

MEDIA UPBRINGING IN A FAMILY: A TASK FOR MODERN PARENTS

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Children in society of information grows up in environment full of information and media. As the development of media competence must be started in early childhood, responsibility about such relevant questions as media education and upbringing, must undertake a family. There are three main parental mediation strategies or methods of media upbringing what are used in families: active mediation, restrictive mediation and co-using. This article provides an insight about the concept of parental mediation and results of the pilot research where one of the objectives was to determine tendencies that dominate in the families of Latvia do to parental mediation.

Keywords: family, media pedagogy, methods of media upbringing, parental mediation

Media is multifunctional: next to informative, entertaining, communicative, and ideological function also educating and upbringing function is mentioned (Кириллова, 2005). Considering the fact, that children in society of information grows up in environment full of information and media, it becomes clear that media has a strong meaning in children education and upbringing processes and accordingly, they largely determine nowadays children socialization. A field of pedagogy as media pedagogy deals with research of these questions.

In 2000th annual report of Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Culture and Education on media pedagogy and education is emphasized, that the Europe democracy has many ways and means how to deal with challenges, created by volatile society. Today`s situation clearly indicates, that it is urgently necessary to develop as much as possible effective activities, that would advance active, critical and intelligent media usage, in other words – necessary to develop media pedagogy (Isohookana-Asunmaa, 2000).

Statistic data of LR testifies that the biggest media consumption is directly at home and a household, with children, often is a computer and a connection to internet. Helen Nixon (1998) interprets it, that nowadays understanding about good upbringing in a family or good educational process in school pretty often is reduced till the level of providing technology (Nixon, 1998). Providing a household with a computer and internet connection often becomes as symbolic statement for nowadays upbringing (Cawson, Haddon & Miles, 1995).

Latvian educational system does not foresee educational subject as media teaching, attention turned to questions on media education is small. Informatics is taught only from 5th class of elementary school. Since the

developing of media competence must be started in early childhood, responsibility about such relevant questions as media education and upbringing, must undertake a family. If in industrial society, responsibility on child`s preparing to life went from family to educational institutions (Rubenis, 2004), then in information society, in great extent, it returns at home in family (Buckingham & Scanlon, 2003). Even parents workplaces, thanks to the information and communication technology connection to internet, in great extent from factories and bureaus returns to home (Ēriksens, 2005). Parents are becoming their children media educators (Buckingham & Scanlon, 2003).

Problem and context of the research

Problem of the research marks in many aspects are:

- 1) as the information and communication technology evolution has been fast, today`s parents have not a derived experience in media upbringing field from their own parents;
- 2) children of the information society, unlike from parents, are grown up in environment of media and often knows the usage of media better than their parents. That creates a contradiction in traditional upbringing model, what up to now was supported on hierarchic pedagogic relationship between adults and children.

A fact must be considered, that media offers different models of behaviour and children reacts on them differently. Sometimes they become good, sometimes harms, sometimes stays without consequences (Baacke, 1997). Children and media communication process is not unambiguous; therefore active participation from parents is so necessary in this process. Many authors draws attention on the great importance of parents in media upbringing (Browne, 1999; Buckingham & Scanlon, 2003; DeGaetano, 2004; Masterman, 1997; Nathanson, 1999, 2001; Potter, 2008; Prensky, 2006, 2010; Six, 1995; Strasburger, Wilson & Jordan, 2009). Almost everyone, who goes in details in media pedagogy questions, marks, that exactly a family is responsible about child`s habit creation of media usage un child`s development of media competence.

At the same time researches about media upbringing and education process in a family are comparatively few. If the research is made in the family, then, mostly, the main objective is to find out how often, at what age and what media children use, but rarely study aim is to find out the practice of the parents media upbringing. This is confirmed by Kelly Mendoza (2009), indicating that there is a little research about parents` strategies on children's media competence development, and whether parents even think in such categories. Mendoza notes that most of the recommendations, which so far have addressed to parents in connection of children and the media, advise to carefully control children's use of media, to minimize the negative effects. But there are relatively few recommendations, which supportively thinks about children strengthen, suggesting stimulating children development of media competence (Mendoza, 2009). Questions in this context is activated, what media upbringing methods parents use, with what media upbringing problems parents face, whether and what kind of assistance are them necessary.

Media upbringing methods or parental mediation strategies

Family is the first media upbringing institution. Almost everyone who immerses in the media pedagogy issues notes that exactly the family is primarily responsible for the child's habits of media use and development of the child's media competence.

It is clear that families have different habits of media usage and pedagogical techniques of media upbringing. There are families with strict rules of media usage and those which pay a little attention to what media, how often and how long children are using (Roberts, Foehr & Rideout, 2005). Studies about media upbringing in the family, focuses on parental media upbringing methods or mediation strategies research in practice. The concept mediation in this context includes the idea of parents as key intermediaries or mediators of a child and media relations (Nathanson, 1999, 2001). Parental mediation covers any strategy that parents use to control, manage or interpret media content for their children (Warren, 2001).

