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The value of New Media in communication between teachers and pupils. Teacher-pupil relations in the age of the Internet

ABSTRACT

This article aims to discuss the problem of communication at and outside of school, in a world dominated by digitisation. The prevailing fashion for the use of online information resources has moved into every aspect of life, including education. Interviews with teachers of different educational levels have been conducted. They were intended to illustrate teachers' attitudes to the requirements of the increasing technological development. A basic question that accompanies the deliberations refers to the quality of education in the world of digitisation. The discussion is reinforced with examples and analyses of the current media education.

Key words: New Media, communication, Media education

Media usage patterns are continuously changing as a result of the emergence of new information and communication technologies. The role of digital technology is growing, more and more people are using the Internet, and mobile phones have become a commonly used tool (Report Poland, 2030). The development of mobile communication, i.e. mobile phones, smartphones and laptops, as well as the availability of wireless Internet provide more and more people with every day continuous contact with a selected group of

people, as well as comprehensive access to information and network resources. This results in strengthening of non-verbal communication and heavy concentration of communication technology within everyday life. According to the PWN dictionary, communication means “flow of information between devices, e.g. phones or computers” and “transferring and receiving information in direct contact with another person” (PWN Dictionary of the Polish Language, 2011).

Currently Internet messengers are also used in schools. The report prepared by Librus shows that 44 % of teachers believe that their relationships with students have significantly improved thanks to using social media (Kalinowska, 2012). Some teachers use popular social network messengers to encourage students, to influence their activity and even to give advice to parents. In this way, traditional classes of Polish or Mathematics become attractive for teenagers, who in their free time eagerly make use of online communicators and websites.

An example of the use of a *Facebook* messenger is a teacher of Polish from the Social Educational Association's Secondary School in Bytom, who created a “fanpage” on *Facebook* and runs a blog for students and parents. Using casual style and a sprinkle of humour, Karolina Jędrych posts content related to: grammar, vocabulary or literature. This is how the teacher explains the goal of her modern teaching methods: “Currently, *Lekcje Polskiego* is a record of ideas, after-class reflections, in real life, namely at school. Its purpose is to serve students, teachers and parents (*Lekcje Polskiego*, Facebook). The blog and fanpage were created in 2008. They are continuously updated and to this day enjoy great popularity, judging by the number of members of the group of “friends”. Ms. Jędrych publishes new posts to serve students, parents and teachers. As there are readers, the teacher faces quite a challenge to meet the expectations of each of them.

This is not a separate case; another example of education using the now common *Facebook* is *Lekcje Ekonomii dla młodzieży* (Lessons of Economics for Teenagers), an educational initiative of the KoLibier Association and the Mises Institute. This fanpage has been created for the purposes of an economic project which serves as an opportunity to publish various kinds of interesting facts concerning economics. Despite the fact that the described initiative has its own website, the number of teenagers following it on *Facebook* does not decrease. Currently, the fanpage on *Facebook* is liked by 2758 users (*Lekcje Ekonomii dla Młodzieży*, Facebook).

Another example of a web communicator is *naszaklasa*. It is a web portal used by teachers in order to e.g. get better acquainted with their students. A proof of such application is an English language teacher from the Complex of Agricultural Schools in Środa Wielkopolska, who uses the web portal to learn more about the students from his class, for whom he was supposed to become a class teacher (Winkowska, Nowak, 2010).

According to John Dewey, the whole society exists not only as a result of transfer of information and communication, but its existence is also based on the processes of transfer and communication (Dewey, 1972). Undoubtedly, it can be stated that the method of communication has become the pillar of communication of the 21st century.

In the interviews conducted with teachers from various school levels, I have asked the question: What do you think is the value of New Media in communication at school? In reply to the above question, I have been given the following statements. A Biology and Physical Education teacher from the Primary School and Public Secondary School Complex in Kryłowo:

In the rural environment, we can see a lower degree of usage of Internet communication. Undoubtedly, there are two sides to using the Internet at school: firstly, a negative one, because students using social network portals publish various content, which later gives them reasons to fight and argue. The second, positive one is that web portals are helpful in transferring important information (e.g. during winter, when children take the bus to school, a message appeared about the suspension of its operation). Furthermore, the speed of communication is definitely an advantage in this case (interview from 5.07.2016).

