ІННОВАЦІЙНІ ТЕХНОЛОГІЇ ДОШКІЛЬНОЇ ТА ЗАГАЛЬНОЇ ОСВІТИ

УДК [004.738.5+654.19]-043.2 : 613.955

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CARTOON HEROES AS HEALTH BEHAVIOUR MODELS

Transformations in the sphere of culture cause that today children's contact with television and other electronic media starts early, takes place on a daily basis, is permanent, and, with time, lasts many hours [8, p. 213]. TV programs are frequently viewed by children without proper supervision, whereas the contents of popular cartoons pose a hazard to physical as well as mental health [4, p. 235]. Psychologists, educators, parents ask themselves a question: How to protect children against the negative effects of television, diverting their minds towards health cultivating behaviours? [3, p. 225].

The most frequent aim of theoretical deliberations and results of research on the impact of contemporary media on the child's personality and behaviour is to identify threats ensuing from watching television, playing computer games, using the Internet, and even a cell phone. The media may affect the individual's behaviour, and, in some cases, the individual's identification with the film characters. Sometimes it is possible to notice a similarity between one's own problems and life situations and those of the program or film character. Meeting of people's needs by providing information, evoking emotions, motivating to be active as well as offering entertainment is becoming the media's role [6, p. 155 – 159].

Media's impact – source of threats to child's health and development

If children are not prepared for skilful, selective use of television or the Internet, a risk of negative impact may occur – i.e. development or intensification of asocial, consumptive attitudes.

Many educators, psychologists and even parents see television programs – even those intended for children – as a source of aggressive behaviours, addictions, premature sexual initiation, deterioration of emotional ties and social relations. Moreover, passive spending of leisure time fosters the development of the problem of excessive weight and obesity in ever younger patients [12, p. 155 – 175].

Jadwiga Izdebska lists indicators which make it possible to determine improper use of television, computer or the Internet by a child. They include: too long a time devoted to the media (over 2 hours a day), improper time of the day for children (after 8 PM or early in the morning before going to school), type and content of the programs, games, websites, showing violence, as well as a non-critical reception of media messages. Incorrect relations between a child and the media may take place not only in the sphere of health but cover its social relations, organization of the day, which may lead to a

reduction of time which could be devoted to compulsory tasks, hobbies, reading of books, motoric outdoor games or sleep. Talking about the health aspect, radiation emitted by the TV set or computer monitor should also be mentioned. Looking at the monitor or sitting in one position for a long time may cause: myopia, irritation, stinging of the eyes, changes in colour perception as well as changes in the skeletal system: postural defects, dexterity limitations, decrease in muscle mass, neck and back pain [8, p. 214 – 215].

Other consequences of spending time in front of the TV may be: fatigue, isolation or aversion to performing tasks which require mental effort [15, p. 39 – 41].

From the psychology's point of view negative consequences of using the media have been pointed out for years by Maria Braun – Gałkowska. Among the media threats to the child's development she indicates erosion of imagination, development of „to have" attitudes, increased aggressiveness and alienation from the real world [1, p. 79 – 81]. Together with a group of co-workers from the Catholic University of Lublin, Maria Braun – Gałkowska negatively assesses American or Japanese cartoons readily watched by children, suggesting, at the same time, the positive impact of family films (for instance: „Full House", „7th Heaven") and television programs for children promoting Catholic values.

The negative impact of the media on children may be prevented by observing the principles of conscious use of television:
1. Every TV set can not only be turned on but also turned off.
2. It is a good idea to browse through TV listings placed in magazines, especially to read reviews published in them.
3. Television programs should be treated like other consumer goods, choosing the most valuable ones.
4. We pay for watching television not only with our time but also by paying subscription. This means that we have a right to complain about harmful and destructive programs.
5. Television may foster family integration by watching programs together and discussing what was seen. Such behaviours are particularly beneficial to children who frequently need for the scenes to be explained and clarified to them.
6. Some psychologists emphasize the therapeutic use of television - it does not always have to pose a health hazard.
7. Media education may contribute to the expansion of competencies related to the use of the media. Children may switch from a passive recipient to an active creator of media reality. Creative use of the media may become a means of achieving numerous educational goals [2, p. 34].