Initially, about the parental mediation speaks exactly in television viewing context, emphasizing importance of parental mediation on reducing negative effects. Mediation is discussed as parent's instrument to provide child's physical, psychological and emotional health (Livingstone, 2002; Mendoza, 2009). Later appears even a thought, that parents and children mediation in time of watching television marks parent's potential not only reducing negative effects, but even creating a positive (Nathanson, 1999; 2001).

First tries to define mediation strategies or dimensions are dated by year 1982, dividing three mediation dimensions: 1) restrictive, 2) evaluative and 3) unfocused (Bybee, Robinson & Turow, 1982).

In further research, in connection directly with watching television, dominates three-dimensional mediation model like this (Nathanson, 1999, 2001; Nathanson, Botta, 2003):

- 1) restrictive mediation – parents restricts children watching on television, establishing rules;
- 2) co-viewing – parents and children watch television together, but do not discuss the plot;
- 3) active mediation – parents discuss seen on television.

In connection with playing of video games, similar mediation strategies are proposed “active mediation, restrictive and co-playing” (Nikken & Jansz, 2006). S. Livingstone and E. J. Helsper (2008) suggest generalizing mediation dimensions, referring them to full media spectrum. Thus, active mediation involves negotiation about what children have read, seen, heard. Active mediation provides both educational guidance and critical comments on the media message content or effects. Restrictive mediation means setting rules, which restrict a usage of diverse kind of media. Restrictions may apply to usage of media time, location or content, such as aggressive or pornographic media reports. Media co-using means that parents are near, while the child is using media or parents use media together with a child, thereby achieving common experience, but without conversations about media message, content or effects (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008).

It is important to note that these mediation dimensions or strategies are not mutually exclusive, nor does necessarily include. Active mediation does not always mean that parents use media together with children. Parental conversations with a child can be before or after media usage. It is clear that media usage together doesn't mean that it automatically is active mediation, because conversations between parents and children, cannot happen, what is

relevant in active mediation (Nathanson, 2001; Vittrup, 2009). Many factors mark in the research, which influence parents' choice on mediation strategy (Mendoza, 2009; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008):

- 1) *Parents attitude to media is one of most important arguments* (Warren, 2001). Research testifies, that often not so much financial possibilities, but exactly parents attitude against media determines, if a full media spectrum is available in household or not. For example, in families where parents believe that the computer numbs thinking, newest technologies are not acquired (Livingstone, 2007). The higher the parents' negative attitude towards the media, the higher the children's level of control of media usage appears (Woodard & Gridina, 2000).
- 2) *Parents attitude towards the children*. Some parents believe that their children themselves are able to choose the most appropriate media content, so their role as mediators is not so important. In contrast, parents who believe that children are not able to select the appropriate media content by themselves, emphasizes their need for mediation (Livingstone, 2007).
- 3) *Age of the children*. As younger the child, as often and more effective mediation from parents. By growing up, parental mediation role reduces (Nathanson, 1999, 2001; Livingstone, 2007).
- 4) *Child's gender*. Parents believe that mediation is needed more for girls than boys (Weaver & Barbour, 1992; Eastin, Greenberg & Hofschire, 2006).
- 5) *Number of media and location*. For example, the fact that the nursery often had become a multimedia room, has a significant impact on parental mediation options and strategies (Livingstone, 2002).
- 6) *Approaches and aims of media upbringing*. If the parents aim is to develop children media competence then choice of mediation strategies is different than if the aim is to protect from media (Livingstone, 2007).

Mediation strategies are not unequivocal in their created effects (Nathanson, 1999), however in general some tendencies draws up. Media co-using enhance children happiness, because children likes to operate together with parents and that unites the family. On the other hand, fact, that the plot is not discussed can create growth of negative media effect in children. For example in cases, when media reports contain violence, aggression and pornography, media usage together with parents without any discussions, can create a positive approval to transfer such media content in real life (Nathanson, 1999). It is noted that this type of mediation strategy in general is not focused on children's development of media competence, because it does not provide a critical reflection (Austin, et al., 1999).

Restrictive mediation strategy is based on the protective or protectionism media upbringing approach (Mendoza, 2009). Within this mediation strategy parents can fully forbid to use any of the media or restrict the time, place or content. Often, parents have the idea that banning children from using the media, they automatically meet the good, responsible parent image. Their research reflects the conflict between parents and children statements - often the parents indicate that they are limiting children use of media more than it appears in children's responses (Buckingham, 1993; Livingstone, 2007). Restrictive mediation may result in children as effect of "forbidden fruit", which is reflected in the children's perseverance to bypass parents settled rules (Buckingham, 1993). Studies have shown that this mediation strategy is used most often with younger children and with girls more than boys

(Buckingham, 1993; Nathanson, 1999). This mediation is supportable, if it is related on restricting inadequate media content for children, for example, violence, aggression or pornography. The mediation strategy in its extreme form, when the child is denied to access the media in full, cannot be accepted, because it does not contribute children's media competence. Restrictive mediation for parents pretty often seems to be the simplest and most convenient way to regulate children's and media ambiguous relationship, because it does not require particularizing and active participation in upbringing process.

