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Digitalization of upbringing and education in relation to shifted socialisation of Polish students

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Abstract

The article discusses modern children's/students' space of life which is outlined by electronic media. They tend to determine the process of upbringing, education as well as socialisation. The above mentioned processes, including primary socialisation which is typically initiated by the family, are now influenced by media. Undoubtedly, mass media and hypermedia provide numerous educational opportunities. On the other hand, they may have negative implications for children since virtual reality, which is obviously different to the real world, tends to generate new threats or risks especially to psychological and physical development. Children might be put at risk of Internet abuse or addiction. The closing part of the article emphasises the necessity for media education such as learning media skills and competencies as well as raising the Internet awareness.

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Introduction

Modern person's space of life is outlined by media which determine the process of children's upbringing and education as well as socialisation. Contemporary media involve among others television, films, advertisement or the Internet. Nowadays, mass media have become an integral part of our everyday life. They influence people's way of thinking, feelings and imagination. The importance of media cannot be overestimated, especially because young people devote a lot of time to the use of media. According to public opinion surveys, media have greater influence

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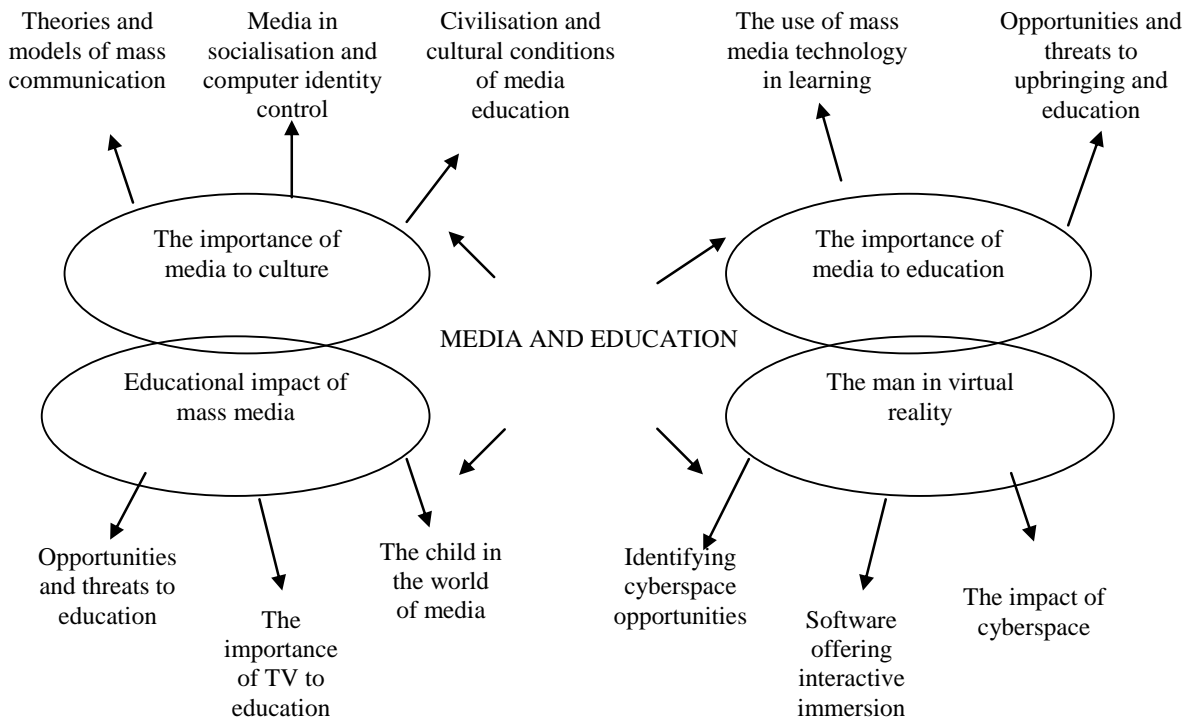
on young people’s behaviours and attitudes than family, school or other socialising agents. It might be claimed that “traditional upbringing and education” does not meet modern life requirements concerning the young people’s need to increase their awareness and experience (Cudowska, 2005, p. 180). New media have become recent and most influential social environment for all young people over the world and certainly those living in Poland, the country which also participates in transformation and globalisation processes. Media offer rich and axiologically diversified content which has a significant influence on children’s/student’s life, their upbringing and education at each level of development. It should be emphasized that media, in spite of their advantages, may threaten upbringing and socialisation processes.