Unfavourable impact of the media on the child's development is also a subject of colloquial discussions devoted to education. Researchers dealing with the media emphasize difficulties with the methodology of research on the

social impact of the media, which are a source of many simplifications and overinterpretations of conclusions.

Pedagogic media–child relation – methodological approach

Jadwiga Izdebska presented two key methodological orientations in pedagogical research on the media. The first one focuses on the **effects of the media on a child**, which is treated as an object of those effects, whose consequences are changes in the psyche, interpersonal relations, daily behaviours, ways of spending time. The other orientation originated from criticism of perceiving the media–child relation as being instrumental, one-sided. In this relation the child is the passive party, subordinated to the media. The alternative methodological orientation treats the **child as an active learning subject**, deriving experience from the media. In this concept the child is not an object manipulated by the media. What is important are the contents of the media messages which a child receives in an active manner. Media education supports the process of deriving benefits from the media, while parents act as the medium in the child-media relation [9, p. 36 – 44].

Jadwiga Izdebska, analyzing the pedagogical child–media relations, uses the term „media childhood". The electronic media area constitutes an important educational environment, a proof of which is the time devoted to them by children between 5 and 12 years, which, on average, amounts to 3.5 – 4 hours a day. Based on research conducted in Poland as well as abroad, she developed an integrated model of media effects, which takes into account the development possibilities and opportunities as well as threats ensuing from media childhood [7, p. 205 – 210].

[Fig. 1. Media childhood – opportunities and threats to development and education. Source: Izdebska J. (2005), Dzieciństwo przed szklanym ekranem telewizora i komputera – nowe jego oblicze (w): Izdebska J., Sosnowski T. (red.): Dziecko i media elektroniczne – nowy wymiar dzieciństwa, Trans Humana Białystok, s. 206].
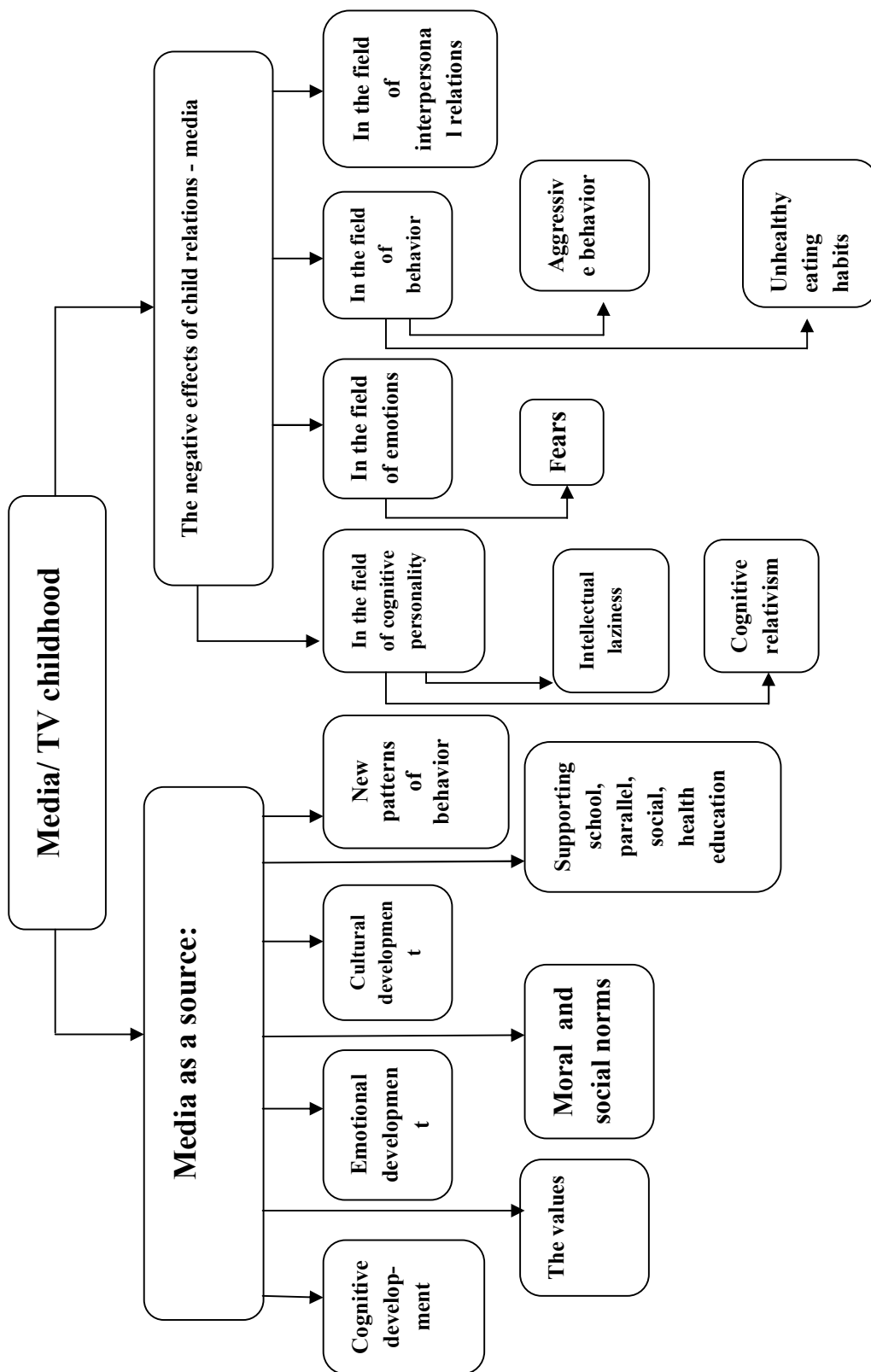
The threats associated with the media's impact are largely owed to improper use thereof. Television, the Internet cannot be treated as evil „in itself", lack of competencies in this regard [7, p. 208]. It is the parents, educators, teachers who are responsible for proper use of the media. Media education thus constitutes a not less important area than patriotic and religious education, fulfilment of the school obligation, vocational training. Insufficient competencies in using the media may also be a cause of threats to the development and education in the health area. The negative impact of the media on health may be associated with discrepant information about a healthy lifestyle. Television and the Internet propagate discrepant views expressed by different „experts" regarding vaccination of children, beneficial or harmful aspects of drinking milk, or using different diets. **Cognitive relativism** associated with an enormous quantity of information flowing from the media constitutes one of the threats to the health of children and youths. The media may also have an adverse impact on the **emotional development**. An example of that may be anxieties caused by watching TV programs, films, which children do not fully understand. Sometimes these can be programs intended for children, in which it is difficult to comprehend relations between fiction and reality. The harmful impact of the media also appears in the **sphere of behaviours**. Young media recipients may model aggressive behaviours of children's idols. Children which spend a lot of time in front of the computer or TV devote less attention to **interpersonal relations**, which has a negative influence on their social development.

