MEDIA EDUCATION AND RELIGION IN SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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Abstract

The contribution focuses on the issue of media education described as a means of education aimed to increase the level of media literacy and media competencies of an individual in society. It mainly focuses on media education in pre-primary education, especially of children in pre-school age, as the most vulnerable target group of media content. It emphasizes the importance of implementing media education in the education of this category of recipients. The contribution describes the types and forms of formal and non-formal media education in the conditions of the Slovak Republic aimed at educating children in pre-school age. The contribution describes a relationship among religion and media education while both share interest in scientific reflection of the media. The contribution also describes religious organization in Slovak republic with aim to improve media literacy of children in pre-primary education.

Keywords: competences, formal, non-formal, children, media

1. Introduction

Media education is an important tool which can help us to find out what is hidden under the surface of media representation, what is the real reality as well as help us to point out the potential risks and pitfalls which can occur while using media. The contribution is aimed mainly on children in pre-school age because this group is considered to be the most vulnerable when talking about media use. We consider to be important to aim the attention to this target group whose media literacy and media competences should be developed as much as possible. The contribution focuses on both formal and non-formal learning of media education in Slovak republic. It shows the current ways how media education can be realized. It describes the agencies, project, companies etc. which try to educate children in terms of media.

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2. Why do we need media education and what is its mission?

Media education is an important factor which helps the individual to orientate in the world of media and it helps to understand this world [1]. The Decree on Priestly Formation, Opatam totius, which is produced by the Second Vatican Council one of the task of the Theology should be seeking the solutions of human problems, applying the eternal truths of revelation to the changeable conditions of human affairs [2]. We can consider those affairs to be even media and everything what is connected with them. When we talk about media education, we can talk about educating a person about media literacy. Thanks to media education individuals are thought to interpret and create messages, select the most appropriate media from the point of view of communication, and last but not least to express their own views on what the media are offering to us. Media education tries to constantly raise the awareness of the media as well as the media image of the world within the society. In addition to this, however, media education also focuses on the need to provide individuals with the skills they need for the independent creation of media contents. M. Brestovanský speaks about two basic goals of media education. First of all, it is developing the capacity for critical media consideration and the second is to prepare the individual for the independent media use [3].

In addition, media education is an educational tool which helps individuals to cope with the potential problems they may encounter when dealing with media. It is above all informational overload, false impression of control, false impression of awareness and false belief [4].

Media education is not a short-term issue, it needs time and a long-term process to strengthen the ability of an individual to think critically and to solve problems individually and creatively to become a deliberate recipient but also a creator of information [5].

In defining the goals of media education, T. Zasepa and P. Olekšák agreed on the following. Media education aims to process goals, methods and tools that should lead to the education and formation of an individual as a recipient of the media. In this context we can talk, for example, about the right selection of content that should develop the personality of an individual. It goes without saying that methods of media education will vary depending on the age of the educated, the type of media used or the content being broadcast. Media education also examines the impact, interference and effectiveness of mass-media tools. In particular, it is about exploring public opinion, propaganda or media manipulation. However, it also examines the effects and impact of media on humans. Its subject is also the educational issue in the relationship between raised and the medium, and conditions of pedagogy in this field. It studies the pedagogical dimension of any media and considers the media also as didactic devices [6].

3. Media literacy and media competences as output categories of media education

Output categories of media education are media literacy and media competencies. Media competence can be regarded as the output of media education organized by both at school and out-of-school education; we can simply say that this concept was created by applying the concept of competence to media issues. The importance of media competence or media literacy efforts to direct an individual towards enhancing media competences lies in media criticism, meaning that an individual should analyse and understand processes in society, media teaching, and thus knowledge of current media systems, media use, and media development [7]. Media competencies are a set of knowledge or skills that the individual or media participant has acquired. A media competent individual is the one who can actively select contents from the media offer which are relevant to him/her. A media competent individual can differentiate his/her interests from interests of media owners while being able to critically think about media content. He/She is also able to create media messages and is aware of the impact of individual media on culture. By using media competencies, an individual can better orientate himself/herself in a great amount of information, and can build his/her own unbiased opinion or attitude. It is a way of thinking that is based on autonomy, analysis and independence. With its use, the individual gains new knowledge, information, contexts, while everything is based on searching for information, comparison, or verifying own ideas but also ideas of others. It is important to highlight the fact that critical thinking greatly contributes to the ability of identifying important facts from a great amount of information and, at the same time, to formulate own opinions based on those facts. An individual is not only a passive media user, but a consumer of information, someone who actively searches for causes and evidence, can predict consequences and reveal stereotypes [1].

