



## On the rational use of the Internet in education

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The Internet has become one of the most important educational tools today. However, research shows that it is often used without the necessary reflection, as an easily accessible source of information instead of being a tool for intellectual development. This article presents new opportunities offered by the Internet and new competences that are necessary to fully use the Internet's potential in education. These competences are mostly intellectual and axiological, not technical.

**KEY WORDS:** education, Internet, competences, wisdom, development

*The essence of technology is by no means anything technological.*

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) – a German philosopher,  
one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th century

### Introduction

The motto taken from the writings of Martin Heidegger should be the standard for working not only with the media, but also with all products of technology. Usually, the users of various technologi-

cal goods focus on the technical aspects and neglect the cultural aspects, which seems obvious and natural on the surface. However, it is culture that is more important in the relation between technology and culture, as it forms the basis for technology. The balance between these two sides of the same coin or of the same reality is the condition for rational and safe use of any technology. For example, the cause of the majority of car accidents is not the occasionally unreliable technology, but the triumph of technology over culture which Neil Postman (1931–2003), the American philosopher, media expert and culture critic, defined as technopol, i.e. they way of thinking about technology<sup>1</sup> and making it a priority, while neglecting (or ignoring) the cultural aspects.

The Internet, similarly to many other educational innovations, has failed to bring the expected results and has not revolutionised the learning environments despite large investments in equipping schools with new technologies. The reason for this negative outcome is the focus on technology itself, not on changing the learning possibilities<sup>2</sup>, as well as the lack of the learning environment adequate to each medium where the advantages of the given medium could be fully developed and used. Many of such technologies (first and foremost, the Internet) can be seen as great tools of unused opportunities and possibilities.

The answer to the question about the reason for the Internet's great popularity in education is usually politically correct: the Internet is a brilliant as well as quickly and easily accessible source of knowledge, you can find there everything you need in the educational process. Leaving aside the essential and frequent error (the Internet contains information, i.e. elements for building knowledge, but not knowledge as such), there emerges another question: considering such easy access to the Internet, why are we, humans, not

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<sup>1</sup> N. Postman, *Technopol. Triumf techniki nad kulturą*, trans. A. Tanalska-Dulęba, Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Literackie MUZA, Warszawa 2004.

<sup>2</sup> *Istota uczenia się. Wykorzystanie wyników badań w praktyce*, trans. Z. Janowska, ed. H. Dumont, D. Istance, F. Benavides, Wolters Kluwer Polska, Warszawa 2013, p. 53.

wiser or better, but on the contrary, there has been a systematic decrease in people's intelligence, as confirmed by the most recent research?<sup>3</sup>

## The trap of the Internet

I described the problem of the systematic decrease in the level of human intelligence, i.e. the progressing process of "idiocracy", in more detail in several publications<sup>4</sup>, but here I wish to focus on the phenomenon which I refer to as "the trap of the Internet". It means that the quick, easy, low-cost and widespread access to information offered by the Internet makes the intellectual alertness of the Internet users go into the sleep mode, so many of them feel released from the need and the readiness to constantly develop themselves. However, the assumption that the easiness of using the medium and its resources is enough to give up intellectual development is a great mistake. The easiness is only about the access to information and not its processing which is beyond what the given medium can do.

Each medium that is to be rationally and responsibly used requires the prior preparation of the user. The information on any randomly chosen topic can be also found on the radio or in a book, but

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<sup>3</sup> The specialists from the Ragnar Frisch Centre for Economic Research used extremely reliable studies to confirm that since the 1970s the average level of human intelligence has been systematically dropping at the pace which is faster than its previously assumed growth in the hypothesis of J. Flynn. J. Morbitzer, *Internet w edukacji – między mądrością a głupotą*, <https://www.edunews.pl/badania-i-debaty/opinie/4328-internet-w-edukacji-miedzy-madrosacia-a-glupota#jacommentid:4924> [access: 10 August 2018].