Cartoon heroes as a threat and challenge in health education
Research conducted among 120 6-year old children from Lublin's nursery schools has shown that after coming home they play with toys (67% of respondents), watch TV (64%), play computer games (36%). As regards television, the respondents usually watch cartoons (76%), less frequently sports, entertainment or news programs. The most famous TV heroes include: Batman – chosen by 37% of the respondents, Superman – (14%), cartoon characters (49%). The children have also indicated that they like characters such as: Simba from „The Lion King", Shrek, Harry Potter, Spiderman, Barbi from „Barbi as Rapunzel", Cinderella, Rudolph The Red-nosed Reindeer, Bloom and Stella from the „Winx Club". Nursery school aged children most frequently identified themselves with animé characters, with boys identifying themselves with masculine characters, mainly with unrealistic and negative characteristics (Spiderman, Bionicle, Batman, Dexter, Pokemons) and girls identifying themselves with realistic and positive characters [13, p. 97 – 99].

It should be noted that the popularity of cartoon characters and the associated advertisements lasts longer than just the pre-school period. The influence of the characters may hide behind children's magazines. Such research is presented by Małgorzata Lisowska – Magdziarz [11, p. 59 – 64]. Girls preferred the "Witch" (bi-weekly magazine „Czarodziejki W.I.T.C.H."),

monthly magazine „Zabawy i marzenia z Barbie". Illustrated press was less popular among boys.

The media offer new possibilities of supporting different areas of development and education, also by influencing the system of standards and values. Moreover, thanks to contemporary media new family, school and extracurricular education tools are appearing. Besides that, the media mechanisms of modelling and social impact constitute a source of patterns of behaviour.

