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PREVENTION OF CHILDREN'S ADDICTION TO COMPUTER GAMES IN THE PROGRAM ASSUMPTIONS AND IN SELECTED POLISH TEXTBOOKS FOR TEACHING RELIGION

Summary: The problem of addiction to computer games affects an increasing number of children. Religious education, with its unique perspective, can play a key role in preventing this phenomenon, as it conveys universal values that can serve as a counterbalance to the virtual world of games. The article presents content regarding the prevention of children's addiction to computer games contained in documents on programming religious education in Polish schools and in methodological textbooks published by the "Jedność" Publishing House in Kielce, the "Święty Wojciech" Publishing House in Poznań and the Publishing House "Wydawnictwo Katechetyczne" in Warsaw. It then presents conclusions and postulates regarding the indicated content.

Keywords: religious education, catechesis, addiction, computer games, prevention.

Introduction

Computer games are mainly a source of entertainment, but they can also be used for learning (Gałuszka, 2017, p. 71–84). However, they also carry huge risks, especially for children. Spending time playing games often leads to addiction, which manifests itself in, among other things, neglecting important duties, problems in social relationships and undesirable mood changes, it can cause aggressive behaviour, it contributes to limiting friendly contacts leading to social isolation, and it is the basis for the development of depression and anxiety disorders. In addition, spending long hours in front of a computer monitor is a common cause of vision impairment, acquiring spine diseases, increasing body weight leading to obesity, circadian rhythm disorders, and making it difficult to fall asleep. You should also pay special attention to the content of games, which are often inappropriate for children's age, due to their nature, e.g. violence, sex-

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uality, vulgarity (Bębas, 2015, p. 114–118). In addition, so-called online games create the possibility of establishing unwanted contacts with strangers, which can lead to dangerous situations for them. In view of the proper development of the spiritual life of children, it should be borne in mind that many games contain elements related to magic, demons, Satanism or other occult practices (Łobacz, 2014, p. 129). Exposing young people to such content can have a negative impact on their worldview, creating a distorted image of reality.

The problem of addiction to computer games affects an increasing number of children. Religious education, with its unique perspective, can play a key role in preventing this phenomenon, because it conveys universal values such as love, respect, and responsibility, which can and should be a counterbalance to the virtual world of games. Religious education particularly emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships, which is important in the context of isolation, which often accompanies gaming addiction. In addition, catechesis helps children understand the meaning of life and find their place in the world, without the need to escape into virtual reality. It is worth emphasizing the importance of religious education in shaping the proper morality of children, contributing to making conscious choices.

The analysis of the program assumptions of religious education and methodological textbooks for teaching religion is one of the many research tasks of catechesis. Through the content included in the curriculum and textbooks, not only religiosity is shaped, but also the social awareness of students, allowing children to acquire various competences necessary in adult life. The aim of this article is to indicate the provisions relating to the issue of children's addiction to computer games in the program assumptions and in selected methodological textbooks for teaching religion and to present conclusions and postulates regarding the indicated content. In connection with the above, an analysis was made; *The Basics of the Catechesis Program of the Catholic Church in Poland* [Podstawy Programowej Katechezy Kościoła Katolickiego w Polsce] (next: Basics), *The Roman Catholic Religious Education Program in Kindergartens and Schools* [Program nauczania religii rzymskokatolickiej w przedszkolach i szkołach] (next: Program) and methodological textbooks for teaching religion in kindergartens and primary schools, published by Publishing House "Jedność" in Kielce, Publishing House "Święty Wojciech" in Poznań and Publishing House "Wydawnictwo Katechetyczne" in Warsaw. When selecting textbooks for the inquiry, their popularity and availability in various regions of Poland were taken into account.

Issues related to the prevention of children's addiction to computer games in documents programming religious education

The currently applicable *Basics* was approved on 8 June, 2018, during the 379th Plenary Session of the Polish Episcopal Conference. Since the *Basics* specifies the requirements that should be imposed on students participating in school religion classes, the recipients of the document are not only the authors of programs and textbooks, but also religion teachers themselves. Thanks to this, it is a practical guide for catechists, who have easier and more specific access to the tasks, content, and requirements that they will present to students.

