essence, the need or the lack of media literacy will determine their more or less impressive functioning. 9 mothers and 3 fathers of children in the initial classes were asked about these aspects in an interview. The obtained results are presented below in the form of a collective summary according to the adopted categories:

- a) what is media literacy and media-digital literacy; is shaping media competences and the conscious reception of messages important in the context of early-school children;
- b) who and how should educate the children in terms of the media; what is the role of particular environments of the child's development in actions related to increasing media literacy
- c) does the parent feel competent in terms of media literacy; how does the parent assess his knowledge and competences in this matter.

The majority of the examined parents provided correct but intuitive answers in the first criterion. These were not definitions from the literature on the subject, which should not be surprising, but rather descriptive observations. One of the fathers incorrectly identified media literacy with the operation of devices, technologies and actions related to computer science.

In the opinion of the respondents, the conscious receipt of media messages was related, first of all, to electronic media, e.g. animated movies on TV or computer games, while magazines or newspapers were referred to much less frequently.

In ten out of twelve cases the parents appreciated the weight of actions related to media literacy in terms of the youngest children.

Example of a statement in aspect a):

- *"It is important to teach children that the media may manipulate, that one may find both the truth and lies in the media. This applies to all elements, also animated movies on TV. One thus needs to talk to the child from the earliest years about the media. Together with my husband we're trying to talk to Antos about such topics and we don't leave him in front of the TV set alone".*

[„Ważne jest nauczenie dzieci, że media mogą manipulować, że można tam znaleźć zarówno prawdę, jak i kłamstwa. Dotyczy to wszystkich elementów, także bajek w telewizji. Trzeba więc zaczynać rozmawiać o tym z dzieckiem od najmłodszych lat. Razem z mężem staramy się rozmawiać z Antosiem na takie tematy i nie pozostawiać go samego przed ekranem telewizora”].

The parents indicate, first of all, the school (in eight cases this was definitely the first indication), and then themselves (the family is the second most frequent indication) as the main entity which should be responsible for media literacy in the second category. No other proposals were indicated in the interviews. The parents did not indicate the media themselves, the peers, non-governmental organisations etc. Many statements emphasised the school's institutional tasks in this respect, referring to the teachers' competences (as compared to the poor self-assessment of their own competences in several cases) Some of the respondents believe that such actions are conducted at school. The request often appeared as a demand.

Example of a statement in aspect b):

- *"We at home control Ania and we're trying, for instance, to limit her access to TV or the computer. We sometimes talk to her about what she saw, but it is the school that should teach the children about the media, manipulations and threats. The teachers know all the novelties better than we do, although nowadays the children know how to use various devices. The teachers should pay greater attention to this topic".*

[„My w domu kontrolujemy Anię i staramy się na przykład ograniczać jej dostęp do telewizji czy komputera. Czasami z nią rozmawiamy o tym co widziała, ale to szkoła powinna uczyć dzieci o mediach, o manipulacjach i niebezpieczeństwach. Nauczyciele znają wszystkie nowinki lepiej niż my, choć w dzisiejszych czasach to dzieci same wiedzą jak używać różnych sprzętów. Nauczycielki powinny zwrócić na ten temat większą uwagę”].

Answers in the third category were diverse. The self-assessment of one's own knowledge and competences was a difficult task for the parents. Four persons (three mothers and one father) assessed their competences very highly. The remaining respondents had great difficulties in this case and the majority of them referred to the help of the teachers or the school as an institution.

Example of a statement in aspect c):

- *"Yes, I assess my knowledge in this respect as high. We're good in this respect and our daughter hasn't had any problems so far".*
- *"It's difficult for me to say whether I fulfil my tasks related to media literacy when it comes to Amelka. We try to talk to her with my husband, but I don't know if my knowledge is great. I try to be up to date with the novelties, teach my daughter what and how she may use, what websites to browse. However, classes at school about safety in the media would be a very good idea. I think so".*

[„Tak, oceniam swoją wiedzę w tym zakresie jako wysoką. Dobrze sobie radzimy w tym zakresie i raczej nie pojawiły się żadne problemy do tej pory u córki”].

[„Trudno mi powiedzieć, czy wypełniam zadania związane z edukacją medialną w stosunku do Amelki. Staramy się z mężem z nią rozmawiać, ale nie wiem czy moja wiedza jest duża. Staram się śledzić nowinki, uczyć córkę co i w jaki sposób może wykorzystywać, na jakie strony zaglądać. Zajęcia w szkole o bezpieczeństwie w mediach bardzo by się jednak przydały. Tak myślę”].

Conclusion

According to the respondents, media literacy should be obligatorily included in the teaching process at the early-school age. It should be introduced, first of all, by the school with the support from the family environment. However, the majority of the respondents do not notice the need to introduce it as a separate area.

The details of classes related to media literacy in the core curriculum thus remain a request for the future. The publication of the objectives and the amount of teaching hours would not only facilitate the implementation, but would also be an obligation to be regular. Perhaps, it would be an answer to the teachers' uncertainty and the need formulated by the parents.

In addition, the significance the respondents attach to media literacy on a five-grade scale is 3.55 on average. It may be assumed that such low significance, with the simultaneous belief that it should be obligatorily implemented, results from the lack of a clear relation to this field of pedagogy. This, in turn, may be associated with the fact that media literacy is a new area which is either still unknown, or changes in this area are so dynamic that it is difficult to catch up with them.

According to the examined teachers, media literacy is implemented by them in the initial classes of the primary school, most often once week, and the students plan to follow this route. The self-assessment of the level of knowledge regarding media literacy among the students is not satisfactory. The need to expand the preparation in this field is visible because self-education and classes conducted at universities will not bring the expected results. The teachers and the students need to be sure that the knowledge they have is sufficient so that they are able to pass this knowledge to subsequent generations. The majority of them are willing to expand their scope of knowledge. Taking into account the research results, the students' preparation in terms of media literacy should be expanded, either by creating a new subject, or by discussing it in more detail during classes and lectures. Such actions could be the beginning of groundwork in order to educate a professional and competent teaching staff in the near future.

This seems particularly important in the light of the expectations of parents of early-school children who emphasise the great role of the school in this matter, who see the need to cooperate with the teachers and who expect assistance from the educators in this respect.

Taking into account the regularities of the research process in humanities and social studies, the obtained results should not be generalised on the entire population. The explorations rather supplement the view of the present status of contemporary media literacy in Poland. This is a voice in a discussion which may also be a guideline for pedagogical and teaching practice.

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