<sup>4</sup> See: J. Morbitzer, *Into Idiocracy – Pedagogical Reflection on the Epidemic of Stupidity in the Generation of the Internet era*, "Humanitas University Research Papers PEDAGOGY" 2018, No. 17; J. Morbitzer, *Sokrates odwrócony, czyli o internetowej głupocie*, [in:] *Człowiek – Media – Edukacja*, ed. J. Morbitzer, D. Morańska, E. Musiał, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Biznesu w Dąbrowie Górniczej, Dąbrowa Górnicza 2017.

the search process is much more difficult (unless the digitised resources are available online, but then we use the given medium as it is present on the Internet). Thus, other media demand more competences, effort and time from the user. It is then obvious that for pragmatic reasons people prefer the Internet. The task of pedagogues is to abolish the myth which says: easy access to information (often identified with knowledge by the Internet users and teachers!) results in the learners' knowledge automatically. If we want to become intellectually enriched, each medium requires preparation and effort by the user. The mission of the contemporary teacher is to prepare the students for the role of the knowledge architect, i.e. to provide the student with the skills of independent, self-sufficient construction of the edifice of knowledge based on the information gained from e.g. the Web.

To effectively use the new technology media and tools, students and teachers need to know several key principles of the media world on the basis of their own reflection. Such principles include: the principle of St. Matthew, the metaphor of the marten in the hen house, the hard and soft media determinism, J. Ellul's paradoxes of technological development and many others. The limited scope of this article allows only to touch upon selected elements from this list.

For the rational use of the Internet, it is the key principle in social sciences, i.e. the principle of St. Matthew, that is specifically relevant. It refers to the well-known parable of the talents which concludes as follows: *For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him*<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, the intellectually rich, i.e. the wise user of the Internet, will be a better architect of knowledge and will choose better "information bricks" in order to build all the more solid edifice of one's own knowledge. For such a user, the Internet will be the tool for intellectual development. An intellectually poor user who will surely be a less skilful architect cannot choose valuable infor-

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<sup>5</sup> *The parable about talents*, The Gospel of Matthew 25: 29-30.

mation and often limits himself or herself to copy-and-paste operations. Aside from some legal problems, it is easy to see that the Internet will be the tool of intellectual degradation for such users.

The principle of St. Matthew applied to the Internet means that there is a specific reverse connection: the more the user is intellectually stronger, the more benefits the user will have for his/her own development. There is a very important conclusion for the educational practice: it is advisable to prepare the learner intellectually by providing the general knowledge. This process can and should be started in early childhood and in any circumstances, including, in particular, the circumstances outside the Internet.

The impact of the information and communication technologies, including the world wide web, on the intellectual functioning of people depends mainly on their rational use. The full and good use of rich and varied online resources is possible only when the user has the right knowledge and, better still, wisdom. The principle of St. Matthew shows that the efficient use of the Internet, including in the area of education,<sup>6</sup> is the choice of people. Therefore, one can refer here to the shortest version of the soft determinism principle formulated by Paul Levinson, an American media expert. It assumes that the media (and all technologies in the broader meaning) offer some possibilities, while people decide how to use them and to what extent.<sup>7</sup> Soft determinism in the media refers silently to the idea of responsibility, since people have the possibilities offered by technologies at their disposal and can decide to use them or give them up. An example of such a decision-making situation could be a driver of a car with huge power and high maximum speed. A responsible driver is ready to limit the freedom offered by technologies in the name of the values he or she believes in, e.g. safety of

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<sup>6</sup> In fact, each type of the Internet use is educational, because we always learn something and become intellectually enriched or we are intellectually (or even morally) degraded.

<sup>7</sup> P. Levinson, *Miękkie ostrze, czyli historia i przyszłość rewolucji informacyjnej*, trans. H. Jankowska, Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Literackie MUZA, Warszawa 2006, p. 24.

himself/herself and others, and to adjust the speed to the given conditions on the road.