The authors of the document draw attention to the discussed issue at the kindergarten stage "the child's development, especially in the intellectual and emotional sphere, may be disturbed by addiction to [...] computer games" (*Basics*, 2018, p. 19). In turn, at the second stage of primary school (grades V–VIII), as part of the detailed requirements regarding knowledge and skills that the student should acquire during religion classes, they assume that catechists will be able to indicate the dangers resulting from addiction to computer games (*Basics*, 2018, p. 72).

The currently applicable *Program* was adopted during a meeting of the Catholic Education Commission of the Polish Episcopal Conference in Częstochowa on 19 September, 2018. The document is fully consistent with the assumptions of the Foundation and is their concretization. The authors of the *Program* use terminology that respects school standards, takes into account the guidelines of the Church and the Polish catechetical tradition. The document is a help for the authors of textbooks and catechists who will adapt this program to the educational needs of the educational institution in which they work.

The authors of the *Program* in the 7th grade of primary school assume that during religious education the student will be able to indicate the most important dangers resulting from addiction to computer games (*Program*, 2018, p. 126).

Issues of preventing children's addiction to computer games in textbooks developed by "Jedność" in Kielce

The textbook for working with six-year-old children in kindergarten includes an example of a boy who had nightmares as a result of playing computer war games (PJ6, p. 54). During the introductory classes on the subject of Lent, the catechist encourages children to completely give up playing computer games during this period (PJ6, p. 155). During the next classes, the authors of the textbook recommended that the teacher show the students pictures (prepared

by the authors of the textbook) showing children's inappropriate behaviour. One of the pictures shows a girl playing a computer game and her sad mother. During the classes, the children describe how to make up for lost time (PJ6, p. 168).

In the second grade of primary school, the catechist conducts an exercise with the students, during which he asks the children to mark the correct choice. The dilemma to be resolved is that of a student who must choose between preparing for tomorrow's test and playing a new computer game (SJ2, p. 183). During the next lesson, the teacher presents the students with signposts to heaven, one of the boards contains content encouraging them to give up playing violent games (SJ2, p. 221). In the third grade, the catechist discusses with the students the sins against the fifth commandment. Among them, he lists "playing violent computer games" and indicates that such behaviour contributes to "destroying sensitivity, [and] perpetuating the idea that pain can be inflicted in reality" (SJ3, p. 102). During the next lesson, the teacher conducts an exercise with the students called "auction – pyramid of values". Among the proposals are computer games, which the students value accordingly. Then they arrange the values in the appropriate order, which is the starting point for a conversation. In the next part of the lesson, the teacher refers to the exercise performed in the context of discussing the first commandment and indicates that, among other things, computer games cannot be the most important thing in life and take the place that should be reserved for God. (SJ3, p. 75, 77). In the fourth grade, during a lesson devoted to the topic of the escape of the Israelites from Egypt, the catechist brings up the topic of human enslavement. During the lesson, the students act out a scene that shows that a child can become enslaved by computer games. Then the students think about how to help a boy enslaved by games (SJ4, p. 67). In the lesson on Lent, the students prepare a cross of resolutions and Lenten sacrifices, which "will help each of us to be a stronger person, bring us closer to God, [and] teach us to overcome temptations". Among the proposed resolutions is "I give up games" (SJ4, p. 233).

In the fifth grade, during a lesson devoted to the figure of Moses, the children's attention is focused on the issue of fulfilling God's will, the condition of which is freedom. During group work, the students make a pyramid, which serves to explain the concept of freedom. The teacher explains that "true freedom is where we voluntarily do good and take care of our spiritual development. There are two types of freedom: freedom from... and freedom to..." Then he gives examples, among which he mentions "freedom from addiction to computer games and freedom to limit the time spent on computer games or give them up" (SJ5, p. 152). In the next lesson devoted to the ability to use time properly, the students fill in a sheet in which they resolve the dilemma of which activities help and which hinder the proper use of free time. Among the proposals is

a note on computer games (SJ5, p. 289). The textbook also included a note on the proper use of information technology. While discussing this issue, the catechist explains that computer games can help in establishing contact with peers and sharing common interests (SJ5, p. 290). In the sixth grade, while studying the figure of St. John Bosco, students reflect on the question "why are the ideas of St. John Bosco relevant and necessary today?" Then they talk about the isolation of young people who often "sit at home in front of computers [...] and waste time on games" (SJ6, p. 274).