Concerning the issue of media competencies and media literacy mentioned above, in some cases there is a terminological ambiguity. Both these terms become accustomed to being synonymous. Media literacy, however, cannot be understood as an equivalent to media competence. D. Buckingham defines media literacy as a result of media education, in a simplified way, as the knowledge and skills that an individual has acquired and learned during the media education process [8].

Media literacy can be demonstrated in several stages. It is the awareness of the individual that the choice of the individual media and the time he spends with them is essential. We can also talk about a critical media reflection based on their analysis and analysis of what the media is made of, how they are built and what they lack. It is also about the social, political and economic analysis of the media, touching on issues such as who creates the media and for what purpose. W.J. Potter understands media literacy as a set of insights that an individual actively uses to interpret the meanings of the media content individuals are hitting [4].

Not everyone can interpret media content, actively choose from a media offer or emotionally distinguish between the interests of media owners and his or her own interests. Not everyone is capable of critical thinking or critical research of media information. In media literacy, we do not talk about functional literacy such as understanding advertising or writing skills, but mainly about critical literacy. It is based on evaluation, analysis and critical reflection on the media. There are two dimensions - a knowledge and a skill dimension, the first one focuses on learning about the principles of media functioning or funding, while the other focuses on practical skills related to media work [9].

Based on the European Media Literacy Charter we should consider a media literate person who can effectively use media technology for searching, collecting or sharing media content, deciding from a wide range of media content from different sources, understanding how media content relate to political, technical and legal concepts, critically analyse media messages, creatively use the media to express opinions and ideas and at the same time reject any undesirable or offensive media content [*Koncepcia mediálnej výchovy v Slovenskej republike v kontexte celoživotného vzdelávania*, 20.09.2018, http://mksrtest.cmsromboid.sk/posobnost-ministerstva/media-audiovizia-a-autor ske-pravo-/media-a-audiovizia/koncepcia-medialnej-vychovy-v-sr-1d3. html].

The level of media literacy and its increase is uneven in the current society. There is an imbalance between ordinary media users and people working in or with the media. It is on the basis of this imbalance that it is necessary to provide systematic public education in this area, where media literacy has evolved as a need to be part of general education. In this context, J. Jirák considers that increasing media literacy is generally an important means of increasing the quality of life of the individual, not only private but also public [10].

4. The importance of media education of children in pre-school age

There is a significant relationship between religion and media. "Previous discussions around the relationship of media, religion and culture have tended to ignore work in the most established fields of film and religion, media ethics, media literacy and religion and conflict." [11] Each of these interdisciplinary areas should be given a space of its own as well as enough attention. In the last twenty years there has been a development in media and religion relationship. Both areas are provided by perspective which can contribute to theory-building in mass communication. According to recent studies media and religion are evolving in a dialectic relationship, not as different spheres. An evidence from social researches points to the fact that faith and spirituality is still present in contemporary world. There exist forms of connection of media and religion, for example in the form of televangelism, online worship, e-praying, religious websites and blogs or religious television and radio. These forms are an expression of free spiritual marketplace [12]. As an example of religious media in Slovak Republic we can mention the journal *Katolícke noviny* or radio *Lumen*.

D. Buckingham believes and mainly puts the attention to the need of media education already in childhood age. Even though it can be observed that today some children's media literacy is higher than adults' media literacy, children still need to develop skills that will lead them to a responsible use of the media and the development of competencies when handling the media. This is primarily about the social and emotional level of children, the general childhood experience of the world, and, last but not least, their individual experience with the media [9].

On this basis, it is important to emphasize the importance of media education of children in pre-school age. In general, children have an intuitive learning that is based on the imitation of any human behaviour. An exception is not even media observation. Already at the age of 14 months, children can observe the behaviour they see in television. However, there is a difference while comparing to adults. Children do not have the ability or instinct to determine if their imitation is appropriate or not. We know that the overall development and development of the child is influenced by the environment. Since the media have become a natural part of our lives, we cannot doubt that they will also affect children. Therefore, education should also lead to an understanding of the ways in which children perceive media and media content.

Within the periods of personality development, J. Čáp and J. Mareš distinguish several degrees, and on this basis also define the teaching of media education at individual levels. They define early childhood from the first to third year of life, the pre-school age from the third to the sixth year, the younger school age from the sixth to eleventh year of life. Middle and older school age is the age of youth, pre-puberty and puberty. All these stages are extremely important for shaping the personality. However, the period in which an individual evolves and learns new things is particularly important [13]. Pre-school age is, according to A. Suchý that age when it is possible to see how a child imitates the activities he or she perceives from the media, and in four years, the intelligent development of an individual moves from symbolic thinking to a higher level [14].