The soft determinism principle is perfectly compatible with the thesis formulated by N. Postman that is crucial for the reflection on the world of the media: *Each technology is always a burden and a blessing; it is not either-or, but both the one and the other*<sup>8</sup>. The use of any technology carries positive effects as well as potential threats which should always be taken into account.

Such a potential threat is e.g. the improper use of the Internet described by the metaphor of the marten in the hen house.<sup>9</sup> It consists in focusing on the ongoing search of new information, while neglecting the processing of the gathered material. This metaphor shows that it is necessary to shape responsible user behaviours in the world of the media, since most of the time we cannot act rationally when faced with too much information. Contrary to the marten that is driven by instinct, people have culture which should steer and guide their behaviours, since they can be shaped and formed.

## Two models of using the Internet in education

In comparison with the era of books, the digital age offers completely new possibilities and sets new requirements. The linear structure of the book imposed the sequence of reading the content and did not make demands for the user to decide. However, the Internet creates a much larger space of freedom and requires that the user make frequent and independent decisions. The ability to make the right decisions, including those relevant to one's own development, is one of the several possible definitions of wisdom. It

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<sup>8</sup> N. Postman, *Technopol. Triumf techniki nad kulturą*, trans. A. Tanalska-Dulęba, Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Literackie MUZA, Warszawa 2004, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. J. Morbitzer, *Sokrates odwrócony, czyli o internetowej głupocie*, [in:] *Człowiek – Media – Edukacja*, ed. J. Morbitzer, D. Morańska, E. Musiał, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Biznesu w Dąbrowie Górniczej, Dąbrowa Górnicza 2017.

follows that the user's wisdom is necessary for the effective use of the Web.

A similar conclusion can be derived from the words of the co-founder and the former CEO of Apple Inc., Steven Paul Jobs (1955–2011): *Technology itself does not matter. What is important is the belief that people are good and wise, and if we give them modern tools, they will be able to work wonders with them.* S. Jobs emphasises the special significance of axiological categories, i.e. wisdom and goodness, since only people who possess such values can fully tap into the potential in the advanced media and technologies. This, in turn, results in the conclusion that if contemporary education is to perform its social mission well, it should adopt a new direction oriented towards wisdom and spirituality.

In the context of the statement by S. Jobs, one should reflect on what it means to be wise from the educational perspective. It is now relevant to the distinction between intellect and reason, present in philosophy since the antiquity and specifically popularized by the German thinker of the Age of Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Intellect (Latin: *intellectus*) is a tool in its nature, not engaged emotionally and axiologically neutral. It performs the function of discovery that leads to the cold knowledge of the truth. On the other hand, reason (Latin: *ratio*) is related to axiology and ensures reflection. It attaches values and indicates what is right and what is wrong. This notion is close to freedom. Intellect is necessary for people to be inventors and discoverers, but it is reason that decides how we will use our achievements. The German pedagogue and philosopher, Otto Friedrich Bollnow (1903–1991), makes a very poignant statement which says that *intellect will teach us how to build a house. But that is not enough. Only reason can teach us how cohabit the house peacefully*<sup>10</sup>. The problem is that contemporary education values intellect more than reason, so it is not interested in guiding towards wisdom.

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<sup>10</sup> T. Gadacz, *Uniwersytet w czasach bezmyślności*, wykład inauguracyjny, AGH, Kraków, <http://www.agh.edu.pl/info/article/universytet-w-czasach-bezmyslnosci-wyklad-inauguracyjny/> [access: 10 August 2018].