In the seventh grade, during a lesson devoted to the parable of the Ten Virgins, students are introduced to an example of a boy who has a problem with learning. The main cause of the problem is the fact that the boy wastes a lot of time playing computer games (SJ7, p. 126). In the next lesson, students are introduced to a negative example of the behaviour of a boy who was supposed to take care of his younger sister but did not fulfil his duty because he preferred to play computer games (SJ7, p. 237). During the lesson entitled "How I deal with problems", the problem of addiction to various substances is discussed, but also a lot of time is devoted to the phenomenon of addiction to computer games (SJ7, p. 279).

Issues of preventing children's addiction to computer games in textbooks developed by "Święty Wojciech" in Poznań

The issue of preventing addiction to computer games appears already in kindergarten in a group of five-year-old children. During classes introducing Lent, the catechist presents an example of a child who experiences negative emotions and gets angry because he is forbidden to use computer games (PW5, p. 164). During classes devoted to the wise men from the East, students say a prayer in which they ask the Lord Jesus for the grace that will help them give up constant gaming (PW6, p. 103). In the second grade of primary school, during a lesson devoted to considering a fragment of the Gospel in which Jesus calms a storm on the lake, students learn the story of siblings quarrelling over computer games (SW2, p. 205). In the third grade, during a lesson in which students learn about the figure of St. Paul, the teacher presents an example of a man who, years later, admits that at a young age he often cheated on his parents when, instead of going to church, he went to a friend's house to play computer games (SW3, p. 23). During a lesson devoted to the fourth commandment, students learn the story of a boy who is affected by his friend's negative statements about his own father. The reason for the scandalous words about his father is the all-day ban imposed on him from playing on the computer (SW3, p. 147). In

the fourth grade, during a lesson devoted to the issue of addiction, students learn about the consequences of addiction to computer games (SW4, p. 261–265).

In the seventh grade, during a lesson devoted to the value of human life, the teacher conducts a conversation with the students about computer games. He asks them how often they play, what types of computer games there are, and which games they like the most. Then he explains that “playing on a computer has its advantages (games improve reflexes, teach logical thinking, develop the ability to perceive and make decisions independently and bear the consequences of these decisions), as well as disadvantages (some games can cause aggressive behaviour and neurotic states; people who spend too much time in front of a computer can also experience a loss of control over reality). It is a hobby that can become dangerously addictive. That is why it is so important to control the time spent in front of the screen. In order for such entertainment to bear good fruit, you need to choose the types of games wisely (e.g. give up those full of violence) and maintain moderation, e.g. by limiting the time spent on this type of play” (SW7, p. 12). During a lesson on important values in human life, students learn the meaning of the eight beatitudes of the Lord Jesus by doing an exercise that encourages them to give up violent computer games in favour of choosing those that creatively serve not to clutter the human heart (SW7, p. 171).

Issues of preventing children from becoming addicted to computer games in textbooks developed by the Catechetical Publishing House in Warsaw

In a kindergarten group of five-year-olds, during the catechesis “The Lord God Speaks to Us” the catechist presents students with computer games based on the Holy Scripture (PK5, p. 42). In the first grade of primary school, during a lesson devoted to preparation for the Holy Mass, students learn that computer games can make it difficult to concentrate and properly prepare for the Eucharist (SK1, p. 155). In the fourth grade, during a lesson on the liturgical year, the catechist asks students to imagine a situation in which they are invited to a friend’s birthday party and then, at the last minute, they learn that the celebration has been cancelled because the friend prefers to play on the computer at that time (SK4, p. 138). In the next lesson entitled “What do I feed my soul with?”, among the requirements for students, there is a provision regarding the dangers of overusing computer games (SK4, p. 105).

In the fifth grade during a lesson on happiness, students participate in a discussion and at the end of the lesson the teacher explains that certain activities can be considered enjoyable and gives an example of playing a computer game. Then he explains that “if a person maintains moderation, everything is fine. However, when they do not act in this way, negative consequences await them, e.g. prob-