One of significant areas of education supported by the media is health. In the **cognitive sphere** television as well as the Internet constitute an important source of knowledge about a healthy lifestyle. In addition to television programs and Internet portals emphasizing the importance of physical activeness, promoting healthy eating habits, pro-health contents can be found, among other things, in news or breakfast television shows. The healthy lifestyle is also being promoted through social advertising, i.e. product placement. In this way Polish viewers learn that drinking mineral water and fruit juices is healthy, that it is a good idea to drink milk every day or eat five portions of fruits and vegetables. Some of those advertisements are specifically targeted at children. Pro-health content can also be found in cartoons. Characters from popular cartoons for girls (Barbie, witches from the Winx Club) encourage children to do sports, live in harmony with nature, to eat healthy food. Many parents, psychologists and educators are undeservedly accused of only promoting attractive looks, a symbol of which is unnaturally slim figure. In the **sphere of social and emotional development** television programs for children emphasize the importance of close ties. Friendship and readiness to offer help, altruism, respect for the elderly, helping weaker ones is promoted by heroes of cartoons for girls as well as boys (Superman, Batman). Children's idols also influence the system of values and moral standards of young viewers. Critics of cartoon heroes accuse them of having a too provocative appearance, which fosters erosion of those characters (Barbie, Wings), using force or promoting a macho image among boys (Superheroes, for instance, Batman, Superman). It should be noted that there is no guarantee of socialization of positive standards and values promoted by the media, or **modelling of behaviours** in an automatic way. Media, acting as a means of education, cannot overtake the educational role of parents and teachers but can only support the process of educating children and youths. Toys associated with cartoon characters may play a certain educational role. An example can be the Barbie dolls, which show children the health problems of their peers. An overweight Barbie serves as a warning against eating too many sweets or too much fast food, a pregnant Barbie may serve as a didactic tool in sex education, and Barbie with cancer may easily demonstrate the problems of seriously ill peers. Parents, educators and teachers may utilize the natural need to have fun and interest in cartoon heroes to perform various educational tasks associated, for instance, with health education. Cartoons do not have to be educational films. However, conversations about their heroes, role playing,

artwork showing positive personal traits and behaviours of the idols may pose an interesting alternative to traditional methods of promoting a healthy lifestyle among children and youths.

Cartoons, also those containing brutal content, have helped diffuse emotions and control aggression for ages. This catharsis theory, controversial to many psychologists and educators, is present in the discussion on whether the negative behaviours of cartoon heroes are adopted by children automatically or whether they may have a positive contribution to dealing with stress [16, p. 483].

Cartoon heroes may become one of elements of advertising activities. Many products are being sold on the Polish market, associated with the cartoon characters (Barbie, Winx, Batman, Spiderman and others). These include food products (for instance: juice in cartons, candies, chocolate) as well as clothing, school articles (backpacks, pencil cases, notebooks), toys and colouring books, cosmetics and other ones (for instance: bed linen for girls and boys, adhesive bandages sold at pharmacies).

John Lenardon points out the threats ensuing from possible contact with contents inappropriate for children. He wrote about the Internet as an extremely precious source of information but, at the same time, he indicates that while browsing the Net there is a risk of children coming into contact with materials such as:

„- pornography,
- news published by organizations spreading hatred,
- cyberbullying,
- identity theft,
- gambling,
- solicitation by adults,
- improper forms of advertising" [10, p. 22 – 23].

The author adds that the child does not have to seek such contents. It may come across them by accident while browsing the Internet looking for music or films [10, p. 140 – 141].

Conclusions

Frequent contact of the child with the media seems unavoidable today but the family, in particular, should pay attention to the choice of television programs and films as well as the type of information coming from the Internet. The art of choosing and differentiating messages that are valuable and constructive should be consciously shaped by the child's environment. This is the more so important that the child creating an image of reality may rely mainly on the image being conveyed by the media, and that image varies a lot, sometimes mixing what is valuable and precious with what is of little cognitive or moral value.

The child has difficulties noticing and understanding the differences between the real and cartoon world. The child does not always agree with the fact that in the film its favourite character is able to do different things while a toy brought home is static. Sometimes the child has problems with anticipating

the consequences of an individual attempt to imitate its brave hero, for instance, a hero jumping from high places to rescue someone. This may arouse a dissonance, and even a sense of inferiority when comparing oneself with the cartoon hero who has many commonly approved traits. It pays off to teach children to interpret the contents of various messages flowing from the electronic media and to turn those media into an element supporting the educational process and not an element that disturbs it.

