
ON PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION 'IN THE ERA OF DIGITAL MEDIA' A HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Today we speak about education that would, in a 'new' humanistic spirit, form cultural capacities of modern man in respect with the rising demands brought by his life in the time of digital media. It reveals that such education is confronted with the risk of 'intertechinism' and deficiency, or loss of the virtue of 'understanding' in modern man and the phenomenon of 'self-promoting' of today's digital media. In relation to these, modern education should promote more emphasis on development and forming of thinking, concentrating also on relevant 'value and moral-based ideas or understanding'. We speak about creative and critical thinking that sets a reflective attitude of human towards his 'Me', towards his experience and cognisance, today especially in the context of digital media. It is Philosophy that seems to be, in this respect, a significant educational factor that co-forms a rationally thinking, 'wise' human being who is not a slave to the modern digital media and flood of information, but a self-confident, free and responsible individuality standing in a partnership with them. We also speak about the importance of Philosophy in 'media education' that understands critical thinking as the key media competence and, ultimately, creative and critical usage of media with emphasis on moral aspects, especially on responsibility ethos.

Keywords: humanism, digital media, education, media education, philosophy

1. Introduction

The contemporary social and cultural dynamics is undoubtedly associated with informatization, computerization, the boom in the new digital information and communication technology, and development of telematic and multimedia technology. Influenced by these phenomena, interpersonal communication changes, but also the very world changes for a man who makes plans, designs and reshapes his world even in the virtual dimensions of the Internet. These phenomena, especially the Internet, then bring also more radical transformation in human experience.

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In the context of the new conditions of life and experience of modern man and society that are given by the above-mentioned phenomena, we believe that it is education that is one of the most acute problems we must presently face. It is now especially visible in the humanistic perspective of philosophy of education. Here, education has, since the ancient times, been bound with the idea of humanity and humanisation. However, it is presently being redefined or reinterpreted in prospect of digital media, as this kind of media is “deeply embedded and inevitably needed in our society and culture” [1].

In the following material we want to speak specifically about philosophy of education from the humanistic perspective in the modern era of digital media. In this context the importance and nature of Philosophy as actual humanistic educational agent will be identified.

2. Humanistic philosophy of education in the era of digital media

It must be pointed out that humanistic perspective in thinking about education, or philosophy of education, is, as such, diversionary. The idea of education has been developing under the influence of various cultural, social and political conditions. Particularly important are also various philosophical foundations for humanistic education [2]. In spite of this internal diversity, the modern humanistic ‘practical’ philosophy of education, which does not intend to be mere ‘theory per se’, acquires a shared perspective. It aims its attention to the question of how education can be a positive contribution to modern man, inevitably also taking into account the characteristics of modern times. It is conscious of the need to meet specific challenges of the modern times and at the same time to reflect what human really needs, facing these challenges. It also appears here that it should be education that shapes cultural capacities of modern human with regard to requirements that life brings in information society and (cyber)culture, which became “the essential expression of our cultural existence” [3].

One of the most acute claims presented to actual philosophy of education in the contemporary digital era is the risk of ‘info-technicism’. According to L. Štekauerová, this risk emerges right in the information and communication technologies. For man, it means that he has to face the depersonalizing pressure of technology which can lead or leads respectively to ‘techno-morphism’ in thinking, actions and values. Along with this, this author believes that information technologies create, in the highest development level, the so-called (virtual) ‘hyper-reality’, promote and keep in connection with this hyper-reality almost unbridled mania of information usage in the lifestyle of contemporary human being [4]. As if from ‘the other side’ we can contribute to the author’s words, it is also risky the vulnerability of man with regard to (technical) proliferation of information and its phenomenon known as ‘information overflow’ or ‘information overload’.

We think humanistic philosophy of education should, with regard to this risk, reflect the fact that techno-sphere, or intruding expansion of info-sphere, creates some kind of deficit, loss of 'understanding' the meaning in human's life, understanding that is bound to personal experience and cognition. Domination of technology, according to Liessmann, 'laps' words and does not permit to create real ideas [5]. Today, with abundance of information, "sense does of course exist, but there is less of it" [6]. With the expansion of information, we have lost or we are losing respectively the ability to 'understand' using the relevant information that we, sadly, cannot distinguish [5]. It seems we miss the 'ideas' that are different from facts and information and that, as Snauwaert points out, in reality it pose act of giving sense to our own experience [7].

