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Education through the media and information technology in the age of transformation

Abstract

On the basis of the empirical research, carried out in the Suwałki-Masurian region, the cultural, economical, sociologic and technological transformations have been analysed. The occurrence on the market of new-generation multimedia computers, because of their big interactive possibilities, causes a great influence on the opinions and behaviours of the members of Polish families. The importance of introduction of education through the media to the educational programmes of primary and grammar schools has been underlined. What results from the discussion of the university or college training of teachers in the field of education through the media and communication sciences is that only a few universities have a necessary technological base. The problem is how to further educate 500 thousand teachers of Polish schools in the field of media and information technology. The process of further education should be verified by standards used in the European Union countries.

Key words: university, college, education, interactive media, information technology, age of transformation, education through the media and information technology

Cultural, economical, scientific, and technological dynamic transformations occurring at the end of the twentieth century exert an enormous influence on our way of thinking and activity. We choke with better and better economical indices as well as with results of our efforts to improve the law and administration of the State. While chasing the indices due to which we would approach the European Union, we forget about the social and educational areas. After all, those areas of our life will determine to a great extent our situation in Europe. Whether we shall be pariahs or citizens with full rights depends on our education, ethic, discipline in working and moral standards, i.e. those values that are shaped significantly by education. It is difficult to require from a poorly-educated farmer or worker, not seldom being an alumnus of just a technical school who soon after leaving the school joins a mass of jobless people, to think in terms of democracy and humanism connected with the pragmatism of a market economy. The lack of clearly defined criteria of upbringing, expectations from teachers, settlements how to perform adult education and indication of relevant priorities — these are some of the problems occurring to the author of this article. Democracy is more complete when it is set up by conscious people who know their value, and are able to keep the balance between “to have” and “to be”. Democracy is an ability to reconcile one’s own needs and needs of other people as well as to renounce one’s own whims. In short, a necessity to connect the economical aspect of activity with the psychologic-existential one is seen more and more clearly.

When considering a contemporary aspect of work, a domination of socialist ideals can be observed in spite of the end of primacy of the Marxist ideology over economy. That situation has its consequences in actions of numerous reformers who, while presenting their opinions, try to break down old habits, attitudes and activities on the one hand, and make efforts to impose new thinking of making economical rules to be dominant over human laws on the other hand. Unfortunately, such an approach does not favour creation of a new attitude toward work, formation of work ethos, and care for the culture of the human spirit. In the Polish circumstances, the lack of both basic economical security and scrupulous upbringing leads to alienation and degradation of work. That is clearly seen in the regions of high unemployment, and in those regions of Poland that have been economically neglected after the World War II. The so-called East Wall including, e.g. the Suwałki-Masurian region, is one of such areas. The lack in this region of a system of colleges, which would emanate humanistic ideas, especially generates negative effects. As a result, a substantial fraction of the young generation, receiving an overwhelming pressure of liberal slogans on economical transformation, sees Western Europe as a land of Midas, and rich gorgeous in gold. However, enormous work that was the way to accomplish the West-European standard of life is missing.

At the same time, a classical social structure can be observed in Poland. The relevant rules, noticed by A. Toffler, are confirmed by the results of a study performed in the Suwałki-Masurian region. 68% of the region's community perceive the real world through their own experience, i.e. in the realities of the former political system, and live in such a way as if no transformations had occurred. Talking about people's own experience, I mean the lack of their direct contact with phenomena and mechanisms governing the transformations, and the lack of experience that could be acquired during an educational process as well. Representatives of this group are reluctant to face major changes of their own situation, the changes that require a substantial effort from them. There is here a strong fear of the unknown; the lower the education level of an examined person, the deeper the fear. The following regularity is observed: the shallower the knowledge of a man, the stronger his/her resistance to changes. Merely 26% of the examined population of this region live at a pace of the present, see changes and the resulting necessity to undertake their own initiatives, but only 6% of the population are ready to invest in themselves while taking a high risk and directing their activities toward the future. That is the group from which the students of colleges operating in the Suwałki-Masurian region are derived.

The above-mentioned results of the study clearly indicate that it is to be desired to begin all the reforms starting from education, and not from economy. It is the education that contributes to both creativity and preparation to future actions. This is the only way to form a community that can cope with economical issues, and does not miss humanistic ideas. Omission of the educational factor makes a substantial fraction (18—24%) of the adult population to remain in the background. The lack of the educational actions intensifies the processes of intellectual and cultural degradation. Thus, apathy and despondency as well as various pathologies arise in such a group of people.

Creation of a virtual world by mass media is another significant factor favouring occurrence of pathologies. The aspect of that phenomenon is much larger since it concerns the whole human population. Man directed toward the future accepts both trivial and tempting ideals shown by the mass media, and dreams about life created by those media of mass imagination. He poorly distinguishes facts from fiction, and becomes an efficient consumer of advertising and a dupe of manipulations in marketing. People living in a sphere of the past encounter more difficulties while seeking a job, and are less active in their efforts to improve their living conditions, and in accomplishing their life aims. Thus, the mass media become a specific dummy of human wishes and desires. A situation arises in which man starts to merge into the world of the media, and he or she does not live a real life but a fiction created by the media. Myths about an easy life devoid of problems occur,

which, confronted with the real world, offers temptations to go beyond all the limits, including first of all the sphere of standards accepted till now.

Man being aware of the present is less vulnerable to a mash offered by the media. He or she is rational, and flexible in fitting to reality. The examined group of such people is composed mostly (87%) of people of higher education and/or running their own businesses. It is also worthwhile to note that 100% of those people see a necessity to educate themselves and their relatives.