Educational and upbringing opportunities offered by new media

It is worth noticing that the term “new media” means both mass media and hypermedia. However, there is a slight difference between these two types of new media. Mass media are the tools intended to reach large audience by mass communication; they provide direct contacts when broadcasting the content from the centre to the mass of the people. Hypermedia, whereas, are technical assets based on a computer with internet access which is connected to such hardware as a monitor, a DVD or a CD player, a scanner or a printer etc. This system enables users to gain access to the texts of different types as well as to create and process them via the Internet. (J. Gajda, 2003). As opposed to mass media which, as mentioned earlier, broadcast information from the centre, hypermedia have numerous sources and their senders - single persons - are able to send and receive information at any time. Hypermedia unlike mass media are active. Here, socialisation function of media must be emphasized since in both mass media and hypermedia the receiver is active and uses information transmitted by media intentionally, being driven by expectations concerning the content of media. The user is not directly influenced by media as they do not operate in isolation.

Media create great upbringing and educational opportunities, they facilitate education without borders. A. Cudowska (2005, p.174) identifies four basic areas of interrelations between media and education: the importance of media to culture, the importance of hypermedia to education, the educational impact of mass media as well as the situation of a person in virtual reality. The details of the above-mentioned areas are included in the chart below.

Figure 1. Map of essential issues concerning the analysis of media and education



From: A. Cudowska, Media i edukacja – wzajemne relacje (in): Dziecko i media elektroniczne – nowy wymiar

dzieciństwa, Vol. I, ed. J. Izdebska, T. Sosnowski, Wyd. Trans Humana, Białystok 2005.

Among all the above-mentioned areas of correlation between media and education, pedagogists are mainly interested in the application of new multimedia technologies to learning. They also focus on opportunities and threats to the process of upbringing and education.

J. Gajda (2005, p.146) mentions the following upbringing and educational opportunities (chances) facilitated by media, which are visible:

- firstly: in a wide range of TV programmes offered by numerous, specialised TV channels which, as a result of competition for viewers, will meet requirements of different groups of people and satisfy various tastes;
- secondly: in possibilities for education in its broad sense, particularly in terms of axiology e.g. education for such universal values as the truth, good, beauty, love, freedom, tolerance etc.;
- thirdly: in higher level of education in Poland, which allows us to take an optimistic look at the reception of media content, according to the uses and gratifications theory, in a selective and critical way, resistant to different forms of manipulation and directed to higher standard of cultural content, as opposed to behavioural theories which assume passive attitudes of receivers who tend to be under the influence of media.

Let me refer briefly to the above-mentioned issues. As far as accessibility to media content is concerned, it should be noticed that there is a wide choice of different programmes which tend to meet children's and young people's requirements as well as to satisfy their needs and interests. TV programmes are available at any time since, thanks to recording equipment, TV or radio programmes do not have to be watched or listened to at the time of broadcasting. What is more, the receivers appear to be more creative in processing ready texts and creating new ones through the use of DVD technology or a computer connected to such hardware as a scanner or a printer. Hypermedia are interactive as they enable the users to establish interpersonal contacts. They also blur the line between senders and receivers.