Since 2016, e-books have been available for a dozen or so school subjects. These are web textbooks made available by the Ministry of National Education, containing quizzes, videos or even sample tests. They are an interesting alternative to traditional school classes. Especially if it is possible to use multimedia boards, thanks to which it becomes unnecessary to move the class to the computer room in order to demonstrate e.g. an animation of the DNA structure. According to another interlocutor:

Every teacher, who wants to become promoted must be able to use the mass media. If he/she cannot, special trainings exist, organised by training companies, e.g. the Teacher Training Centre or KURSOR. In addition, each school has an IT special-

ist, who can conduct such training, so I think there are no teachers left who do not use the Internet as a form of school and out-of-school activity and would find this problematic. Certainly, students connect better with younger teachers, who are in touch with technological novelties, and this also affects the relations between them (interview from 5.07.2016).

A teacher from Mechanical School Complex in Cracow, in response to the question, has also observed that communication with students in the age of the Internet has two sides:

In the case of bright students, it accelerates the learning process, as we can work with them without meeting, remotely. At school, such communication through electronic means also significantly facilitates work, as we can trigger the imagination of each student, but on the other hand, when the student is not interested in the topic, he uses the Internet and hinders class work. Furthermore, students have lost the ability to think on their own, because they use the Internet on their phones, even during class for simple exercises. Sometimes it's hard to assess whether something is their own idea, or if they found it somewhere on the web (interview from 7.07.2016).

The teacher from the vocational secondary school actively uses software and Internet messengers in his work. One of such programs is "*goggle drive*", which is used for sharing particular files with a given class. Another tool which he uses is Facebook messenger, used by a group of students taking part in a competition. According to the teacher, thanks to this application, his contact with students was fast, which significantly facilitated the running of the project. The teacher from the Mechanical School Complex is not bothered by less frequent direct contact with students, and he readily replaces it with online contact:

I believe that increased online contact is by no means a negative thing; I treat it as a good addition, since I see students every day at school. Furthermore, considering the today's bureaucracy, it is unfeasible not to use electronic devices, because as a class teacher I know that sometimes I must get a parent's signature in two days and in such a case I communicate electronically, rather than through the student (interview from 7.07.2016).

On the other hand, students have various opinions on their contact with teachers using social network portals. One of year 2 students from the Second-

ary School in Kruszwica has an ambivalent approach to keeping in touch with teachers outside school by means of the Internet. However, he sees no reasons to cut off from this type of relations with teachers.

I don't think there are any advantages to accept teachers in the friends circle, unless the teacher is active enough to announce on the website e.g. trips or tests. And the disadvantages? Also none. No one in their right mind publishes silly photos on Nasza Klasa, which - when spotted by a teacher - could later cause troubles at school (Winkowska-Nowak, 2010).

Another example of using the Internet in the school space involves individual management of the last five minutes of classes by students – a teacher's idea, after completing the class topic in the computer room. It has the following effect: thirteen out of fifteen students spent their time on social network websites, and the remaining two spent it on expanding their knowledge about their interests using educational platforms. Therefore, it is undeniable that competent use of the Internet encourages and allows students to deepen their knowledge. However, teenagers are still not fully capable of appreciating the ease in access to knowledge.

Currently, the use of the media is not associated with education, but rather with development of interests. Nonetheless, both students and teachers eagerly use the Internet as a source of knowledge. Consequently, the media have become an inevitable ally of education.

Furthermore, there are many websites created by associations, foundations, scientific groups, universities or private persons which use popular web messengers to provide educational information and encourage teenagers to be active in a given field. Examples of the above include the following fanpages: *Lekcje Czytania* (*Reading Lessons*) – a campaign of the Tygodnik Powszechny Foundation intended to promote readership by carrying out literature class throughout Poland (*Lekcje Czytania*, Facebook), *Lekcje Rysunku* (*Drawing Lessons*) (Facebook) – a fanpage created by students of the Cracow University of Technology, available only for a closed group of readers. *Lekcje Śpiewu* (*Singing Lessons*) (Facebook) – a fanpage where instruction courses and music lessons are conducted in Warsaw. Thus, it may be noted that the subject matter of the published educational aids is broad, ranging from Polish grammar, through economics competitions to hairdressing skills and Facebook make-up courses. The group of readers is also very broad, including children, teenagers

and adults. However, the goal remains the same: reaching the broadest possible group and arousing their interest.