In this context, philosophy of education is the recognition that all of the media, including the Internet, establish their own logics of thinking and actions, they offer a specific vision of man, favour this or that value system. In a way they influence modalities of perception and choice of what deserves human's attention, therefore they interfere with the concept and sense of man and push towards some model of his specific development [8]. Perhaps, based on the above mentioned, we may speak about 'self-establishing' of the modern digital media, which can represent a new way of applying totalitarian expectations in the life of contemporary human. On one hand it is 'self-establishment' of media as the result of their own (technical) features, which corresponds to the famous McLuhan's "the medium is the message" [9] and refers to the phenomenon of 'mediamorphosis' in its strong version. On the other hand, it is also about enabling and direct support of sharing the mass idea perspective and value-based assessment in contemporary digital media, about direct value and sense-based manipulative tendencies that are applied and developed on basis of various kind of social practice through these media, or through their usage.

From the humanistic point of view, it is believed that the actual philosophy of education should be oriented to education that can serve as 'counter-action' against the above-mentioned loss of ability to 'understand'. At the same time it should be the education as a mighty 'counter-action' against 'self-establishing' of the modern digital media in any given way. As such, it should promote immunity against possibility and tendency to manipulate, against sharing the large-scale point of view, it should lead to destruction of 'technomorphism' and stereotypes that are implied and employed in a large scale within thinking, evaluation and so forth.

We believe that this education should intend to help us to come with adequate styles of perception, thinking, assessment, and in this context also human's behaviour within the context of broader demands that life brings in the time of digital media, or information society. Such education should intend to help us gain adequate skills and competences which consist of knowing, acquired knowledge, developed dispositions (perceptive, value, attitude, interaction, and so forth). It is obvious that this education does not concentrate primarily on passing some "instant knowledge" [10] in form of 'complete' fact

file that is set once and for all. It is not about knowledge in the sense of quantity of mediated 'information' as quantity of 'ready' knowledge. Also: the effort to pass the sum of knowledge is not the most important factor in the time when we have computer memory that can assist us [11].

Therefore, the present education is about, or should be about forming the ability to tackle information (and facts): the ability to distinguish relevant information, see the value of information, with regard to, for example, practical needs. It is about the ability to assign quality relevant from the point of view of 'knowledge' and broader 'understanding' in the scope of value. In this context, the skill of tackling information means also the skill of assigning value to it. At the same time it is about the ability to turn the most relevant information into knowledge [1, p. 126] and also to know how to use this knowledge in practical life.

It should be noted that this is all about thinking as the ability to adequately process information or facts that we deal with in various contexts of our life. In modern education, which wishes to be beneficial to modern man in the time of digital media, more emphasis should be placed on development of thinking, as critical thinking. We can understand this generally as "systematic, consistent training in creative, critical and observing habits, abilities and skills to form the flexible, open mind of people for accepting all unusual or unexpected situations... We list here also a habit of reflexive understanding of Myself, moral and social responsibility." [3, p. 20]

In the context of the previously said, we take the view that the actual philosophy of education needs to reflect the need of 'strong' shaping function: help those who learn to become free personalities capable of employing self-confidence and criticism, reflection and creativity, solidarity in freedom and responsibility in effort to put digital media to a good use (also in, for example, for educational need) [8, p. 88]. It seems that its 'ideal' is in the kind of person or personality "that is flexible, intelligent, diligent and prepared to interact meaningfully with others through technology and with technology; a critical person who knows how to debate and discuss messages and proposal reaching them from the outside, who knows how to reveal their interior and their hidden agenda" [12].

Within this humanistic perspective, for example "human and pedagogic value of media education" [8, p. 88] and media literacy itself are to be understood. It can be stated here that one of the values that are in the context of media education or media literacy is the defence of individual autonomy that is based on unrestricted observation, information and critical thinking. In relation to the present digital media, they are especially about the principle of reflectivity and criticism – criticism towards media news, content, and criticism towards their technological context. However, it should be stated here that media education and media literacy do not only promote freedom, autonomy and individual criticism. They concentrate also on the value of open dialogue in democratic society or active citizenship and so forth [12, p. 55-57].