Nowadays, computer has become an essential tool in our everyday life, for children and young people it offers a nice way of spending free time. Information providers enable receivers to establish contacts with other users, make them creative and even influence their way of thinking. There are a lot of valuable educational games and TV programmes, for instance "Sesame Street", a long-running children's TV series, which is known for its educational content relevant to almost all school subjects. With providing knowledge in an easy and nice way, such programmes teach children powers of observation, deduction skills and logical thinking (B. Siemieniecki, 2002).

Huge educational possibilities of mass media and hypermedia are applied to educate children with disabilities, particularly those who are deaf, blind, and chronically ill or socially disordered (educational, therapeutic, counselling games etc.). Electronic media are used in distant learning schools (e-learning). Thanks to numerous types of media multimedia programmes on DVDs or e-books are created.

Mass media and hypermedia facilitate not only pre-school and school education, but also beyond school, parallel education. Children watch programmes intended for them as well as programmes for adults, which may be also valuable for young people such as nature documentaries or programmes related to human existence. Such content is not usually offered by schools. Interesting and attractive form of passing information makes the process of acquiring knowledge occasional and unintentional. It is television which provides (may provide) children with information concerning different areas, encourages young people to develop their interests and passions, delivers entertainment and various forms of relax, influences attitudes, shows the meaning of life, teaches understanding and love to other people as well as stimulates imagination. In this sense, TV offers a great variety of programmes (see: J. Gajda, 2005, p. 148).

Educational programmes are broadcast through numerous specialised and popular digital TV channels such as Discovery Channel, Animal Planet, National Geographic Channel, Travel Channel and sports or religious channels. Thanks to its special features, television (similarly to other mass media and hypermedia) is able to influence all aspects of people's lives (T. Purayidathil, 1998). TV programmes with educational content help children develop their cognitive skills, provide young people with information, teach them pro-social behaviours, encourage them to act constructively, develop interests and hobbies, influence children's attitudes and opinions. Therefore, they may facilitate socialisation and upbringing processes.

The Polish system of education (new core curriculum) offers relatively new area of education – "computer classes" which also involve the use of multimedia programmes. As a result, parents more and more frequently buy their kids computers with multimedia software. They hope that computer hardware and software will increase learning effectiveness, guarantee educational success and additionally fill up children's time when parents are absent (compensation function). Computer programmes are used in schools for almost all subjects: to teach mathematics,

languages or science, among other subjects. They potentially increase teaching effectiveness as well as children's and young people's life chances, including educational ones.

Selected threats or risks to socialisation and upbringing associated with the use of media by children and young people

Dominating and constantly extending media, multimedia and ICT aspects of child's life provoke pedagogical and social reflections. The questions arise: what is happening to the child in the world of electronic media, who the child is becoming, how can the child benefit from media, what kind of destructive changes occur in the child's personality, when the variety and diversity of media content becomes a new educational chance and when media pose a threat to the child. Pedagogists notice negative impact of mass media and hypermedia, particularly television, computer games and the Internet on upbringing. According to J. Gajda (2005, p. 144),

1. Mass media and hypermedia present reality in a biased way through projecting a false image of the world: they exaggerate social pathology by excessive display of violence e.g. rape or terror scenes, they also overuse sexual content, without deep social analysis or convincing examples of any ways to prevent negative issues.
2. They promote and strengthen consumerism, encourage materialistic values and popularize brilliant careers of people with no moral values. The notion of success is limited to wealth.
3. Media make us indifferent to numerous problems. What is more, they decrease cultural standards, the level of arts and cultural tastes, through promotion of dominating pop culture.

Projecting false sense of reality tends to be extremely dangerous (see: B. Matyjas, 2008). Pedagogists are concerned about the scenes of violence and cruelty which appear to be the most devastating to upbringing and education. Electronic media such as TV or the Internet rushed into the child's life and disorganised it by reducing the amount of time devoted to learning, reading and other duties or hobbies. This means that media threaten family life and family education. As pedagogists and educators, we would like to identify some risks or threats that arise from the use of media and hypermedia by children and young people. Negative impact of media involves:

- disorganisation of everyday life; media affect daily routine tasks and free time activities;
- harmful effects on health, physical and psychological development;
- family disintegration;
- performing care, educational and socialisation functions as substitute for parents (B. Matyjas, 2008, p. 96).