Marta Dziubińska, as a teacher, readily uses Internet communication tools. In her article “*Facebook, Twitter, Skype – moi nauczyciele*” (Facebook, Twitter, Skype – my teachers), she states several advantages of the use of web portals in education:

Following threads and groups with interests related to the content of the subject or course. Sharing opinions about books, movies, etc. Sharing and publishing studies and texts prepared by students. Sharing sets of materials aiding the process of education. Playing thematic online games, which require skills and knowledge obtained during classes. Organising contests, elections and brainstorming sessions. Exercising communication skills in a foreign language (in the case of language courses, it seems natural to utilise the potential to establish contacts with native speakers forming interest groups, bloggers, etc.). Publishing and evaluating project tasks and presentations. Establishing contact with experts in a given field, politicians, other training groups and teachers. Obtaining information and participating in competitions related to the taught subject (Dziubińska, no data).

We may also add positive aspects to the above, such as: greater courage – due to indirect contact, possibility to get to know lifestyles, views of another person, simpler way to present our skills on the web (by posting pictures and videos), wide reach of shared knowledge (e.g. YouTube, which has more than a billion users), popularity on the web (as in the incentive to be active), possibility of anonymous confrontation, quicker access to knowledge without the need to leave the house, simpler and cheaper way to conduct scientific research (e.g. by creating web surveys).

Another example of mobile communication between school and parents involves more and more popular e-registers, which allow for quick flow of information and constant parental control over their children's marks. Text messages, which are treated as a certain source of information transfer, e.g. a parent-teacher conference, are an interesting form of communication within this group of people. Modern forms of contact are evaluated more and more positively, as technical aspects seem to outclass forms of direct contact.

Certainly, deciding to use the abovementioned didactic aids requires significant commitment and additional time, which needs to be spent before or after classes. Furthermore, it is necessary to have a computer and Internet

access (which today is not really a problem). However, the issue of digital literacy remains unsolved. Żukowska (1993) defines social expectations from teachers which include permanent response to the development of science and technology. Consequently, she indicates personal development and further training, pedagogical innovation, communication skills and active participation in culture as the most important competences.

Numerous pedagogical publications define teachers as “promoters of progress” (Muszkieta, 2004), which includes progress with regard to communication between teachers, students and parents. Undoubtedly, using the help of digital tools is compatible with competencies related to further training. We can even say that technological orientations are now becoming visible, as evidenced by “replacing teachers with technical teaching means” (Muszkieta, 2004), as well as communication orientations – based on the development of social communication and various kinds of messages (Duraj-Nowakowa, 2000). Among IT and mass media competences indicated by the Pedagogical Committee of Polish Academy of Sciences, we can distinguish “command of computer language”, i.e. application of IT technologies to support teachers’ and students’ learning processes, creation of own educational programs and sharing them on the web (Muszkieta, 2004). As a result, it can be noted that teachers are not only expected to introduce innovations in the form of new technologies, but are even required to have to use them.

Many reports on school evaluations, conducted in the Tadeusz Kościuszko General Secondary School in Pruszków among others, identify the use of the mass media in the form of: educational platforms, social network portals, web portals, as necessary in the process of education. The new media have become “an alternative teacher” (Strykowski, 1996), whose assistance can be used at any moment.

Functioning in the information society poses new challenges for schools, related to preparation of the youth to look critically at information found on the web. The communicated values, in a concentrated dose of countless kilobytes, can change the way of thinking and the perception of the world. This is why common sense and the ability to utilise the values given to us by technological progress are so important. It might seem that teachers, facing the fearless opponent – the Internet, slowly lose their authority and the need for their presence (which, undoubtedly, may be partly true). However, this opinion is not justified, judging by the growing need to use the services of “coaches”. The contemporary youth less and less frequently use traditional teaching aids, re-

placing them with ready-made software found on the Internet. However, education should consist in developing skills and gaining competences in different areas of life, which cannot be fully taught by means of web aids. That is why the contact between teachers and students is especially important. Internet consumes time, which could be spent on direct contact with the teacher, and as a result the advice and instructions communicated at school lose their value. Consequently, the teacher-student relations seem to slowly disappear.