On the one hand, the media are generally regarded as a means of positive shaping the personality of a child, but on the other hand they can easily become a means of negative affecting their development. The media influence and form the distribution of the child's day, as well as his/her interests, patterns of behaviour and, not less important value systems. As the media's impact on the child can be positive, it can also be negative. The main reason is that children are still unable to have a critical attitude towards them, and so they cannot distinguish between good and appropriate and bad and inappropriate.

Because children are not equipped with the ability to read, the most popular media for them is those based on images, that is, television or computer, or tablets. Television is nowadays very frequent leisure time activity. The Internet has become a space in which they find a virtual world based on sound and graphic effects that diversify the life of the child. Children are also an important and numerous target group of media-driven ads [15].

We know that children are getting in contact with the media since the early age. Therefore, it is very important to develop their knowledge in this area. According to J. Jirák, the media is even able to shade school or family in the eyes of children [16]. It is therefore more than important for children and young people to start being educated in the field of media in order to understand the media content, understand how media originate and who is behind them.

Nowadays, children get in contact with the media before they start to attend a nursery. Computer, television, digital technology, with all of these, children come into contact from an early age. It is, therefore, natural that they get into a situation where they are exposed to the influence of the media, whether positive or negative. The media have a big impact on children also in the context of their socialization process. They are involved in forming values, attitudes and opinions. Based on this, we can argue that the media has become an important means of education. Consequently, there comes out the necessity of introducing media education into the system of education, in all age groups, not excluding even children of pre-school age. The goal is to teach all age categories to responsible approach to the media and their content, to learn how to use the latest communications technologies and to protect them from negative influences and inappropriate content.

In the education of pre-school children, media education has been classified as a cross-cutting topic and its level is general and elementary. It focuses on shaping basic media competences, skills and abilities. It aims to form a critical and selective attitude towards media content. As we witness the constant development of media and communication tools, the definition of target media education categories has being shifted in recent years. There is an increase in introduction the new technologies that produce countless amounts of information, knowledge, games or experiences. This is why children are becoming one of the most numerous and most attractive target groups in the media industry. But at the same time they are the most vulnerable and threatened group. They are not able to distinguish between fiction and reality and between that what is positive and what is negative [17].

5. Formal education of children in pre-school age in the field of media education in conditions of Slovak Republic

The need of media education and its inclusion and creation of conditions for its implementation in Slovakia, as well as the promotion of the increase of media literacy of citizens, is also based directly on the documents of the Council of Europe and the European Union. They emphasize the importance of media education in society. The proposal to introduce media education into the education system was initiated on the basis of the research tasks of the State Pedagogical Institute. At present, media education is included in the compulsory content of education at elementary and secondary schools. The content is either a cross-sectional topic or is taught as a separate subject, or in the form of independently voluntary courses or subjects.

As far as pre-primary education in kindergartens is concerned, media education has also been classified as a cross-cutting theme. Various organizational forms and learning with the game are used to implement it [*Koncepcia mediálnej výchovy v Slovenskej republike v kontexte celoživotného vzdelávania*]. Based on the *State Educational Program for Pre-primary Education in Kindergartens* valid from September 2016, **media education** is also among the educational areas. Based on the core framework of the child's core competencies in kindergarten, children should gain skills and knowledge in the field of communication, mathematical competences and competencies in science and technology, digital competences, competence to learn, problem solving, creativity and critical thinking, social, personal, civil and work competencies. In addition, the State Education Program also defines several areas that reflect and represent the core contents of human culture that will be further developed at higher levels in the future. These are the areas of language and communication, **mathematics and information work**, human and nature, human and society, human and the world of work, art and culture and health and movement. It is precisely the field of mathematics and information work which is also connected with the teaching of media education, where the main aim is to provide information in addition to providing mathematical knowledge and skills and developing mathematical, logical and algorithmic thinking. On the basis of this, information work should, based on performance standards, teach the child to manage the basics of working with digital technologies; the child should control digital games and use digital animation programs [*Štátny vzdelávací program pre predprimárne vzdelávanie v materských školách*, 20.09.2018, http://www.statpedu.sk/clanky/statny-vzdelavaci-program/svp-pre-materske-skoly].

