



Supporting the creative development of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds in selected contexts of media education

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The aim of the article is to present selected contexts of media education in supporting the creative development of children from disfavoured backgrounds. This analysis was based on the results of research carried out by the author in the framework of a doctoral dissertation at the daycare centre in Poznań. In the final part of the article, the author presents proposals for changes concerning the introduction of media education elements in daycare centres.

KEY WORDS: creative development in children, socially disfavoured backgrounds, media education, non-formal education

Introduction

For many years now, the media have been one of the most important communication and information channels. The popularisation of mass media in the 20th century made a significant impact on

cultural changes, and the development of new technologies observed in recent years contributes to their massive growth and has an impact on their character. Undoubtedly, new media accompany us every day, in every activity undertaken. However, the dynamic development of new media does not coincide with changes in the educational system taking place at the same rapid pace. Despite the long-postulated need of introducing media education, which encompasses “teaching about the media, through the media and to the media”,¹ the situation in Polish schools is still worrisome. The report on the state of media education in Poland, commissioned by the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT) in 2000,² led to initiating a number of changes in some schools, concerning following modern trends in the use of new technologies in working with children and youth; however, there are still a rather sizeable number of schools that have not implemented and did not undertake to implement the basic objectives of media education.

However, school is not the only educational environment in which children and young people function. The list of the most important educational environments outside school include the family, which is a basic and natural educational environment and the local surroundings.³ Thus, human development (in a multifaceted context) is conditioned by all types of environments in which the person participates – both through deliberate and unintended influences.⁴ This results in social inequalities, which arise as the result of

¹ W. Strykowski, M. Kąkolewicz, S. Ubermanowicz, “Kompetencje nauczycieli edukacji medialnej”, *Neodidagmata*, 29/30, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Poznań 2008, p. 55.

² J. Juszczak-Rygałło, “O potrzebie rewitalizacji edukacji medialnej”, [in:] *Pedagogika*, K. Rędziński, M. Łapot (eds.), Volume XXV, no. 2, Wydawca Akademia im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie, Częstochowa 2016, p. 135.

³ W. Sroczyński, *Szkice do pedagogiki środowiskowej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Przyrodniczo-Humanistycznego w Siedlcach, Siedlce 2016, p. 165-188.

⁴ K. Segiet, “„Wyjść poza zastane schematy”. Znaczenie edukacji i działań modyfikujących środowisko życia człowieka”, [in:] *Animacja w środowisku. O potrzebie kreowania działań lokalnych (teoria a praktyka społeczna)*, K. Segiet, K. Słupska, A. Tokaj (eds.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Poznań 2017, p. 49.

civilisational, cultural, informational changes and technological progress. Moreover, they also cause distribution and reproduction of environmental and socio-cultural capital. In socially disadvantaged or underprivileged environments, where inequalities arise due to the lower opportunities of an individual from a given group to exercise the rights and privileges to which everyone is entitled,⁵ such as families threatened with marginalisation or social exclusion, as well as those from ethnic or national groups and families in which children have difficulties at school or problems with their peers, there are more visible problems and issues resulting mainly from the disturbed functioning of the family or school environment. Thus, the theses concerning crises of the modern family or educational systems are highlighted and further emphasised. As a result, the leading role of mass media and new technologies in everyday life (especially among the youngest generations) is becomes noticeable and clearly visible. The omnipresence of the media can be observed in all spheres of life – in the aforementioned education system, in the family or political system, in public life, as well as during study, work or leisure. This has a significant impact on changing lifestyles, value systems and behavioural patterns in ever younger generations.⁶ Therefore, in recent years, there were postulates and calls to “develop a national curriculum of formal (educational system) and informal (family environment, cultural institutions, NGOs) media education covering all social and age groups, with a particular focus on children and youth.”⁷

⁵ A. Zbonikowski, “Społeczne oddziaływania defaworyzujące a poczucie własnej wartości dzieci i młodzieży”, [in:] *Psychospołeczne uwarunkowania defaworyzacji dzieci i młodzieży*, K. Hirszel, R. Szczepanik, A. Zbonikowski, D. Modrzejewska (eds.), Wydawnictwo Difin SA, Warszawa 2010, p. 13.

⁶ E. Wysocka, “Zagrożenia społeczno-kulturowe dla rozwoju młodego pokolenia” [in:] *Dzieci i młodzież w niegościnnym świecie. Zagrożenia rozwojowe i społeczne*, ed. E. Wysocka, Wydawnictwo Akademickie Żak, Warszawa 2012, p. 107.

⁷ J. Juszczyk-Rygałło, “O potrzebie rewitalizacji edukacji medialnej”, [in:] *Pedagogika*, K. Rędziński, M. Łapot (eds.), Volume XXV, no. 2, Wydawca Akademia im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie, Częstochowa 2016, p. 136.