However, a new “occupation” is emerging: facilitator – a person supporting and facilitating social processes, often performing control over problem-solving or decision-making processes of a group (Blanchard, Carew, et al. 2010). The profession of a teacher slowly changes into a form of facilitation. Communication in this form seems to be simplified; thanks to easy access to the Internet (we can now access the Internet even in shopping malls, restaurants, schools and libraries using Wi-Fi connection), it is possible to quickly transfer information and use diverse means of communication. All of the above make education in the cyberspace significantly more attractive and convenient for generation Y.

Another argument for using the mass media in education is relevance of knowledge, which is constantly “refreshed”. Consequently, as compared to traditional books, the Internet becomes a more interesting compendium of knowledge. Teaching by means of the Internet seems to be more active and creative. Communication via electronic means requires preparation, and often creates needs, but also provides us with the possibility to reflect longer on the content we want to post. Therefore, publishing videos on *YouTube* and posts on *Facebook* motivates their author to focus on their content. This motivation is additionally reinforced by the assessment of other Internet users, who continuously arouse creative passion in young people.

The quality of the reception of messages is an aspect that arouses some doubts. Such convenience has its drawbacks, namely, lack of naturalness in interpersonal relations, which cannot be replaced with an Internet relation. Thus, a question arises: what is the value of online communication and is it equally valuable as direct communication, accompanied by eye contact, gestures and non-verbal signs? Considering such platforms as *Skype*, *YouTube*, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, a conclusion can be drawn that a message transferred through the abovementioned platforms is not as limited as it may seem. For instance, if we take into consideration eye contact, then *Skype* allows for maintaining it. Not only can we talk and see the reactions of our interlocutor,

but we can also communicate verbally through the dialog window, where we can enter texts of particular importance, e.g. when talking to a foreigner (we can write the pronunciation of particular words). *Skype* is used this way to learn foreign languages. Language schools more and more often arrange on-line courses, which do not require “face to face” contact. A single traditional education model is currently being abandoned in favour of numerous equivalent forms of education, including on-line education. This phenomenon is presently referred to as “de-schooling” (Home Education in the UK). Another phenomenon is re-schooling (Adams, 2012), which means transforming schools in order to adjust them to the changing conditions of social life. Both these phenomena are commonly used, an example of which is one of language schools: *Teleenglish*, which uses the *Skype* platform and phones for carrying out courses with students. Therefore, it may be concluded that it is teachers who in a way force and mobilise students to have contact with the New Media.

As a result of the generally accessible Internet connection, the cost of knowledge nowadays seems to be significantly reduced. As it turns out, nothing could be further from the truth. Having knowledge and the ability to use it in practice have not lost their value (Nycz, Smok, 2006). Despite the fact that we can now call ourselves an information society, we can observe huge deficits in messages processed by people. Due to the possibility of permanent access to information, people do not see the need to memorise and learn things that can be found in the 21st century knowledge fount – the Internet. It involves a number of hazards, since more and more often we are confronted with the issue of maintaining good relations with others and keeping relationships. Humans would much rather maintain contact with a computer than with another human being. And their state of knowledge is far from ideal.

An example confirming the above opinion is the use of GPS navigation, which is replacing traditional maps. For this reason if the navigation equipment breaks down, a member of generation Y is left helpless, since he cannot use maps in paper form. Thus, a demand emerges for employees having high level of knowledge and the ability to use it in practice. According to the Forbes weekly, the most desired skills on the labour market in 2015 are dominated by communication competencies (Domaradzki, 2014). This demonstrates an increased demand for building relations with clients, subordinates, students, which would affect the quality of interpersonal relations. Therefore, it may be concluded that we experience the phenomenon of “a vicious circle”, since the

labour market continuously affects education, resulting in the trend to quickly increase ICT qualifications.

Thus, it seems that there is no need to treat the Internet as a teachers' enemy, as direct contact remains irreplaceable. It should rather be regarded as a teaching aid and an alternative method for knowledge transfer. In this case, the words of A. Camus: "School prepares children for life in a world that does not exist" appear to be untrue.

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