The strength and bravery of boys' heroes and the beauty and subtleness of some of the girls' heroesses can be considered in terms of education understood as preparation for playing social roles associated with gender. Cartoon characters may either facilitate or disturb the child's understanding what the given role in specific social conditions involves. Talking to children and explaining reality to them may facilitate the process of preparing for life in the society.

It is necessary to be aware of the threats and to exercise parental control in order to be able to prevent the occurrence of factors which may disturb the physical and mental health of the child. Other educators may have their share in conducting media education in the contemporary world. This means an opportunity to use the positive aspects of the media, for instance, to encourage and inspire others to take steps promoting human health and development, to provide knowledge and show patterns of desired behaviours, for instance, pro-health behaviours [14, p. 221 – 226] and to ensure that the patterns evoke a desire to imitate, i.e. to assimilate oneself with the model, for instance, in terms of appearance, beliefs, way of expressing oneself [2, p. 16 – 17]. It would be a good idea to emphasize proper behaviour in cartoon heroes or to create more cartoons where the heroes will become a model for the children to follow.

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Бучак А., Самуйло М. А., Самуйло В. А. Мультиплікаційні герої як моделі здорової поведінки

Вплив засобів масової інформації на психіку, здоров'я і поведінку дитини, як правило, оцінюється негативно. Дослідження, проведені фахівцями в галузі психології, зміцнення здоров'я, освіти, охорони здоров'я освіти, показав, що навіть, здавалося б, безневинні оповідання для дітей можуть сприяти розвитку проблем з фізичним здоров'ям (дефекти осанки, проблеми із зором, нездорове харчування), звикання до телевізора, агресивна поведінка, труднощі з розрізненням вимислу від дійсності. У сучасному вихованні дітей важко усунути ефекти телебачення, Інтернету і комп'ютерних ігор. У цьому випадку, може бути, це було б гарною ідеєю використовувати ЗМІ для формування здоров'язберігаючої поведінки. Однин з найбільш важливих освітніх механізмів є моделювання. Популярні герої мультфільмів можуть стати позитивним прикладом у процесі формування здорової поведінки.

Ключові слова: здорова поведінка, вплив засобів масової інформації, медіаосвіта, моделювання.

Бучак А., Самуйло М. А., Самуйло В. А. Мультипликационные герои как модели здорового поведения

Влияние средств массовой информации на психику, здоровье и поведение ребенка, как правило, оценивается негативно. Исследования, проведенные специалистами в области психологии, укрепления здоровья, образования, здравоохранения образования, показали, что даже, казалось бы, невинные рассказы для детей могут способствовать развитию проблем с физическим здоровьем (дефекты осанки, проблемы со зрением, нездоровое питание), привыкание к телевизору, агрессивное поведение, трудности с различением вымысла от действительности. В современном воспитании детей трудно устранить эффекты телевидения, Интернета и компьютерных игр. В этом случае, может быть, это было бы хорошей идеей использовать СМИ для формирования здорового поведения. Одно из наиболее важных образовательных механизмов является моделирование. Популярные герои мультфильмов могут стать положительным примером в процессе формирования здорового поведения.

Ключевые слова: здоровое поведение, влияние средств массовой информации, медиаобразование, моделирование.

Buchak A., Samuylo M. A., Samuylo B. A. Cartoon heroes as health behaviour models

Media's impact on children's psyche, health and behaviour is usually evaluated in negative terms. Research conducted by specialists from the field of psychology, health promotion, pedagogy, health education has shown that even apparently harmless cartoons may contribute to physical health disorders (postural defects, vision problems, unhealthy eating habits), addiction to television, aggressive behaviours, problems with distinguishing fiction from reality. In modern child raising it is difficult to eliminate the effects of television, the Internet and computer games. In this case maybe it would be a good idea to use the media to shape pro-health behaviours. One of the most important educational mechanisms is modelling. Popular cartoon heroes may become positive models in the process of shaping health behaviours.

Key words: health behaviours, impact of the media, media education, modelling.