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The Status of Implementing Media Education
in the Slovak Republic

ABSTRACT:

In Western countries, media education has been implemented into the curriculum for over a dozen decades. In Slovakia, there is no tradition of formal media literacy instruction. However, its implementation has been discussed since the beginning of the 21st century. Recently, several initiatives have been carried out with the aim of implementing the most beneficial media literacy practices in the educational process, including academic discussions; the creation of educational guidelines as a supplement to curriculum and learning materials; the organization of both training courses for elementary teachers and media education courses. Nevertheless, Slovakia still appears to be in its initial stage of the implementation of media education as a subject of study. The main problem is the absence of the independent institution which could be able to coordinate current activities for the purpose of increasing awareness of media literacy. Currently, the extent of media education is insufficient in its role as a cross-curricular subject randomly incorporated into the teaching process of the primary education.

KEYWORDS:

MEDIA EDUCATION, MEDIA LITERACY, MEDIA HABITS, PRIMARY SCHOOLS, STUDENTS, EDUCATIONAL PROCESS, CROSS-CUTTING THEME, COMPULSORY SUBJECT.

A contribution to today's cultural and moral condition of society in our country and in the world is largely caused the media; this notion has been confirmed by several experts in their works (L. Urban et al., 2011 K. E. Van Vonderen , W. Kinnally, 2012 Š. Gero, 2012, H. Pravdová, 2013). W. J. Potter (2012, p. 7) distinguishes four main problems that arise during the contact with the media: "the saturation of information, a false sense of awareness, a false sense of control and false beliefs". For education, whose goal is to achieve media competence, media literacy is an expression used in connection with Media Education. D. Buckingham (2005), as a part of the idea of media education, which takes into consideration the development of the skills of critical understanding of the media and the way it is actively perceived. He has identified four stages in the evolution of media education in the UK: the stage of suppression of media culture and an effort to resist it, the stage of acceptance of popular and media culture, the stage of demystifying of the media and the stage of new approaches. Current educational processes in the field of increasing media literacy include three basic concepts of media education: the concept of the protection of recipients, the concept of media literacy acquisition and the concept of approaches of professionals (D. Bina , 2006).

We have decided to use the term media literacy, since this term appears in documents in European institutions. For example, the European Parliament resolution from December, 16, 2008 on media literacy in a digital world (2008/2129 (INI)) in paragraph 8 states that "media literacy means to have the ability to independent use of different media, to understand various aspects of media and its content and to critically assess as well as to communicate in different contexts, moreover to produce and distribute media content". The document also declares that with a large number of available resources the most important ability is to specifically filter and sort information from the flow of data and images coming from the new media.

The concept of media literacy is predominantly quoted from the general definition, which is the result of the international conference held by The Aspen Institute Wye Centre in 1992: "Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create information with specific outputs and in different formats" (M. CH. Firestone, 1992 In M. Pressley, 2002). Nevertheless, media literacy also indicates "competence of using a variety of media and skill levels and abilities in the use of media devices" (D. Chandler, R. Munday, 2011, p. 265). According to another definition media literacy is about understanding the sources and communication technologies, codes that are used, the production of reports, their selection, as well as the interpretation and implications of these reports (J.S. Baran, K. D. Davis, 2011). But there have always been differences in opinions, for example, whether the increasing of media literacy is going to be conceived as an individual success, or it is going to be a part of social and cultural practices. In other words, how strong emphasis should be placed on media criticism, and whether it is better to achieve media literacy through education or civic initiative (M. Alper, R. Herr-Stephenson, 2013 M. Lincényi, 2013).

Media education in Slovakia, unlike in other countries of the European Union, does not have a tradition. In the 20th century, educators and experts discussed sporadically this topic on scientific forums. At the end of the last century psychologists and sociologists, espe-

cially E. Hradiská, N. Slavíková and S. Brečka, began to warn about the need to of the implementation of media education at the Slovak schools. The last of these experts mentioned above, S. Brečka (1999), as a media expert worked out the first comprehensive publication dealing with issues concerning media education. Eventually, his study became the first Dictionary of Media Communication (Heslár mediálnej komunikácie), which was published in order to increase awareness among the general public about what was happening in the field of media communication. The author of the publication concentrated on analyzing the situation of media education and literacy in the world.