Can we use the Internet rationally and responsibly? As presented by Nicholas Carr, an American writer on technology, business and culture, in his work titled "Shallow mind", the Internet enforces superficiality: [...] *when we get connected to the Web, we enter the environment which encourages perfunctory reading, chaotic thinking and superficial science*<sup>11</sup>. This aspect is also underlined by the world-famous Polish sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman (1925–2017): *In the ranking of useful and desired skills, the art of surfing has dethroned the art of diving*.<sup>12</sup> It is meaningful that the activity of the Internet users is described as "surfing", i.e. sliding across the surface, while there are no terms that would refer to going deeper, e.g. diving. Without referring to the deep Web which means the content not indexed by standard search engines or the majority of the dark Web, )<sup>13</sup> and sticking to the classical definition of the Web, it should be concluded that such a superficial use of the global Internet resources with no deeper penetration is the waste of these resources, but mostly the waste of the great opportunity for intellectual development. Due to the lack of the skill or the willingness to dive on the Internet, we lose the possibility to know what is below the surface, what is perhaps beautiful and valuable. We lose the entire "underwater world of the Internet".

However, if we imagine the Internet as a nearly endless menu, it is obvious that in the face of such a huge abundance of information the reasonable strategy is the satisfy the hunger for information is to taste small portions from particular tables (pages), hoping that we will find more tasteful dishes on the next tables. Therefore, this abundance of information imposes the strategy of shallowness, but it only partially explains and justifies giving up the online resources which are "deeper" and require more competences from the user.

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<sup>11</sup> N. Carr, *Płytki umysł. Jak Internet wpływa na nasz mózg*, trans. K. Rojek, Wydawnictwo HELION, Gliwice 2013, pp. 145–146.

<sup>12</sup> Z. Bauman, *O edukacji. Rozmowy z Riccardo Mazzeo*, trans. P. Poniatowska, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej, Wrocław 2012, p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> See: <https://ciekawe.org/2016/07/15/glebszy-poziom-internetu/> [access: 10 August 2018].



The solution to this problem is undoubtedly the key task and challenge for contemporary education.

Assuming that the criterion is the degree of filtration of the information that reaches the learner, it is possible to define two models of using the Internet. The first model (without prioritizing it) is providing the learners with access to the entire Internet, while the educational institution makes no interference. The second model assumes that such institutions provide filters which make the learners use (thematically) limited resources which the teachers deem useful and generating no threats in the form of e.g. content that is harmful educationally and incorrect in terms of subject matter.

In the first model which reflects the real situation of the Internet user, the learner is thrown into deep water. The learner has skill related to searching for information, its selection and processing into useful knowledge, so he or she must possess the soft skills, especially the one that is crucial today, i.e. the skill of learning. Perfecting this key skill of the 21st century in connection with learning to be responsible for one's own education are the greatest advantages of this model. The critics will point out the possible threats, particularly in the form of content that is untrue or can impact the learner negatively.

The second model is "central steering" – the learner navigates an artificial, but safe environment of information, but his or her navigational skills (those which are needed and those which are shaped) are considerably limited. This situation resembles a driving course on a closed track that presents no threats that could happen in real life on the road, but for this very reason it is very different from everyday traffic and, therefore, of little use.

The basic pedagogical question relates to the purpose of using the medium: whether it is a far-reaching purpose, i.e. the learner's intellectual development, or a short-term purpose such as preparing an essay, a project or giving a simple answer with no deeper analysis or even with no real understanding. We need to ask if it is an internal purpose (motivation) formulated by the learner or an external purpose imposed by the teacher, the school or the curricu-

lum. Referring to the concept of Abraham Maslow, the first case is satisfaction of the needs for growth and treating the learner as a person steered from the inside, while the second case is satisfaction of the needs for lack and treating the learners as a person steered from the outside. It should also be added that the model with the information filter is commercial, since its creation, content provision and efficiency evaluation etc. are performed by dedicated companies.

From the educational perspective, the first model is more justified and beneficial to learners, while the second model is more convenient and safer for teachers. If we consider that in contemporary education the teacher, though still very important, is no longer the manager, the mentor and “the wise man on the stage”, but more a guide and a facilitator who stands back, while the main protagonist is the learner, then the choice of the model seems obvious.