The primary goal of media education for preschool children should be to respect the uniqueness of the child's developmental prerequisites, and should be based on his/her individual experience and knowledge of the surrounding world. Based on this, the selection of didactic tools and teaching methods should also be adapted. For children in pre-school age, it is very important that teaching methods are such that the child will acquire new knowledge and experience based on their own action, attitude, and observance [17]. For children, better and more funny methods than explanation are discussions, games, role playing, or production methods. The teaching aids should also be selected, the choice of which depends on the individual specifications of the content of the teaching, the competencies of the pedagogue, as well as the individual pupils' givenness. We can include video monitors, school boards, projection screens, radio, microphone, amplifier, speaker, headphone or camcorder, camera, computer, TV, scanner or printer [18].

Implementation of media education in teaching in kindergartens in the Slovak Republic is different. It differs not only from the use of teaching aids, but also from the level of education of pedagogical staff in the area of media education. Of the total number of nursery schools (859), the teaching of media education is realized in 551 kindergartens. There are several reasons why media

education in kindergartens is not possible to realize. This is mainly because of insufficient expertise of pedagogical staff, lack of finance and technical equipment or a small number of children and absence of curriculum. In kindergartens where media education takes place, it is done in three ways, either:

- media education as a separate educational activity,
- media education as an integrated educational activity or
- joining both forms.

    In kindergartens, media education is realized through activities such as:

- using interactive boards;
- watching fairy tales and television;
- use of the computer and the Internet;
- evaluating media content;
- using the radio, listening to songs, fairy tales;
- using CDs and DVDs;
- using books, magazines, newspapers;
- solving interactive tasks;
- drawing in RNA program;
- using photos;
- comparing reality with media;
- animated games [19].

6. Non-formal education of children in pre-school age in the field of media education in conditions of Slovak Republic

Non-formal education can generally be considered as an organized and systematic education that takes place outside of formal education. Its goal is to provide education for specific population groups in selected types, forms and content areas. It is mostly organized by various institutions, whether businesses, foundations, cultural establishments, civic associations, and so on [20].

The Lifelong Learning Memorandum defines non-formal education or non-formal learning as a learning that is conducted alongside the mainstream of education and training [*Memorandum o celoživotnom vzdelávaní sa*, 23.09.2018, https://www.minedu.sk/data/files/2607_2000_memorandum_o_celozivotnom_v zdelavani.pdf].

In the context of non-formal education of media education in the Slovak Republic, we can say that there is currently no interconnection or intersection of individual activities focused on media education. However, existing activities or non-formal education projects focusing on media education in Slovakia are mostly focused on children and adolescents. There are several projects that focus on media education and thus on developing of media literacy of pre-school children in non-formal form.

6.1. Association eSlovensko

The best known are the internet projects of the civic association eSlovensko. They cover several websites that focus on the issue of media education.

One of the most known website is **zodpovedne.sk**. This project considers the main goal to raise the awareness about responsible use of the Internet and mobile phones. It is also targeted at parents and tries to raise interest in their children's activities on the Internet not only at home, but also at school or with their friends. It focuses on the area of media-related threats such as paedophilia, pornography, addiction, bullying or discrimination, violence, fraud and the provision of personal data. It deals with threats such as viruses, hoaxes, internet dating, or online trading. It also offers tests or knowledge about individual threats, as well as cartoon interactive stories. In connection with this project the publication *Deti v Sieti* has been also published. It focuses on the issue of protecting children from the threats of the online world and provides advice on how these pitfalls can reasonably explain to children [https://www.zodpovedne.sk/index.php/sk/].

Another website **kybersikanovanie.sk** is focused on a series of Internet lectures on cyberbullying, supplemented by audio-visual and musical elements [http://kybersikanovanie.sk/].

Website **nehejtuj.sk** addresses issues of racial intolerance, aggression, domestic violence, xenophobia and aggression on the Internet. A set of 12 movies was created on two DVDs along with a methodical guide [http://www.zodpovedne.sk/index.php/sk/nehejtuj-sk].

Another website of eSlovensko association is **noproblemos.sk** which is a series of comics, whose main characters spend hours on mobile phones and tablets and on the Internet at home. The Internet is a source of inspiration for their stories. On this basis, the project demonstrates the need for education, prevention and protection of children and youth from the risks of the Internet [http://noproblemos.sk/category/komiksy/].

Very interesting project dealing with media education is also **ovce.sk** or sheeplive. It a series of comics, whose main characters spend hours on mobile phones and tablets and on the Internet at home. The Internet is a source of inspiration for their stories. On this basis, the project demonstrates the need for education, prevention and protection of children and youth from the risks of the Internet [http://sheeplive.eu/?r=ovce].