This study offers a descriptive analysis of the implementation of media education in the Slovak Republic with an interpretative reference to its positive and negative aspects. We feel free to present these findings based on practical experience we have gained during our own personal media education at elementary school, as well as from direct observations of how media education is taught at two other elementary schools.

The state of integrating media education in Slovakia

Media education has been a part of research and development tasks of the State Pedagogical Institute (ŠPÚ) since 2003. Ever since this time, a team of experts has been working on the introduction of this subject into the formal education system as a part of a project for experimental verification of this new voluntary and optional subject for primary schools and eight-year high schools. Between the years 2003 – 2005, the Institute participated in the project CESTY - The starting points, objectives and strategies for the implementation of the National Program of Education, in which the proposition incorporating media education, as an innovative element, in the curriculum at primary and secondary levels of education, was included.

In the first stage of solving this problem a team led by Viera Kačinová prepared a proposal for a non-mandatory and optional subject called "Media Education" for the 5th - 9th grade of primary schools and for the 1st - 4th grade of eight-year high schools. The proposal includes methodological materials, curriculum and textbooks. ŠPÚ as a part of the starting points, objectives and concept of the project KEGA in primary and secondary schools, which also participated in the integration of media literacy into the curriculum of Slovak language and literature. Subsequently, in June 2005, the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport (MŠVVaŠ) of the SR approved the project of experimental verification: Media education as a compulsory subject at primary schools and eight-year high schools. At the same time the Ministry approved the request by ŠPÚ within the framework of the addendum of the terms for professional and educational competence of teachers of media education (V. Kačinová et al., 2007). There was also a Manual focused on the issue of media and media education it was published in the academic year 2007/2008 by the Movement of Christian Communities and Children titled My @ media (Us @ Media) (J. Högerová, 2007).

At the university projects were launched with the goal of preparing new teachers to teach media education. In 2007, the Faculty of Mass Media Communication and Advertising (FMK UCM) of University of Cyril and Methodius in Trnava organized a scholastic confer-

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ence "Media Competence in the Information Society" in Smolenica, where, as part of the topic "Media Education" there were thirteen lectures given on the subject (V. Kačinová, 2007). This event highlighted a need of developing a concept for media literacy education at secondary schools within the Slovak Republic, which was ultimately, in 2008 released by FMK UCM in Trnava. The team of authors of the work created a publication containing methodological and organizational procedures and methods of work, including a concept, textbooks and teaching aids for 33 thematic units. A part of the project also entailed the training of secondary school teachers on how to teach media education, which was implemented in three professional courses during the year 2008 (J. Matúš et al., 2008). At the same time, in 2008, within ŠPÚ there was an educational project for a two-year specialized qualification course in collaboration with the Department of Slovak language at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra.

The project Media Education in the Teaching of the Slovak language and Literature was designed for graduates of second-degree university study programmes as a part of the specialization for teaching academic, artistic-education, as well as educational and vocational subjects, who will be then prepared to teach the subject of Media education for an interim period. The first significant step, in 2003, under the present conditions in the Slovak Republic, was the adoption of a classification system for television programs and labelling them with specific graphic symbols in accordance with an initiative by the Council for Broadcasting and Retransmission (RPVR). The Act no. 343/2007 Coll. about the conditions of registration, public distribution and preservation of audiovisual works, multimedia works and sound recordings of artistic performances from June, 20, 2007 under the protection of minors, introduced a single labelling system for audiovisual works, sound recordings of artistic performances, multimedia works, programs and other elements of program service according to age appropriateness in terms of their inaccessibility, suitabi-

> At this time, there is still no textbook, which has been approved by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic for teaching the media education atprimary schools. There are, however, several titles on the topic of media education: Media issues in Catholic Religious Education (G. Pala, 2008), Media Education (T. Zasępa, P. Olekšák, 2008), The Phenomenon of "Tabloid Journalism" in Slovakia (M. Lincényi, M. Kohuťár, 2009).