lems at school” (SK5, p. 54). In the lesson “God promises salvation to man” students design a comic book showing the consequences of choices made in accordance with and against God’s will. The first picture shows a situation in which a person is tempted to evil. An example is a boy who wants to play on the computer instead of preparing for a test (SK5, p. 107). During the lesson on God who is able to heal human wounds, students act out a drama in which they take on the role of friends who have a quarrel during a computer game and as a result stop talking to each other (SK5, p. 111). During the lesson on Advent, students prepare Advent resolutions. Among them is a provision regarding the voluntary limitation of time spent on computer games. It is recommended to give up computer games at least two days a week (SK5, p. 268). In the sixth grade, during a lesson devoted to the Holy Spirit, children learn the story of a boy who was passionate about computer games. His passion was the cause of frequent arguments with his sister, who was disturbed by the loud and frequent shouting of her brother while playing, causing the unnecessary distraction of concentrated attention (SK6, p. 243). In turn, during catechesis on the gift of reconciliation, students write down in their notebooks examples of heroes from computer games who underwent an internal transformation to act accordingly (SK6, p. 203). During the lesson on the need for reconciliation, students submit their own ideas that can be used in a computer game dedicated to ecumenical reconciliation (SK6, p. 263). In the seventh grade, during a lesson on responsibility for life, the catechist uses the “brainstorming” method to interpret behaviours that contribute to the weakening of family ties. Among the negative examples, he refers to, among others, “hours of computer games” (SK7, p. 178). Later in the lesson, the teacher develops the problem of “hours of computer games” causing dangerous addictions (SK7, p. 179). In the eighth grade, during a lesson devoted to Father Franciszek Blachnicki, students, using a computer game about the founder of the Light-Life Movement and the Crusade for the Liberation of Man, experience an accessible and attractive form of knowledge transfer (SK8, p. 250).

**Issues of preventing children from computer game addiction
in the curriculum assumptions and textbooks for teaching religion
– a comparative approach**

A table was used to present the analysis of the collected data. This tool allows for a clear presentation of data, allows for systematic ordering of content and allows for the comparison of content regarding the prevention of children’s addiction to computer games in program documents and methodological textbooks for teaching religion.

Table 1. Prevention of children's addiction to computer games in documents programming religious education and selected textbooks

Issues prevention of children's addiction to computer games	Basics	Program	Jedność	Wojciech	Katechetyczne
Loss of time due to using computer games			P6 S5 S5 S6 S7	S3 S7	S5 S5 S7
The problem of social isolation and disturbance of interpersonal relations			S6	S2 S3	S4 S5 S6 S7
Students' awareness of the dangers of gaming addiction	S5-8	S7	S4 S5 S7	S4 S7	S7
Developmental disorders in the intellectual sphere	P4-6		P6 S2		S1 S5 S6
Developmental disorders in the emotional sphere			P6	P5 S3 S7	
Violence in computer games			S2 S3	S7	
Computer games a threat to faith in God			S3		S1 S4
An encouragement to give up gaming during Advent and Lent			P6 S4	P5	S5
Prayer for breaking the addiction to computer games				P6	
Indicating the positive features of computer games and the ability to use them			S5	S7 S7	P5 S5 S6 S6 S8

P 4-6 – methodological textbooks for teaching in kindergarten

S 1-8 – methodological textbooks for teaching in primary school

Conclusions and postulations

Religious education is a place where not only the principles of faith are passed on, but also a system of moral values, which are essential for the proper functioning of a person, is shaped. Prevention related to the topic of improper use of computer games is an important issue that can help children in situations of addiction and protect them from many negative consequences in adult life.

It should be noted that the authors of both documents programming religious education recommended that attention be paid to raising children's awareness of the dangers resulting from addiction to computer games. However, it should be emphasized that the recommendation regarding developmental disorders in the intellectual sphere, included in the Foundation, did not find a place in the *Program*, which by its nature should be compatible with the assumptions of the Foundation. To sum up the content regarding the discussed topic in the documents programming religious education, it should be clearly stated that they lack many important elements. It should also be surprising that the documents programming catechesis did not include any content regarding the prevention of addiction to computer games within the catechesis of people with disabilities. It is postulated that in future editions of the discussed documents, important content should be included, because the problem of addiction to games also concerns children with disabilities. Therefore, it is proposed to add the important content indicated below to subsequent editions of the documents.

The authors of the analysed textbooks, despite the lack of provisions in the programming documents, included important content regarding the prevention of children's addiction to computer games.

The authors of all the analysed textbooks most often referred to the problem of time loss caused by children playing computer games. In second place among the problems discussed were issues related to the problem of social isolation and disorders of interpersonal relations. Third place was taken by two problems: development disorders in the intellectual sphere and raising students' awareness of the dangers resulting from addiction to computer games. In fourth place was the issue related to developmental disorders in the emotional sphere. The least frequently addressed issues are the dangers related to strengthening faith in God and violence in computer games.