The dysfunction of contemporary educational systems in terms of preparing students for the effective use of the Internet on a global scale, not only in Poland, was pointed out by professor Łukasz Turski, a physicist with broad knowledge and a perfect pedagogical intuition. In the article titled “Triumph of ignorance”<sup>14</sup>, the author accuses the educational systems of particular countries that they have failed to perform their crucial duty, i.e. to teach the rational use of online resources. As he rightly stated, *the ability to differentiate between truth and scam is more important than knowing about logarithms, wars or insurrections*<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, the school should support the learners in shaping their inner axiological and substantive filter that allows to see the difference between truth and false as well as between correct content and untruth and simple nonsense. The skill of using such a filter by a student is far more valuable than providing read-made filtered information.

The post-modernist ideology that gives up truth and makes it a matter of plebiscites (more and more often various groups decide

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<sup>14</sup> Ł. Turski, *Triumf nieuctwa*, “Przegląd” 2017, No. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Ł. Turski, *Triumf nieuctwa*, “Przegląd” 2017, No. 6.

what is true via voting), the admission of many truths, euphemistically called “narratives”, and the present functioning of the “post-truth” and *fake news* have shaped people who simply trust the media communications and accept the information with no doubt, reflection or criticism<sup>16</sup>, for which the late journalist, essayist and critic of mass culture, Mariusz M. Czarniecki (1934–2015) suggested the term “mediot”, i.e. the media idiot. The word „idiot” is not offensive, as it derives from the Greek *idiotes* meaning a non-expert, an ignorant, a person with very low qualifications.<sup>17</sup>

Another key skill in the contemporary world of the Internet is indicated by professor Tomasz Szkudlarek. Alluding to the law of Theodore Sturgeon who says that *ninety percent of everything is crap*, professor calls for adopting a proper distance to the media communications and the attitude of “indestructible and all-time suspiciousness that it might be otherwise”<sup>18</sup>. It is the attitude of the rational criticism which should be adopted by people towards the media.

## Conclusion

The use of the Internet in education is a very difficult topic. There are multiple concepts, approaches, individual ideas and opinions by researchers and teachers. This situation resembles John Godfrey Saxe’s (1816-1887) “Ballad on the elephant and six Hindu blind men”<sup>19</sup>. The limited scope of this article make it impossible to quote

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<sup>16</sup> J. Morbitzer, *Sokrates odwrócony, czyli o internetowej głupocie*, [in:] *Człowiek – Media – Edukacja*, ed. J. Morbitzer, D. Morańska, E. Musiał, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Biznesu w Dąbrowie Górniczej, Dąbrowa Górnicza 2017.

<sup>17</sup> M. M. Czarniecki, *Medioci: czy nie jesteś jednym z nich? Przewodnik dla odbiorców telewizji, prasy, radia, kaset wideo, Internetu*, Wydawnictwo Europol, Warszawa 2003.

<sup>18</sup> T. Szkudlarek, *Media. Szkic z filozofii i pedagogiki dystansu*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2009, p. 124.

<sup>19</sup> *Księga nonsensu*, trans. A. Marianowicz, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1986; see also dok. elektron. <http://psychologbielsko.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Saxe-J.G.-Ballada-o-s%C5%82oniu.pdf> [access: 10 August 2018].

it in full, but I encourage everyone to read it due to its educational benefits. Each of the six blind men describes the elephant from his own limited cognitive perspective. Though every one of them is right in their own fragmentary description, none depicts the whole. The ballad presents one of the most frequent cognitive errors, i.e. *pars pro toto*, that is knowing the whole through its pieces. It indicates the necessity to exchange ideas, experiences and results between researchers who study the implementation of the Internet in education, since only then it will be possible to arrive at an adequate picture of the entire landscape.