Media education and creative development of the child

Every person has creative potential, not just those with talent. However, its development (especially during childhood) is conditioned by adults (parents, guardians, teachers), who should encourage and create space for creative thinking and activity of the child.⁸ Children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds rarely experience this type of support at home. Moreover, it should be remembered that creative development also concerns the media or hypermedia aspects. School seems to be the first environment (following the family environment) where the child should receive appropriate support in this respect. Therefore, contemporary teachers face many challenges, which are posed by – among other things – socio-cultural changes. They should not only be professional and follow the latest trends in education, but also update and keep developing their competences. Above all, when teaching a young person, they must be a reflective educator who will take into account all the areas in which contemporary children and youth function, because their role does not only concern the transfer of knowledge, but also the development of children's personalities, identities, desires, goals and dreams.⁹ Unfortunately, the situation in the Polish educational environment does not offer positive forecasts for a rapid change in the situation found at Polish schools. Examples include Anna Michniuk's study on new media school¹⁰ and Danuta Morańska's rese-

⁸ M.A. Runco, "To understand is to create: An epistemological perspective on human nature and personal creativity", [in:] *Everyday creativity and New views of human nature. Psychological, social, and spiritual perspectives*, ed. R. Richards, American Psychological Association, Washington 2007, pp. 91-107.

⁹ I. Żeber-Dzikowska, "Teacher's and student's creativity as a challenge for the modern education", [in:] *Pedagogika*, K. Rędziński, M. Łopot (eds.), Volume XXV, no. 2, Wydawca Akademia im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie, Częstochowa 2016, p. 37.

¹⁰ A. Michniuk, "Współczesna, nowomediałna(?) szkoła – próba charakterystyki", [in:] *Edukacyjne i społeczne wyzwania rzeczywistości cyfrowej*, ed. A. Iwanicka, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Poznań 2017, pp. 101-123.

arch focusing on the use of modern educational methods and information technology during classes.¹¹ In both cases, the authors declare that while there are some modernised schools, which have a willing staff and possibilities to carry out teaching with the use of new media (as well as for the creative development of students), but they are still a minority in relation to schools, which for various reasons did not yet introduce the necessary changes in the teaching and learning process. Meanwhile, the main ideas of media education (mentioned in the introduction) focus not only on developing media literacy and its impact or introduction of students to media culture, but also on acquiring new knowledge and competences, as well as their practical use.¹² Therefore, the ability to use equipment (which is often mentioned by teachers as a barrier to the use of new media during classes, in the context of media competence of a modern teacher compared to students student – because in the opinion of teachers it is the students who have higher competences in this area)¹³ is not sufficient and this knowledge does not necessarily lead to creative activity of the student.

Another issue concerns education and supporting creativity when the child is at a young age. It should be noted that children are exposed to new information technologies at diverse levels at an increasingly young age. These days, small children (aged 3 or older) usually use new media in their family homes, and later – at pre-school age – also outside the home (if modern educational methods and techniques are employed in kindergarten). It should not come

¹¹ D. Morańska, “Nauczyciel wobec wyzwań społeczeństwa informacyjnego”, [in:] *Edukacyjne i społeczne wyzwania rzeczywistości cyfrowej*, ed. A. Iwanicka, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Poznań 2017, pp. 47-56.

¹² A. Ogonowska, *Współczesna edukacja medialna: teoria i rzeczywistość*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, Kraków 2013, p. 31.

¹³ Cf. A. Michniuk, “Współczesna, nowomediałna(?) szkoła – próba charakterystyki”, [in:] *Edukacyjne i społeczne wyzwania rzeczywistości cyfrowej*, ed. A. Iwanicka, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Poznań 2017, pp. 104.

as a surprise that children are also proficient in the use of new media at later stages of education. In addition, the use of media at such an early age is linked to changes in the cognitive, physical, motor, social and emotional functioning of children, which is also very dynamic.¹⁴ In a situation where media education is not implemented in the educational process at all or is carried out incorrectly (in kindergarten, school or among adults), voluntary participation in the world of media may result in tangible negative impacts or even endanger individual development, for example as a result of improper selection of messages and media content, or failure to exploit the potential of multimedia and hypermedia materials and media tools. In the latest 2018 EU Kids Online report (full report to be published in December 2018), prepared under the guidance of Jacek Pyżalski in partnership with the Orange Foundation, based on the study of a group of 1300 respondents aged 9-17, the team of researchers presents the following conclusions: „Many students have not been acquainted with any rules concerning the use of the Internet. One in three students indicate that teachers at school never or almost never talk about on-line safety matters. As many as 40 per cent of students claim that there are no established rules for using the Internet at school, and 45% of respondents never talked to teachers about proper on-line behaviour and best practices on-line.”¹⁵ Therefore, the spread of on-line violence, with very different levels of intensity diverse types,¹⁶ which can lead to risky behaviours hindering not only their development, but also the lives of children and