M. Wawrzak-Chodaczek's (1997) research reveal that television often enters children's lives to perform educational functions, and even wins over peer groups and other institutions. Children's and young people's everyday life is strongly influenced by multi-hour, frequent and regular TV watching. The way TV content is passed to the viewers stops children from active and creative thinking. To make matters worse, it favours passive attitude, and mental laziness as well as decreases ability to think creatively. Watching violent TV programmes strengthens violent and aggressive behaviour in everyday life.

TV or internet commercial which does not include educational content may also have negative influence of children and young people. Children are uncritical, credulous, they cannot judge or assess the TV content they watch. These make young people easy to manipulate by commercial producers. Advertisement creates the standards of mass consumption rather than individual tastes. In such conditions it seems to be difficult for young people to create their own lifestyle. Advertisement appealing to children's needs which due to different reasons cannot be satisfied appears to be particularly dangerous. This causes frustration, aggression and often desire to possess advertised items (e.g. clothes, electronic equipment) whatever the cost.

Computer and the Internet pose also a threat to socialisation and upbringing. P. Aftab (2003, p. 84) identified the following threats or risks:

- children may find unsuitable content online (pornography, hate, violence, deception, false or exaggerated information);
- easy access to instructions e.g. how to buy a house, how to construct a bomb, how to take drugs etc.);
- children may become restless, they may be exposed to hurtful, vulgar content and threatened by hackers, virus senders or other cyber offenders;
- it is risky to disclose personal information (e.g. while taking part in online competitions or completing online forms);
- young people might be deceived while doing online shopping (e.g. when buying software, music files, pictures, games etc.);

- children may be unaware of online stranger danger when invited to meet a stranger face to face in reality;
- risk of becoming addicted to the Internet.

Among other media-related threats computer games played by a lot of children and young people should be mentioned. There are games full of cruelty and violence that promote hate or cybersex. Pedagogists emphasise the fact that children are seriously hurt online. Different types of cyber crime include: cyber paedophilia, cyber pornography, cyber sex, cyberbullying, grooming and cyberstalking. Pornographic online content strongly influences children because it is misrepresented and distorted in order to reach higher popularity and powerful effect. Children sexual abuse by paedophiles can result in long-term harm also for the child's parents who feel guilty that they were not able to protect their kids. The younger a victim is, the more serious psychological and social disorders will he/she exhibit.

Children are particularly threatened by cyber pornography or cybersex, especially in the areas of cognition, emotions, motivation as well as morals, which may lead to inner conflicts, fears and finally to personality disintegration. Sex therapists claim that cybersex and cyber pornography (similarly to above mentioned cyber paedophilia) pose a serious threat to proper sexual development of teenagers. The powerful impact of online sexual content results from the fact that it is misrepresented and distorted. It occurs through the impression that people seen or met online appear to be interesting and they enjoy high standard of living. These make them easy to identify with. Internet users seeking sexual experience online want to get in touch with people characterised by strong personality so that they could imitate their attitudes, patterns of behaviour, the ways they talk or even dress. They are very realistically presented in films or photos, and therefore Internet users get the impression that it is possible to copy them in the real world. (W. Kornas – Biela, 1998). However, we should remember that the film or story content does not make us to condemn the characters for their actions. It is very important that these characters do not suffer any consequences of their actions (e.g. becoming infected or disappointed by a relationship). On the contrary, sexual contact is presented only as a source of sensual pleasure, satisfaction and the sense of fulfilment as well as success in life. Therefore, all these can have long-term, cumulative and subconscious effects on the child's psychological development that will affect his imagination, interests and moral values. The impact of strong stimuli influence as well as the fact that Internet users remain anonymous may hinder taking up normal sex life in the future (Ł. Wojtasik, 2003). It is emphasised in pedagogical literature that lonely children who are looking for new or different experience as well as kids who have difficulties in making friends in the real world or face problems with personal identity, those who lack adults' interest and love and young people with problems at home become an attractive target for criminals.