It seems that one solution to be considered is the concept of the holistic view of the Internet. It assumes the unity of the four spheres: technical, intellectual, cultural and axiological. Only the first one refers to technology as such and it consists in learning how to operate the equipment and selected applications. The intellectual sphere covers the user skills in terms of choosing valuable information and building the edifice of knowledge, i.e. the skills of the architect of one's own knowledge and the responsibility for one's development and relations to other users. The cultural sphere is the widely understood context of educational changes, while the closely connected axiological sphere is necessary to make ethical decisions when selecting the information and to apply the general medical principle of "primum non nocere" in the use of the Internet. This sphere also includes the postulate by S. Jobs regarding the wise and good user of the media. It must be emphasised that it is not the guarantee, but only a necessary condition for the rational use of the Internet.

The preparation for this process requires shaping the entire learning environment. This concept is defined by Hanna Dumont and David Istance in their work titled "The essence of learning" as the set of material and immaterial conditions in which the process of learning is carried out. This learning environment covers four dimensions:

- the learner (who is learning?),
- teachers and other educators (who participates in the learning process),

- content (what is learned),
- infrastructure (where and by what means?)<sup>20</sup>.

The authors underline that learning should be understood as “set in the context” and it is the direct context of each learning event is what makes up the “learning environment”<sup>21</sup>.

Let me conclude with Martin Heidegger’s thought that is the motto for this article: *The essence of technology is by no means anything technological*. The considerations presented in this article lead to the conclusion that it is a great error to perceive the Internet and its use for education mainly in technical categories. It is necessary to adopt a wider and holistic vision and a related concept of education towards wisdom and spirituality. Wisdom, in turn, should be seen as a particularly precious value for both the learners and the teacher. The point is not that all teachers and learners should be as wise as Greek philosophers, which is unrealistic, but it is essential to indicate a direction and raise the awareness of striving towards wisdom, as it constitutes a significant axiological category in today’s digital world. Wisdom requires objective evaluation (when information is selected and when the teachers makes the assessment of the student), control over emotions and efficient decision-making.

The way leading to wisdom is a long one. At present, wisdom is a value in decrease. The multiple causes of this negative effect include the popularity of the hot media, i.e. communicating messages that are easy to process and engage senses and emotions instead of imagination and reason, contrary to the cold media. Immersed in the world of the hot media, people in the digital age become more emotional and less rational.<sup>22</sup> It is worthwhile referring to another

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<sup>20</sup> *Istota uczenia się. Wykorzystanie wyników badań w praktyce*, trans. Z. Janowska, ed. H. Dumont, D. Istance, F. Benavides, Wolters Kluwer Polska, Warszawa 2013, p. 52.

<sup>21</sup> *Istota uczenia się. Wykorzystanie wyników badań w praktyce*, trans. Z. Janowska, ed. H. Dumont, D. Istance, F. Benavides, Wolters Kluwer Polska, Warszawa 2013, p. 53.

<sup>22</sup> J. Morbitzer, *O efekcie cieplarnianym w edukacji*, [in:] *Człowiek – Media – Edukacja*, ed. J. Morbitzer, D. Morańska, E. Musiał, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Biznesu, Dąbrowa Górnicza 2015.

definition of wisdom. In today's shaky world full of confusion and excessive stimuli and information, wisdom should be seen as the skill of making the right decisions as well as the art of achieving inner peace and quiet. This art is so difficult that only few can master it.

The fight for the rational use of the Internet in education, which can be provided at any place and time, without the former space and time limitations of the school, is the fight for the student's smartphone with the Internet access to be not only the extension of his or her mind or hand and a simple tool of entertainment, but also a rationally and responsibly used mobile tool for the young person's development, the tool for learning about the world and about oneself. It is a very important element of education towards self-development and effective preparation for functioning in the digital world and, in a wider context, for being an aware, fully valuable citizen of the contemporary web society. The progress of technology which is not coupled with the in-depth humanist reflection will always be a greater threat than opportunity.

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