The primary goal of media education as an intentional process lies in gaining media competences. A student should acquire and strengthen especially critical thinking, as the key competence, and also an ability to solve problems that relate to human as a consumer and creator of information [13]. As N. Slavíková ethically and relevantly adds, it is an interdisciplinary, systematic life-long process of acquiring media competences and abilities that should examine responsible, creative and critical usage of media with a focus on moral contexts and humanism [14]. The fact is that 'homo medialis', or 'homo informaticus' creates, develops and uses modern (digital) media and information in the context of various axiological and ethical orientations. And finally, it is also about media themselves being the carriers of values.

According to the previously said, humanistic perspective should be about media education that is not axiologically and ethically neutral, or that is not indifferent to (ethical) good. Here we can speak about 'ethisation' of medial education. On one hand, application of value-motivated or ethically motivated bases is desirable. On the other hand, we can understand and construct ethical education as converging with ethical education, which is primarily oriented on advancing moral, personable and social development in which and for which there are values that are relevant. We may assume here that contact, as well as some conjunction between media education and ethical education, their mutual relation in the context of broader cultural education, will lead to the formation of ethos (of responsibility) that is needed in the context of digital media, or usage of digital media.

It must be pointed out that ethos (of responsibility) in the context of using of digital media, can be assisted especially by education (as one of the system mechanisms in society), which also anticipates the existence of self-forming, or the way of self-cultivation [3]. It may be stated here that, as we believe, Philosophy, as an authentic and cultural means of self-reflection, really gains a new social meaning in the present time of modern media. We believe it is indeed Philosophy, as an authentic way of self-reflection and self-cultivation of man, which takes on a new social value and sense. We understand it is its importance that is also significant in the context of modern education, or more specifically in media education, which wishes to be a positive contribution for contemporary man with regard to the requirements and conditions of life in the era of digital media.

3. On the actual importance of Philosophy - Philosophy as humanistic and educational component

As already mentioned before, philosophy of education, which wishes to contribute to the life of modern human, should be based on what a human needs when facing the challenges of modern time. What is it then that human needs in the time of digital media, especially concerning the already mentioned risk of 'info-technicism', which represents a great challenge for the modern education?

Let us take a look, one more time, at his situation that, as we believe, evokes the actual social or educational importance of Philosophy.

The humanistic perspective shows us that human needs to cope with various confrontations, with the world of digital media, with the reality it brings. He must face challenges that the world of media brings, media that is “ubiquitous and inevitably needed” [1, p. 19], as well as to compete or meet the challenges of ‘self-promoting’ in modern times and society. Also, if it is to exist and work efficiently in today’s world, he needs to be able to “cope successfully with great deal of information brought by countless relations” [6]. However, his situation requires collecting and processing of information. He needs to handle not only the quantity, but also the quality of the information received. It is always the relevant information that is important – human communication can make sense only by using exactly this “relevant information” [15]. This is the value in various aspects and contexts of our life.

It could also be stated here that for modern human, it is not very easy and painless to meet these conditions and demands. In this respect we can speak about problems – difficulties that human faces in the modern times: For instance, the possible or real meaning of information sometimes vanishes. It is true that, for example, mass communication, or even democratisation in access to information, especially on the Internet, led to the fact that “a large proportion of information has no real value for us” [16]. However, also our own limits in ‘reading’ and ‘processing of information’ are to be blamed. We may state together with A. Kiepas, that assessment of information is not at all easy – it requires expertise, sensitive approach, ... Finally, it also requires certain criteria that will help to assess what is important and what is irrelevant. Yet, the net alone does not offer this. What is more, there is no axiological perception whatsoever in information overflow [16].

Particular inconvenience in the life of modern man seems to be in a certain deficit, loss of ‘understanding’ in the horizon of sense, bound to personal experience and cognisance. Information and messages, with expansion and overflow with which man is constantly confronted within the context of media techno-sphere is only one-dimensional, simplified meaning, expression without reasoning, as G. Myerson points out. Messages and information do not include understandings, meanings [17, 18] – they are different from meanings in the context of the sense, freedom, morale and responsible human life.