As K. Mendoza pointed out, parental involvement and children's media relations with the active mediation assistance marks the highest potential in children's media competence development (Mendoza, 2009).

Active mediation means discussions, plot explanation, answering to questions. Theoretically active mediation includes three task groups: 1) categorization (example, whether and how media contents reflect reality), 2) confirmation (example, confirmation or condemnation of media contents), 3) improving (emphasizing of necessary information and bonding with other extra information) (Vittrup, 2009).

Methodology and execution of the pilot research

In order to find out what tendencies exist in the application of media upbringing methods or mediation strategies in the families of Latvia, from March 2011 till July 2011 a small pilot project was carried out.

Quantative data collection method was used in the research. In order to measure mediation strategies inventory questionnaire was structured from three parts each measuring one of the types of mediation strategy. Each scale consisted of 20 arguments that can be evaluated in scale 1 - 6 where 1 means 'never true' and 6 'always true'. Internal consistency of questionnaire was tested using Chronbach's alpha method, for all scales results was satisfactory and allowed further analysis of those factors. Detailed demographical information was collected in order to better describe mediation strategies and research findings.

Research basis: families that have children of age 1 to 12. In total 20 parents agreed to participate in this study resulting sample total of 20 respondents. Parent's age varies from 26 to 40 years old, both males and females from different social and geographical parts of Latvia. Data were collected on self-response paper based questionnaires, data analysed using SPSS Statistics program.

The results of the pilot study show average scores for mediation strategies as follows: co-using 3.23; restrictive 3.51 and active 4.01. For whole sample active mediation scores are higher than for co-using and restrictive scores. However there are no standardized scores to compare with, it can be hypothesized that active mediation strategy dominates in Latvian culture.

When comparing mediation strategies (using independent samples T-test method) with parent's gender males showed statistically significant ($t=-2.58$; $p>0.05$, $n=20$) lower scores for restrictive strategies (males: 2.84; females: 3.79) and slightly higher for active (males: 4.15 females: 3.95) and co-using (males: 3.39 females: 3.16) strategies. Due to restrictions of this study in terms of small sample size this conclusion can be analysed as tendency that needs to be evaluated in larger sample.

Statistically significant correlation using Pearson's correlation method was found between co-using scores and active strategies scores ($r=0.52$, $n=20$, $p>0.05$) for whole sample. This means that in present strategies of

tested respondents both co-using and active mediation strategies are rather used together or shows similar patterns in behaviour of parents. Restrictive strategy is rather opposite technique.

Also weak correlation was found between child's age and co-using strategy ($r=0.30$) and active strategy ($r=0.29$) and between parent's age and active mediation strategy ($r=0.29$); negative correlation between parent's age and restrictive mediation scores ($r=-0.39$). Those correlations are not statistically significant in tested sample, but additional testing in larger sample is necessary. Larger sample also can lead research to clarify insignificant correlations and differences in present data.

Statistically significant ($t=-2.23$; $p>0.05$, $n=20$) higher scores for active mediation strategy was found for families with more than one children (4.39) than for those with one children (3.70). This can be explained as parents with more than one child have more knowledge of parenting and are more sophisticated with their actions as they tend to use more active mediation strategies. This finding can be related to previously mentioned weak correlation between child's age and active mediation strategy used. In order to establish scientific model for these correlations a larger sample is necessary.

Conclusions

The study revealed that most actual mediation strategy for tested sample is active way of mediation that means parents are willing to actively take part in child's media experience and support them with available knowledge in particular media.

As the pilot study revealed several tendencies in data there are clear future research goals and methodology. It is suggested to validate parental mediation strategy inventory questionnaire to adjust used arguments and test its validity for broader use. By expanding sample size there can be set standards for different population groups for mediation strategies that can be used in future as a reference point. Suggested research sample should include data from both parents as the study showed differences in parent's gender related to mediation strategy used. It should also include data about all children in family as there was slight correlation with child's age and mediation strategies. It is unclear for the moment does the parent's mediation strategies differ for younger and older children or are the same.

In extension of this research there should be also considered measures of media used at home as parental mediation strategies can vary for different media sources. Also parent's lifelong experience with different media types must be measured as it dictates ones attitude and knowledge about particular media source. Even more tendencies can be found in family mediation strategies if grandparents and siblings were tested for media literacy and mediation strategies as parents aren't the only persons who interact with children in their media experience at home and family is rather a system than a one way interaction. As mentioned above children sometimes have more experience and knowledge in some forms of media than the parents do. In those cases mediation strategies can work differently as stated.

It is predicted based on these findings that significant gender differences exist in mediation strategies both in parents and children genders. Thus it can be valuable to form future research sample relative to population distribution in terms of gender distribution.

It is hypothesized that parental mediation strategies vary depending from child's age. More extensive study must be accomplished to gain strength in these arguments.

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