Proper socialisation and upbringing tends to be also threatened from cyberbullying, which is intended to harm or harass other people. N. Willard (<http://www.cyberbullying>, 2014) mentioned the following examples of cyberbullying:

- 1) flaming,
- 2) harassment or electronic mobbing,
- 3) denigration,
- 4) impersonation,
- 5) outing and trickery,
- 6) exclusion
- 7) cyberstalking.

Cyberbullying may enter through Instant Messengers (IM), e-mail, text messages, social communication services, chat rooms, blogs, websites, bash boards and online games. In virtual reality bullying often occurs within groups of peers who are developing antisocial and aggressive behaviour. According to A. Andrzejewska (2009, p. 148), the most common types of cyberbullying include:

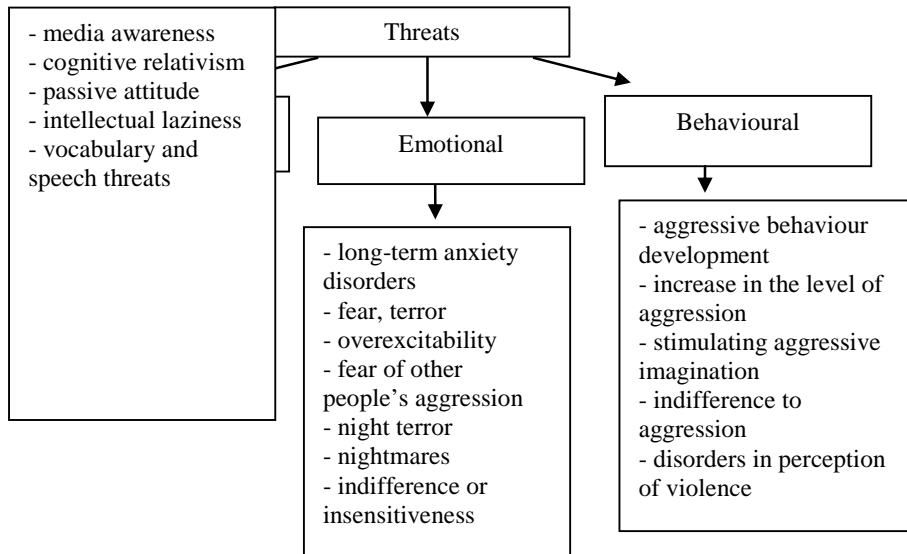
- hacking of e-mail accounts or chats;
- creating humiliating websites;
- insulting and making a person the subject of ridicule in online forums;
- identity theft;
- blackmail and threats;
- mobile phone hacking and stealing personal information, addresses, text and multimedia messages' content which are then published or spread (e.g. at school) without the consent of the phone's owner.

Grooming and cyberstalking are other types of cyber crime which seriously threaten children's education. Child grooming is directly linked to cyber paedophilia, cyber pornography and cyber sex. Thanks to the Internet,

sexual criminals are equipped with interactive communication technologies which help paedophiles achieve their goals. Sexual grooming is harmful and dangerous since the child is made to feel at fault or complicit in the abuse. This may result in neurotic reactions and premature sexual involvement which often leads to sexual obsessions. Cyberstalking, whereas, is the repeated use of electronic communications to harass or frighten other people. Children often become the victims of cyberstalking. The cyberstalker can be another child or someone motivated by revenge.