In relation to the previously mentioned, it could be stated that – as we also have already pointed out – a modern human faces the need and importance of the ability to distinguish relevant information, evaluate information based on the quality of ‘understanding’ and the ability to appraise it with regard to his practical needs..., and also capacity to turn the most suitable information into knowledge [1, p. 126] and eventually, to make good use of it. It is basically about the ability to think or think critically, which is relevant for human decision-making, choice and practical performance in plurality and complicated demands of life nowadays, with large quantity of information and also digital media themselves.

It must be pointed out that this is inevitably also about value and moral relevant 'ideas'. We need these to make decisions and generally to lead life in which, including the modern times of digital media – as has already been explained – we have a possibility to find a meaning and find its coherence in experiences [2, p. 2]. These 'ideas', different from facts and information, emerge from every individual reflection of unique experience (this is also one of the reasons why it cannot be 'transferred') and 'steer' our transformation. As a matter of fact, they represent the act of finding value in individual experience [7]. They represent 'understanding' of our life situations and problems in them, understanding that is not value and moral-neutral and that actually (from the humanistic point of view) builds foundations of freedom and responsible involvement in human as his 'true' quality of being humane.

It is in this context that we believe we can speak about the already indicated actual importance of Philosophy. We believe that Philosophy could be a great, however not the only, aspect in the context of challenges that the modern times of digital media brings, especially in the context of education. To this end, education should contain some space for "Philosophy as the educator" [19]. It may be pointed out here that also Snauwaert emphasises the actual 'educational' benefit of Philosophy – its importance for study and practice of education in a democratic society. L. Bellatala also expressed a similar idea – according to her, Philosophy is now approaching education, or self-education of a free human being [L. Bellatala, *Philosophy and Education. From Elitism to Democracy*, 2012, <https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Educ/EducBell.htm>].

According to Snauwaert, Philosophy can act as 'trainer' because it constitutes the way of asking, putting to question or examining, and also a discipline that enriches the capacity for the ability of reflection and rational thinking [7]. Here we think that Philosophy can act as 'trainer' because it 'teaches' us to think critically. It therefore contributes to shape 'critical thinking' that can in education be seen as a way to use intelligence and information to perform, analyse, evaluate, create concepts, new ideas, arguments and hypotheses as well as valid and useful reasoning [12, p. 79, 96, 99, 100].

According to Bellatala, in the scope of Philosophy perception, Philosophy can be taken as a dialogic method of thoughts, events and speech. Philosophy, in her view, can meet its humane and educational assumptions thanks to the fact that it concentrates on helping to find our own way in the maze of knowledge and socio-political constructions from our relativistic existence that is not indifferent to the challenges that humans face. Namely, this is about help in reaching a dialogical habit in the critical analysis of everyday speech even that of the specific languages, e.g. political, educational, mass-media, in uncovering and reducing the possible tyranny of the words [<https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Educ/EducBell.htm>].

It should be noted here that the reflexive philosophical work as such is a means of forming the already-mentioned understanding that respects the wealth of human's experience and experiences. It is about value and moral-relevant 'ideas', that we, humans, need in the context of our thinking or broader

understanding for authentic free and responsible existence. It should be remembered that Philosophy as a ‘trainer’ neither wants to lose nor loses the sight of “non-reducible human that arranges this world not only in a human-like manner, or based on rationality and cause, but also emotionally, meaningfully and in a value-based manner” [20], which enables him to understand things and events.

It is obvious that reflexive philosophical work is the result of human dealing with himself, with his own opinions and insight. It is also something that everybody needs to do independently – reflection cannot be deputed to somebody else, as also L.F. Svendsen points out [6, p. 134-135]. It is therefore an authentic cultural opportunity and way to develop individual approaches to external reality and ways how to deal with it. It is also an opportunity, or means, for self-reflection and self-forming for man as creative subject [21], way that is relevant to its value and morality, it is also a means to find a meaningful self-determination, self-projection of man as a consciously active and observant creature. In this connection, we believe that Philosophy, as an important agent of self-formation of human (as, among others M. Solík notices, who in this context emphasises especially the phenomenon of self-reflection, as a kind of ‘wisdom’ [22]) can lead us to the desired ethos (responsibility) in the context of (usage of) digital media.