It should be noted positively that the authors of the textbooks not only drew attention to the dangers resulting from the use of computer games by children, but also indicated specific proposals aimed at encouraging them to limit the time spent on games.

Among the issues was a proposal to abstain from games during Advent and Lent. In addition, the authors of the preschool textbook published by "Święty

Wojciech” recommended prayer for breaking the addiction to computer games. It should be emphasized that this is a valuable initiative, which unfortunately was not included in any of the analysed textbooks for primary school.

It is proposed that in subsequent editions of the textbooks by the publishers indicated below, the content that was included in the other methodological guides analysed should be added:

- in the textbooks of the “Jedność” at two stages of primary school – the problem of social isolation and disorders of interpersonal relations;
- in the textbooks of the “Wydawnictwo Katechetyczne” and “Święty Wojciech” at the first stage of primary school – raising students’ awareness of the dangers resulting from addiction to computer games;
- in the textbooks of the “Święty Wojciech” at both stages of education and the textbooks of the “Jedność” at the second stage of education – development disorders in the intellectual sphere;
- in the textbooks of the “Wydawnictwo Katechetyczne” and “Jedność” at both stages of education – development disorders in the emotional sphere;
- in the textbooks of the “Wydawnictwo Katechetyczne” and “Święty Wojciech” at both stages of education – violence in computer games;
- in the textbooks of the “Jedność” and “Święty Wojciech” at both stages of education – threats to faith in God;
- in the textbooks of the “Jedność” at the first stage of education and the “Wydawnictwo Katechetyczne” and “Święty Wojciech” at the second stage of education – encouragement to give up games during Advent and Lent;
- in all the textbooks analysed – inclusion of prayers for the intention to break addiction to computer games.

It is worth emphasizing that the authors of the analysed textbooks noticed the fact that computer games also have many positive aspects that can affect children’s development. This is important from the point of view of prevention and teaching children how to properly use technology, which can be used not only for fun. The wrong approach would be to present computer games only negatively, because using them skilfully can help improve memory and concentration, solve problems, analyse new situations, plan actions and make decisions. In addition, games can convey knowledge from various fields of science, including religion, in an interesting way. It is postulated that future editions of textbooks should include a greater number of religious games, of which there is no shortage at present.

Addiction to computer games is a serious problem that has a negative impact on the lives of young people. Appropriate deterrence can help prevent this problem and ensure that games are a healthy form of entertainment. The earlier preventive measures are taken, the easier it will be to prevent the development

of addictions. To sum up, the analysed textbooks contain a number of important contents that can support the process of prevention against addiction to computer games among the young generation. In addition, content related to the negative impact on health should be supplemented, such as vision defects, sleep and rest disorders, obesity, posture defects, depression and anxiety disorders. Based on the analysis, it should also be stated that little attention in the context of computer games has been paid to spiritual threats, such as occultism and Satanism, materialism and consumerism, and moral relativism. Therefore, it is postulated that the problem of the indicated spiritual threats should be included in a correspondingly greater approach in subsequent editions of the textbooks.

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Profilaktyka uzależnienia dzieci od gier komputerowych w założeniach programowych i w wybranych polskich podręcznikach do nauczania religii

Streszczenie: Problem uzależnienia od gier komputerowych dotyka coraz większej liczby dzieci. Nauczanie religii ze swoją unikalną perspektywą, może odegrać kluczową rolę w profilaktyce tego zjawiska, ponieważ przekazuje uniwersalne wartości, które mogą stanowić przeciwwagę dla wirtualnego świata gier. W artykule przedstawiono treści dotyczące profilaktyki uzależnienia dzieci od gier komputerowych zawarte w dokumentach programujących nauczanie religii w polskich szkołach i w podręcznikach metodycznych wydawanych przez *Wydawnictwo Jedność* w Kielcach, *Wydawnictwo Świętego Wojciecha* w Poznaniu i *Wydawnictwo Katechetyczne Sp. z o.o.* w Warszawie oraz zaprezentowano wnioski i postulaty dotyczące wskazanych treści.

Słowa kluczowe: nauczanie religii, katecheza, uzależnienie, gry komputerowe, profilaktyka.