lity or unsuitability for minors, in age groups up to 7, 12, 15 or 18. (For more see: Law 343/2007). The Rreal implementation of media education, however, occurred on December 16, 2009 , when the Government of the Slovak Republic approved Resolution no. 923 to the Bill of Media Education Concept in the Slovak Republic in the context of lifelong learning. The document defined the limits of the development of a new subject in the future. The concept illustrates the current state of education in the media world in comparison to the conditions in Slovakia. It defines the objectives, strategies and assumptions for the creation of an effective system of media education (Koncepcia, 2009 - The Concept , 2009). The preparation of the document was carried out within the interagency working group of the Ministry of Culture together with the ministry staff and representatives of MŠVVaŠ SR , SPÚ, independent institutions, non-governmental organizations as well as with other independent experts. The concept also includes basic, processed documents from the European Union, the Council of Europe and UNESCO. The necessity to create conditions for the implementation of media education in Slovakia and to encourage the media literacy levels of EU citizens was accelerated by a directive from the European Parliament and the Council no. 2007/65/EC from December, 11, 2007 amending the Directive of the Council 89 on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by the law, other legal regulations or administrative provisions in member states related to the implementation of television broadcasting activities (Audiovisual Services Directive), which has been passed into the law of the SR (Koncepcia 2009 - Concept, 2009) .

A significant advancement in the implementation of this new scholastic subject was brought about, in 2010, by a conference on separate topic of Media Education in an open space, which was attended by representatives of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, university lecturers, teachers and experts from independent organizations. The General Director of the department of media, audiovisual and copyrights of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism stated that in Slovakia there is no research institution with such an autho-

rity and understanding on media and communication technology that could chart chronologically the evolution of the media environment, summarize the current results of partial research projects in the media field and, on the basis of all of this things could anticipate developmental trends and subsequently submit proposals for solutions.

The conference also assured that the aim of the concept of the media education in the Slovak Republic as of December 16, 2009, was the creation of the Centre for Media Education and interdepartmental work group, which would supervise the on-going tasks related to implementation, on the basis of the Government Resolution (N. Slavíková, 2013). This didn't take long and at the beginning of 2011 the Media Literacy Centre IMEC was opened, established by the FMC UCM in Trnava in February 2011. The centre runs has been in operation for only a short period of time so far and so evaluation of its activities would be premature. The academic as well as professional community, however, expect this centre to increase radically activities regarding the implementation of media education in Slovakia.

Developing methodical materials

At this time, there is still no textbook, which has been approved by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic for teaching the media education atprimary schools. There are, however, several titles on the topic of media education: Media issues in Catholic Religious Education (G. Pala, 2008), Media Education (T. Zasępa, P. Olekšák, 2008), The Phenomenon of "Tabloid Journalism" in Slovakia (M. Lincényi, M. Kohuťár, 2009). The secondary schools are doing a little better as they can use the textbook for the 2nd year of high school called "Art and Culture" by the author E. Mistrík (2009), which was approved by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic for a limited period of 5 years.

Teachers of the primary schools, during the school year 2010/2011, were able to utilize a proposal for an optional, elective subject of Media Education for the second year, which was elaborated by a team led by V. Kačinová (2004). The proposal and guidelines included curricula, methodological materials and textbooks for the 5th to 9th grade. From our own research we know that teachers who teach this subject relied on this proposal, which they incorporated and created using their own experience as a base. The curriculum has been developed on the principle of mainstreaming media in each year: in the fifth grade it is television, in the sixth grade it is film and video, in the seventh grade it is auditory media (radio, CD), in the eighth grade it is print media (newspapers, magazines), in the ninth grade it is digital media (internet, CD-ROM, DVD, digital TV). V. Kačinová (2005) sees the advantage of such an arrangement of curriculum as an opportunity to concentrate on one medium. During five years of study pupils should acquire the competence to handle with all forms of media provided, which they would choose in each grade. However, we do not find such a thematic layout of curricula to be appropriate, as it disregards the chronological order of the historical development: books, newspapers, radio, film, television, video, Internet. The inclusion of popular television into education in the fifth grade and film in the sixth grade may attract pupils, but expansion of the important processes of audiovisual media is too difficult for a pupil of the age of 12 to 13.

Methodological materials include starting point, objectives, methodological approach, recommended educational materials and literature. However, they are not feasible, at least, as far as the amount of time necessary is concerned. For example, materials for the fifth grade include items with the following time allotment (# of school lessons): My media biography (3), Basic/essential types of media and their meaning (6), Media in the context of history (4), A journalist's job in various forms of media (5), The characteristics of television compared to other media (4), Television genres, their formulas and conventions (8), How to create a TV show? (6), Types of programs for children and youth on television (6), Our television program (18). (Kačinová, V., methodological materials, 2005). Fifth graders would therefore receive a total of 60 lessons during the school year, precisely two lessons per week. Monitored primary schools, however, have set one lesson per week for a new subject of "Media Education". Methodological materials are also inappropriate in terms of their content. In some topics there are some suggested expressions, which are not accurately correlated to the age of the pupils who are supposed to learn them. Fifth graders at the primary schools should, within the thematic unit "Television genres, their formulas and conventions", learn the difference between reality, fiction and staged reality (V. Kačinová, 2005, methodological materials 5th grade, p. 28). We consider these terms to be difficult to explain to fifth graders. We think that several terms in the methodological guidelines are even complicated for the primary school teachers, who should teach media education after being re-qualified.