¹⁴ M. Klichowski, J. Pyżalski, K. Kuszak, A. Klichowska, „Jak technologie informacyjno-komunikacyjne mogą wspierać rozwój dziecka w wieku przedszkolnym? – studium teoretyczne”, [in:] *Małe dzieci w świecie technologii informacyjno-komunikacyjnych – pomiędzy utopijnymi szansami a przesadzonymi zagrożeniami*, ed. J. Pyżalski, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Poznań 2017, p. 116.

¹⁵ <https://fundacja.orange.pl/aktualnosci/artypul/90-proc-nastolatkow-nieumie-tworczo-korzystac-z-technologii/> [retrieved on: 24.09.2018].

¹⁶ J. Pyżalski, *Agresja elektroniczna i cyberbullying jako nowe ryzykowne zachowania młodzieży*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2012.

young people is yet another issue stemming from the lacking media education in the lives of the young generation.

The third area which is of particular importance for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds in the context of creative development and media competence is the local environment. When a child does not experience support in a family home or school, or when they do not have sufficient support, day care institutions available in the local environment are often the last place in the child's immediate environment. In Poland, these institutions provide free assistance, supporting families in fulfilling family functions, and their regular activities (daily, twice a week, etc.) are directed mainly to children and youth experiencing unfavourable (economic, social and cultural) situation in the family home, particularly experiencing educational and school failures. Such institutions (community centres socio-therapeutic centres, therapeutic centres, backyard form, clubs, centres or daycares for children and youth), the activities are focused mainly on conducting classes aimed at strengthening educational opportunities for children and young people from disadvantaged environments, as well as filling knowledge gaps and getting children up to speed.¹⁷

The author's own research, carried out as part of a comparative study, which constituted a part of her doctoral dissertation on the art of socially disadvantaged children in local support and care centres, raised many issues pertaining to education in a much broader context. For the purpose of this article, the author decided to present a part of the study, which concerns only the issue of media education. The research had a qualitative and quantitative character and was carried out using the case study method in institutions in the city of Poznań. The study used the technique of observation, questionnaire interview and drawings of children, accompanied with conversation about their works.

Classes in the group of younger children aged 6–12 took place on Mondays and Wednesdays and lasted for 4.5 hours. Each Wed-

¹⁷ Act of 9 June 2011 on Family Support and Foster Families, Dz. U. [Journal of Laws] of 2013, item 135, as amended, Article 24.

nesday, in theory children had 5 computers with access to the Internet at their disposal (3 of which were working) and 15 minutes for games. There was a maximum of 12 children in the group (participation in classes organised by such institutions is voluntary). Every Wednesday there were 15% to 20% more participants than on Monday. The author also noted punctuality and enthusiasm, motivated by free time with computers. The participants used the computers in turns (15 minutes per participant), according to the "first come, first served" rule, coupled with "if you have homework, you have to do it first." The rest of the participants could use their free time for entertainment. In reality, a maximum of 4 children did their homework and the rest sat at the computers, even though only three of them could use them at a time – the rest watched and cheered on their friends playing games, and after a while they would switch. During all classes, no child gave up the possibility to play video games. Most children chose arcade games (92% of children) and logical games (8%). This was an effect of the rules of the institution, saying that only educational games were allowed. During the entire observation period (3 months) nobody was interested in repairing the remaining computers. There were no educational classes regarding media – including classes without equipment.

During interviews with tutors (4 persons) in a given institution, they came to the unanimous conclusion that computer, IT and media classes – speaking more broadly, classes using new technologies – are not carried out at their institution, despite the fact that one of the tutors was a Computer Science graduate with a master's title. All tutors were active teachers in public primary schools. Moreover, according to their declarations, they do not consider this type of activity to be a way to develop children's creativity. In one of the opinions, the tutor noted that: "New media rather hamper the education of these children, since due to the computer classes on Wednesdays, they find it difficult for them to focus on anything else. They often come from difficult, disadvantaged environments, four of them do not have access to a computer at home, but at least one of the parents of each child has a smartphone. On the other hand, they won't be able to

print homework from their smartphone, and our printer often breaks down. Children find themselves between a rock and a hard place, because if they don't have homework at school, they either get negative points or a note for parents." Another tutor's answer regarding the turn-based system at the institution was: "If children didn't know the rules, they would just keep playing games, and we do our best to show them that these games are not everything. We have a plan for this time. Apart from that we have a lot of board games, so we offer children an opportunity to play, especially those who can only watch. Sometimes we even manage to convince someone."