People disposed toward creation of the future can easily and without emotions make a proper opinion about the mass media. People of that group clearly exhibit a high level of both understanding and processing of information derived from the media. They have widely developed information skills, and are able to confront pieces of information and to draw proper conclusions. That group of people is composed mostly of higher educated people as well. It is also characteristic that they are hardly influenced by the content of a virtual world, which results from their own creativity.

As mentioned above, an excessive focusing on economy and the lack of common processes of regular education and further education generate specific social effects. That appears most clearly as indiscriminating acceptance of technology, simply as creating a kind of technocratic culture.

The praise of economy and lack of sufficient actions in the area of adult education belong to basic elements of formation of technocratic virtual subculture which affects such human spheres as cognitive, emotional and psychomotor ones. Increasing significance of the mass media in formation of the contemporary world leads to the rise of a cult characteristic of a special lifestyle and habits. It is worthwhile to note here that the less the grown-up people participate in education through media, the more readily they accept the world created by the mass media. The studies performed at the Nicholas Copernicus University in Toruń and at the Suwałki-Masurian College in Suwałki show a close relationship between reflectiveness of information perception by people and people's knowledge on how the media work. No matter if it is a State or private school, this is a positive correlation; at the same time, the higher the level of education, the broader the scope of analysis of information provided by the media.

A high rate of changes occurring in the modern technology generates an urgent need to introduce a field of knowledge called education through the media at every level of education. Implementation of the necessity of educating through the media into the basic educational programme without general further education of teachers will be a dead regulation, as are many regulations in our law. The lack of actions aimed at preparation of future teachers in the field of the mass-media pedagogy will result in a situation in which a technocratic way of perceiving the world will prevail in education. By now, various forms of education through the media are already

introduced at a few faculties of the humanities and education. Unfortunately, these steps do not concern faculties of sciences. It means that a future alumnus-teacher will be a technocrat in the bad sense of this word. The negative results of that situation are already seen at Polish schools, first of all at primary ones. Thus, it is hard to imagine a teacher who would achieve good results in upbringing in spite of much effort put into the preparation of the educational process. As a consequence, a primary school, that should first of all be educating, does not and will not perform its tasks and fulfill social expectations. Also, the school of the programme is adjusted to the technocratic way of perceiving the world. For example, removal from the primary school programme of education through the media, and replacement of information technology by informatics means that explanation of perception of contents of the mass media and gaining necessary experience in this field by pupils are not included in the programme. Humanistic postulates to apply information technology to the school, as understood in a broad sense, are not included in the programme either. Consequently, the pupil gets acquainted with the question of the media individually. Leaving the pupil beyond influence of the education through the media generates circumstances favouring a free choice of interpretation and the rise of a social pathology.

The lack of education through the media in the educational programme, in spite of a bombastic assurance on a dominant position of upbringing in the process of primary education, leads to the situation in which effects of the educational reform being introduced with much effort are limited. The results of such a policy will be felt especially in rural and country-town communities where the school, devoid of the influence in the field of education through the media, will involuntarily strengthen a model created by the mass media. That will intensify frustration and other pathological phenomena. This situation will indirectly influence self-limitation in accomplishing the entire upbringing programme as well, e.g. in the field of environment protection. Also, that condition will still increase the differences between urban and rural communities, in spite of laudable issues of the education reform. One has to realize, however, that introduction of education through the media to the educational programme is one of the basic factors determining a success of the reforms in the country, and a proper preparation to the conditions present in the European Union.

The disregard, in the programmes of primary and grammar schools, of a separate group of issues dealing with education through the media requires formation of adequate institutional further education of teachers specializing in different subjects. A few academic centres performing research in the field of education through the media will not be enough to prepare the educational personnel. The alumni of such centres are in great demand on the job market beyond education. Consequently, only a fraction of them

get to schools where, as a rule, they are not fully used in result of underestimation of the significance of education through the media by the Ministry of Education. School directors and other high-rank educational officials are not interested in adequate employment of those high-standard specialists, which results from an improper position of education through the media, i.e. at the end of the list of educational needs.

Education of teachers in the field of education through the media requires high-standard specialists and well-equipped laboratories. At present, few universities have such a base. Thus, a system of institutions engaged in education through the media should be developed through a form of grants. Also, private colleges should be made interested in preparing specialists in this field. Perhaps, it would be worthwhile to attempt to set such a condition as a necessary one to, e.g. acquire authorization to grant master's degrees. The studies performed at the Suwałki-Masurian College at Suwałki and at the Teacher's College at Zgierz clearly indicate many possibilities regarding realization of such a programme in technical colleges of different types. Therefore, it is worthwhile to prepare a project of an educational programme after the example of the programme "Internet in every commune".

Talking about the necessity of further education of teachers is a truism. The essence of the issue is to specify how to further educate 500 thousand teachers of Polish schools in the field of education through the media and information technology. Undoubtedly, the best results will be obtained when education is performed with great diversity and at many levels. However, taking into account an enormous task and scarcity of resources, teleteaching should be implemented. The process of further education should be realized following verified standards used in Poland and in other countries.

The lack of a complex formulation of education through the media and communication sciences in the programme of teachers' studies has its consequences also in making progress in the quality of education. It should be simply assumed that it will be hard to talk about a success of the reform without introducing a common further education in the field of using the media in education. Transition from memory didactics to thinking didactics is impossible without a general use of the information technology connected with education through the media by teachers.

Occurrence at the market of new-generation multimedia computers, which include devices separate till now (a TV set, VCR, modem, etc.), causes a situation in which a tool of an enormous power of influence due to interactive possibilities enters Polish families. It affects our behaviour, family life and process of upbringing in a positive way, and makes far-reaching transformations in the culture. Therefore, education through the media should be recognized as one of the high-priority aims of education and upbringing in the modern school. The lack of it will cause considerable, mostly negative, social consequences.