Sixth graders at elementary school should, according to the suggestion of methodological guidelines within the thematic unit "Elements of violence in the news", take an evaluative and judgemental approach towards violence in television, radio and printed news (V. Kačinová, 2005, methodological materials 6th grade, p. 35). However, according to our own media literacy research at three primary schools in Bratislava we know that students of the 5th, 7th, 8th and 9th grades have a fundamental problem with naming news and journalistic programs, which is exacerbated by the fact that they do not even know the difference between these two genres.

The methodological guidelines for the 5th and 6th grades contain the explanation of the issue of news and journalistic programs. Suggested textbooks for the 5th grade for example contain the differences in the transfer of information: "The difference between TV and radio from a technical point of view is in the process of signal transduction. During TV broadcasting the images, together with sounds, are transmitted by the air from terrestrial transmitters (terrestrial transmission of television signals), from satellites (satellite broadcasting) or by cable system/network (cable TV).

„Radio spreads words and music via electromagnetic waves, either wirelessly or by wire" (V. Kačinová, textbooks 5th grade, 2005, p. 36). Following the practical experience of teaching this subject, we would like to state that this issue is too difficult to theoretically explain to fifth graders at the elementary school. Seventh and eighth graders understood the whole process after drawing the individual transmission of television signals on the blackboard. We also consider textbooks covering mostly theoretical explanations of problems, discussion questions, tasks, including a minimum number of illustrative examples, as well as practical recreational games, to problematic. Teaching at

Slovak schools is too focused on memorization. Also from the research survey of students´expectations we have learned that students do not want theoretical learning and testing, but rather relaxing and fun lessons. Theoretical explanation of the media is also problematic from the perspective that, as an optional subject, students do not receive a mark for media education, but they are merely evaluated verbally, which does not really motivate the pupil to pay attention or even to learn.

Based on the practical experience of teaching media education at the primary school on Vývojová Street in the city district of Rusovce we feel that it is necessary to state that the experimental suggestion of media education in this form is not suitable for teaching at the second level of the primary school and, furthermore, that it requires further development and finalization. Our findings are confirmed by the fact that all the monitored teachers, who during the school year 2010/2011, taught Media Education, were constantly modifying and correcting the experimental suggestions for media education. In the terms of teaching the subject, they favoured Czech textbooks, as well as their own notes over the textbooks by ŠPÚ.

From the Czech publications, teachers used the textbook series "Media Education" by the authors J. Pospíšil, L. S. Závodná and also "Basics of Media Education" by M. Mičienka and J. Jirák. Both of these titles have been written and published in a modern way. Media education - Methodology (J. Pospíšil, L. S. Závodná, 2010) explains the themes such as: communication, mass communication, journalism and journalistic genres, types of media content, media, media and entertainment, media and advertising, impact reduction and risk of the media, the inner operation of media, media regulation, and new media.

Media education - workbook (J. Pospíšil, L. S. Závodná, 2010) contains solutions to the textbook for media education. The textbook for the subject of Media education includes a variety of examples, tasks and questions that cover all subject matters discussed in the student's textbook. All exercises are, according to the authors, designed to be based on reality as much as possible so they can be used in practice. The correct solutions for all the tasks are listed in the teacher's book.

"Fundamentals of Media Education" (M. Mičienka, J. Jirák, 2007) is a handbook of media education prepared by the company Partner Czech, together with the Centre for Media Studies within the Faculty of Social Studies as a part of a project paid for by the European Social Fund and state budget of the Czech Republic. Methodological material for teaching acquaints pupils and students with the principles of how the media functions, it teaches them a critical approach to the media and provides them with basic media literacy. It is true, however, that there is little consensus among experts in what should be the content of a separate subject "Media Education". Žilková M. (2010) points out that the constant changes and the lack of stability of the subject itself constantly affect its contents.