However, in response to the question whether they imagine modern world without the use of new media, the tutors unanimously said that they do not. However, in their arguments, they often alluded to the fact that "these children do not need it right now, other needs are far more important, because not all children can eat a hot meal at home."

In the case of classes supporting multi-faceted development of children, the tutors mainly used the offer of subject classes – to be more precise, the subjects which the children found the most troublesome at school, including mathematics, Polish and English. The notion of classes pertaining to supporting the child's creativity were conflated by all tutors with art classes and activities. One of the tutors declared "I am the supervisor of an art club at my school, I like to do such things myself, we often work creatively with children coming here. I bring the supplies, I tell them what it is, and then we make things. It's always a great time. Children often ask me what to do, what to use, what colour to choose, I give them suggestions and tips, because I already know them a little bit and know what they like. Recently we made decorative decoupage gift boxes for their loved ones. Before Christmas we often make Christmas cards, which are sent to our sponsors, then we choose the most beautiful ones." One of the tutors noted that "some children have creative ideas, for example during an afternoon tea we always discuss current issues or I ask a question. Children have such a great imagination that it's always fun."

In conclusion, we should refer to the fact that in the context of belief in educational opportunities for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, tutors tend to focus on providing them with bare necessities, completely disregarding the fact that new media are present in everyday life. In thinking about children's development and their potential they refer to the principles of social, cultural and economic reproduction (according to Karl Marx's theory of copying patterns from their immediate surroundings). The tutors participating in the study do not see the educational potential in information and communication technologies, which is conducive to the development of creativity and the expression of children's own selves. They do not interpret them as tools to help shape their identity and social ties, or to strengthen their participation in social life, even though they themselves notice that they cannot imagine modern life without new technologies. However, it should be noted that children attending day care institutions are treated as triple disadvantaged by tutors, because they come from underprivileged backgrounds, mostly do not have the equipment, opportunities and competences to use the media, for example in the creative process, and moreover, the tutors do not even give them a chance to change their thinking about their future, for example by imitating family models.

The time spent on games in the day-care centre does not develop children's creative and media competences, perhaps it provides entertainment, which children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds experience less often than their peers. However, as the authors note in the aforementioned conclusions of the 2018 EU Kids Online report concerning children and teenagers in Poland: "90 per cent of teenagers are unable to use technology in a creative manner"¹⁸ "The most common on-line activities are content consumption – watching videos and listening to music, as well as communicating with friends and loved ones. More than 80 percent of

¹⁸ <https://fundacja.orange.pl/aktualnosci/artykul/90-proc-nastolatkow-nie-umie-tworczo-korzystac-z-technologii/> [retrieved on: 24.09.2018].

respondents claim that they have used this option at least once in the last month.”¹⁹ As a result, children and young people’s passive use of the Internet and the untapped potential that technologies bring into our everyday lives is not just about children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. This report only confirms that immediate changes in the education system are necessary and that media education itself should be one of the most important elements of the new curriculum, as young people need adults to accompany them in discovering previously unknown areas of knowledge.

Instead of a conclusion

In conclusion, day care institutions play an important role in the lives of children and youth from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. However, the managers and tutors working at these institutions should update and modernise the offer of classes. Usually, these institutions do not have large financial resources, although they can draft projects and take part in competitions organised by the European Union, as well as various national and local institutions and authorities. In addition, they can also invite external companies to cooperate, which might for example include providing equipment to work with children.

The most important, however, are the willingness to change and update the knowledge about the perception of creativity and media by the educators themselves. If the view of reproduction hinders even the educators’ thinking about the chance for the development of children and youth from socially disadvantaged backgrounds to take other actions, better patterns of behaviour and change their situation for the better, even the best-equipped institution will be unable to provide good results.

In addition, the introduction of media education does not always require the presence of equipment and highly qualified staff –

¹⁹ <https://fundacja.orange.pl/aktualnosci/artykul/90-proc-nastolatkow-nie-umie-tworczo-korzystac-z-technologii/> [retrieved on: 24.09.2018].

just a bit of commitment, broadening the knowledge in a given field and an open attitude is all that is needed. The involvement of the tutor in acquiring new competences – for example concerning theoretical issues pertaining to the media, such as cyberbullying and hate on the Internet, but also in the implementation of “programming unplugged” programmes, or even inviting external tutors and educators to conduct workshops for children on media tools that will be useful in their education. This will certainly increase the attractiveness of classes and activities, but it might also contribute to a real change in the lives of those young people who are already doomed to failure by many people – including from the child’s immediate environment – due to their socially disadvantaged background.

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