In the light of the above, we dare to speak about ‘philosophication’ of education. Here, philosophication means – metaphorically speaking – especially giving Philosophy, as love for wisdom, a chance to speak in education. It means especially to open education for creative thinking, reflection. However, it cannot now be understood as favouring the ‘sophy’ over ‘science’. We agree with W. Welsch who claims that despite the fact that Philosophy in the strict sense of the word is on the decline when it is without its momentum of wisdom, it cannot today be based only on wisdom. It should be based on equilibrium between Science and wisdom [23].

‘Philosophication’ of education as opening for creative thinking, reflection, requires room for problematic asking, i.e. putting questions. In education, it means for example not to see and not to construct it fundamentally as offering ready answers for concrete issues, not to want to fulfil it in positive knowledge, in information and facts. Not to see or construct it merely for laying and acquiring of new patterns for thinking, feeling and acting, not to want to exhaust it as mere handling of given moral norms, values and laws. Not to construct it to be a mechanical and imperative ‘guiding’ or ‘shaping’ through orders and prohibitions [24] and similar.

It may be observed that philosophical reflection, or asking, manifests itself especially in dialogue, which reveals as a mighty tool for the virtue of creative thinking [21, p. 233-236]. It is clear that philosophical dialogue as such does not have the technical and instrumental and therefore also, from the humanistic point of view, a risky nature. It is believed here that it is Philosophy as a ‘dialogue way’ that can work as really human agent of education in modern human who shapes his cultural capacities with regard to broader demands that life in an

information society brings and requirements that are brought by the (cyber)culture. Surely, we may only agree with B. Kosová that we need a Philosophy that is tied to education and not Philosophy, which is beyond the practical life of man [25].

4. Conclusions

It could be concluded that the 'modern' humanism refers to human life in which we understand our world as value-based, or meaningful. It also reflects the fact that today human being can be created in the context of digital media, which is his everyday individual and collective experience. These give him a new chance or opportunity, though not unlimited in extent and unconditional. As a matter of fact, humanity is not to be put in danger in the times of 'digital era', and man needs to be able to live his life in a free, creative and dignified way, with all that comes with it. Various systematic measures and mechanisms can help here in our society. In this context education can also help, as it should cooperate in preparing man for life in the times of digital media. It should be education that shapes cultural capacities of modern human, concerning the challenges brought by his life in information society and the aspirations of (cyber)culture, which has become the "essential expression of our cultural existence" [3].

The contemporary practical philosophy of education in humanistic perspective, which concentrates on the problem of how education can be beneficial for the modern man, should, as it appears, reflect just what man needs in the modern times and should meet the challenges it presents. It seems that it is the risk of 'infotechnicism' that brings a great challenge for the contemporary philosophy of education in the times of digital media. Considering this, the results infotechnicism brings, we believe that philosophy of education can offer a 'counter-move' against the loss of ability to 'understand' a value and a morally-relevant way in modern human. Furthermore, it should be education as 'counter-mode' against the fact that modern digital media establish themselves in all the possible aspects of human life.

In modern education, which wishes to be beneficial for modern man, as already mentioned, emphasis should be put on improvement of creative thinking, meaning - critical thinking. This thinking needs to be formed and shaped in modern education, as it requires reflective attitude towards 'me', or towards man's own and unique experiences and cognisance. It should also be very much about value and morally-relevant 'understanding', or 'ideas', which vary from facts and information and which originate in individual reflection of our own experience. In this context, it is inevitably about forming a critical approach in thinking or criticism that, particularly in relation to digital media, takes a form of criticism towards media messages and content, but also criticism towards their technological context [26]. Here we see the importance of media education and media literacy that concentrates on creative and critical usage of media with regard to moral aspects, especially ethos of responsibility.

It is considered that in the field of education, or media education, it is very desirable and needed to update the social importance of Philosophy. We may speak of ‘philosophication’ of education, or its need, and we point out here that educational is an inseparable and vitally important part of Philosophy and philosophication activity [19]. As a matter of fact, we see that Philosophy can now cooperate as ‘trainer’, precisely because of its ability to shape rational, or creative and critical thinking, because of its ability to convey value and moral-based relevant ‘ideas’ or ‘understanding’, even in the present situation when there is ‘overpressure’ of information and ‘self-promotion’ of digital media. As such, it can form the rationally thinking man – man that is wise, that is not a ‘slave’ of the media, but a self-confident and responsible individuality in relation to them [27].

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