Media education in the educational process of the school system

Currently, media education is a cross-sectional topic within a number of established compulsory subjects. Based on the decision of MŠVVaŠ SR Media education can be taught as a separate optional elective subject. From practical experience, however, this solu-

tion appears to be insufficient. The primary school Principals do not include this subject among the optional, elective subjects, since that means only extra work for them. An optional subject, again, has the risk of carrying lesser weight and importance and it is consequently less effective with the pupils.

The inclusion of media education among the compulsory subjects in Slovakia is currently not realistic. This is why several experts have been thinking about exactly within which compulsory subject media education should be taught. Another problem is the lack of teachers for teaching media education. Many departments at the universities as well as ŠPÚ and methodical centres are trying to solve this problem with a variety of seminars and workshops on the topic of media education for teachers who are interested in learning the issues.

The completion of these courses authorizes teachers to teach media education across the board. M. Žilková (2010) considers this approach unsystematic, given that it does not guarantee nationwide education in the field of media. The situation changed in March 2011, and since then teachers have had the opportunity to gain approbation and the specialization to teach media education as a separate subject at the secondary schools. FMK UCM in Trnava opened the first training program focused on issues of media education that is accredited by the Accreditation Council MŠVVaŠ SR. Graduating from the program, which includes 240 lessons, allows teachers at secondary schools to obtain full qualification to teach a separate subject "Media Education".

Potential for the development of media education in the primary schools in Slovakia

Implementation of media education at the primary schools should continue. From the position of a university teacher who has taught media education at the elementary school for one year, I would like to suggest the following changes for the future:

- There's a lack of sufficient information about media education within mass media, and so many parents, as well as some teachers, are sceptical and hesitant to accept media education, which then influences the students´ perception.

It would also be appropriate to revise the experimental curricula, methodological texts and textbooks for teaching media education by ŠPÚ, especially with the help of primary school teachers, who are able to adjust the curriculum for the pupils of the second grade of primary school better than university teachers, respectively professionals from MŠVVaŠ SR. During the lessons, pupils can be motivated with teaching aids.

An approved textbook and exercise book would be appropriate for the proper teaching of media education, as proved in the Czech Republic. Experts predict that the prognosis for media education development could be quite favourable, as long as some specific theoretical concepts, plans and suggestions are put into practice. Dana Petranová (2011, p. 2011, p. 82) reports that there must be a conscious effort to incre-

ase, at a high, professional level, the media literacy of the teachers themselves with the aid of accredited educational programs for "media education" in the form of qualified study programs.

"Insufficient cooperation among the institutions that are more or less professionally engaged in media education is a major shortcoming in the field of media education in Slovakia."

• Media education should, be at least, coordinated by the Ministry of Education, if not obligatorily included as part of the mandatory, elective subjects.

Due to its practical specifics, teaching media education should be carried out in groups of up to 15 pupils. It would be well combined with teaching ethics, art, and possibly religious education.

Conclusion

In the conclusion, it is clear that the current state of the extent of teaching media education in primary schools, the given range of implemented activities, is not sufficient. During the school year 2010/2011, in the capital city of the Slovak Republic Media Education was taught only in the 7th grade at three elementary schools.

Above all, we see as a problem the fact that activities supporting media literacy are not uniform since each institution dealing with media education implements their own activities on their own terms. During the introduction of this new subject there has been no uniform professional or academic community, and so the basic reserves in communication are only among MŠVVaŠ itself and the Ministry of Culture during this introduction of media education in schools. Universities train and educate teachers for Media Education on their own and even though ŠPÚ has prepared a curriculum, these activities have not been coordinated. The situation could have improved after the formation of the Centre for Media Literacy IMEC, which was established in March 2011. However, we see its independence as a problem, since it has been an institution established by the University. So far, however, it is too soon for deeper analysis of the activities of the IMEC centre.

We do not foresee an improvement in the situation of the current state of the implementation of media education in Slovak Education system, due to the fact that most directors of primary and secondary schools are not taking any of the necessary steps beyond what the law requires, since they are having currently enough existential problems. In our opinion the development of Media Education at schools can be carried out by radical change in the approach of its implementation. The easiest option is to introduce Media Education as a compulsory subject within the educational process. Introducing Media Education as an elective subject, respectively, at least as a clearer part of a specific compulsory subject would help. For these variations, however, it will be first necessity to obtain sufficient public support for Media Education. ∎

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