Online threats and risks may affect cognitive, emotional, behavioural aspects of children’s and young people’s development. J. Izdebska identified the following media-related threats:

Figure 2. Media-related threats to child development



Source: J. Izdebska, Dziecko w rodzinie u progu XXI wieku. Nowy wymiar dzieciństwa (in:) ed. H. Cudak „Roczniki Pedagogiki Rodziny” 2002, Vol. V, p. 77 quoted after: B. Matyjas, Dzieciństwo w kryzysie. Etiologia zjawiska, Wyd. Żak, Warszawa 2008, p. 97.

One of the computer and internet-related threats is netoholism (P. Forma 2009, p.31-38). Similarly to other disorders, Internet addiction requires long-term therapy so as to “wean” children from spending a vast amount of time online.

J. Szafraniec (1997, p. 2-6) characterized the world of value presented in everyday media coverage and emphasized that this world does not reflect the rules, values and morals that should be commonly recognised and applied. On the contrary, it denies, distorts and ridicules the most important values through the content, images, attitudes and opinions presented in media. Value-illness, which results from living without values, is manifested by amorality, cynicism, helplessness or apathy and may lead to somatic disorders and illnesses. This “cool world” has negative impact on socialization and education processes which affect young generations of children and students. Therefore, young people should be educated how to use media and mass media properly as well as become aware of online threats and risks.

Media-based socialisation in education and upbringing

Generally speaking, socialisation refers to the influence of society on an individual which results in acquiring competencies to ensure full and effective participation in social life. (P. Forma, 2012, p. 25). Socialisation involves the process of influencing an individual by other members of the society. The influences occur in such socialisation and education environments as family (primary socialisation), pre-school and school institutions as well as mass media and hypermedia (secondary socialisation). The process of socialisation is determined by all above-mentioned environments characterised by interrelations of micro and macro worlds which influence children and young people’s personality (J. Modrzewski, 2007, p. 121).

As mentioned above, media (mass media and hypermedia) are currently very important environment of socialisation, education and upbringing since they are present in children’s and young people’s everyday life.

Unfortunately, they sometimes become dominant socialising environment when parents are pushed into the background. Hence, the term “shifted socialisation” emerges which denotes socialisation shifted from the family that is primary living environment and the source of traditional, relational and common upbringing to beyond-family environment such as media (e.g. television, the Internet). From pedagogical point of view, it is important that particularly parents, educators and teachers take under control the media and hypermedia-based influences which may bring both positive and negative results to children and young people. The diagnosis of media-related threats and risks, that is identifying and describing problems, should begin taking up preventive measures, such as media education intended not only for children and young people, but also for their parents and teachers. It seems to be essential to develop critical and discursive attitude towards media content. In our opinion it is one of the main tasks of modern education. Therefore, specialists should create emancipatory competencies for children, young people and other users of media concerning virtual world and media content. Media education ought to accompany an individual in their development so that a person becomes aware of media importance in everyday life. Media education involves the knowledge of relationships with media, associations of media with reality context as well as the awareness of the roles a person - an addressee of media content, takes in a sophisticated chain of communication (A. Cudowska, 2005, p. 181). Therefore, media education should be understood as pedagogical activity intended to develop a certain attitude, the way of thinking and acting in life, based on universal values. It is indispensable in the process of children socialisation (family, school) to develop media competence. In pedagogical literature parents may find useful guidelines concerning children safety in the Internet. They provide information that helps parents keep their kids safe online.

Conclusions

Modern life of children and young people is nowadays different from the life a dozen years ago. At present, a TV screen and a computer with Internet access tend to be important elements of life. Digitalisation of life occurs in all its aspects including education and upbringing as well as makes mass media and multimedia more influential than family. Media impact on young people, their personalities, attitudes, behaviours and opinions may be positive along with all educational, therapeutic or compensatory opportunities provided by media. On the other hand, media pose threats to intellectual, moral, emotional, physical and practical spheres of life. To prevent the above-mentioned threats media education addressed to parents, teachers, and primarily to children and young people should be introduced in order to develop media competencies as well as the awareness of opportunities and dangers that media pose to socialisation, education and upbringing.

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