Pomoc.sk is another website of association eSlovensko. It is a combined helpline supported by the European Commission. The aim is to provide assistance, support and advice in the field of responsible use of the Internet, media and new communication technologies. The line is open 24 hours a day at the free phone number 116 111 [http://www.pomoc.sk/].

Stopline.sk project aims to combat data misuse, racism, xenophobia, and operates a national centre that focuses on reporting illegal content on the Internet [http://stopline.sk/sk/uvod/].

6.2. Civic association *Žabky* and *Salezian media school*

In addition to the eSlovensko association, the field of media education in non-formal learning in Slovakia is also involved in the civic association **Žabky**. The association has been awarded the accreditation of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic in the field of media education entitled '*Vidieť či čítať neznamená rozumieť*'. This training activity is 110 hours and includes three training modules. They also work in Košice and, in addition, they provide animation training and Internet TV **iTV Žabky**. Another project is a Salezian media school implemented by the religious community Salezáni Dona Bosca a dcéry Márie Pomocnice. They have created a program for youth aimed at education in the field of media education.

6.3. TASR school service

Press Agency of the Slovak Republic (TASR) with its school service also contributes to the field of media education in non-formal learning. TASR makes all its services available to all schools in Slovakia. Their goal is to contribute to the realization of media education and to enable to work with real agency news.

6.4. Mediálne historky/Media stories

An interesting concept is also the Media Stories, a theatrical production realized under the auspices of a theatre company from Rimavská Sobota. They focus on the traps of the media world.

6.5. Detinanete.sk

The mobile operator Orange Slovensko is also concerned with the issue of media literacy and Internet pitfalls. They run the **detinanete**.**sk** website. It focuses on both children and their parents and aims to offer tips and tutorials to protect children from the threats they face on the Internet. It also serves teachers as a source of inspiration.

6.6. IMEC - International Media Education Centre

IMEC has been operating since 2010 and has been developed from the initiative of the Faculty of Mass Media communication at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava. The Centre regularly informs about media education, its importance, integrates current projects on the issue, gathers, selects important outputs. Within the activities of the Centre, it has also been published the publication 'Učíme sa o médiách', which is intended for kindergartens and elementary schools. It includes games, tasks, and thoughts that can be used to implement media education of children [*IMEC: Učíme sa spoločne o médiách: nová publikácia z mediálnej výchovy pre MŠ a I. stupeň ZŠ,*

25.09.2018, http://medialnavychova.sk/ucime-sa-spolocne-o-mediach-nova-publ ikacia-z-medialnej-vychovy-pre-ms-a-i-stupen-zs/]. In addition, the Centre carried out a project in which a book of media tales was set up for pre-school children entitled 'Ako červená čiapočka noviny čítala'. It contains nine fairy tales, seven of which are original but transformed into the present digital world and two are authored [*IMEC: Kniha mediálnych rozprávok: Ako Červená čiapočka noviny čítala*, 25.09.2018, http://medialnavychova.sk/kniha-medialnych-rozpravok-ako-cervena-ciapocka-noviny-citala/].

7. Conclusions

There is no doubt that media studies concerning also media education and religion share lots of common areas and they have really close interests while talking about scientific reflection of the media. There are some religious organizations which try to educate in the field of media literacy. At the same time the number of religions has developed specific relationship to the mass media. There comes a new type of journalism connected with religion. This kind of journalism has to find its voice and roles. Media education can be effective tool in finding a way how to deal with this issue. Media and religion, they both try to reveal what is hidden underneath the media presentation and to point out what is the real truth. Media education is aimed on increasing and developing critical thinking, media literacy and medial competences. It tries to develop skills which can be helpful with working with media, with receiving the content form media, with selecting information which are given to us by media producers and so on. This can be helpful in the environment of religion based media for both producer of contents and users. In general, it is a factor or a tool which helps people to orientate in the world of media and to understand it.

The most important is to provide media education in education of pre-school children. There are several reasons why. Children are the most vulnerable group of recipients of media. They are not able to realize the risks and bad effect of media reception and they don't know how to defend themselves against potential risks of media impact. Their skills are not enough to distinguish between good and bad, between right and wrong. That's why it is necessary to education children about media from their early age. Media education can be provided in formal and non-formal learning. In Slovak republic there are some institutions which are focused on media education in non-formal learning and provide it in different and interesting ways. We can talk about courses, videos, tales, websites and so on. Some of those activities are aimed not only at children but also at their parents because when we want children to be educated in something even their parents should understand the topic. There are some websites for parents with instructions how to behave in online world or how to protect their children against the risks form media.

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