



## **Role of the Children's Press in the Process of Education – the Polish Experience**

**Andrzej Adamski**

[a.adamski@uksw.edu.pl](mailto:a.adamski@uksw.edu.pl)

University of Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński, Institute of the Media Education and Journalism (Poland)

### **Abstract**

*Children's magazines are an important source of knowledge about the world for a children, despite the increasing competition of electronic media and the Internet. Among the modern ways of mass communication, they occupy a special place - are in fact on the border between the verbal and visual communication. They transmit the information differently than television, radio or computer. Thanks to its specificity, they interact more extensively.*

*This paper aims to answer the question: What role in the educational process meets the press for children? The author will show the value of educational children's magazines and reflect on how they affect the child. He will look for the answer to the question: whether the childrens' press is really doomed to lost from the television and the Internet? The author also will make a brief analysis of the market of the press for children in Poland.*

Despite the increasing competition from the electronic media and the Internet, children's magazines remain the important source of knowledge for children. They occupy a special place among the modern means of mass communication, in other words, they are on the borderline between the verbal and visual communication.

This study aims at answering the question: Which role does the press play in the process of educating children? The author will present the educational value of children's magazines and he will examine their impact on a child.

### **1. The Polish press market**

How does the current Polish children's press market look like? There are not many titles like e.g. *Swierszczyk*, which have existed for years. A vast part of prevailing magazines have emerged after 1990.

Egmont Poland and Media Service Zawada are two major potentates on the children's press market. Among the publishers of the children's press we can notice three minor ones: Technopol Publishing House, Phoenix Press Publishing House and BPV Poland. The remaining titles on the market are distributed by individual publishers. Worth mentioning is *Swierszczyk*, the journal with long standing tradition. *Teddy Bear-Children's Friend*, which (unfortunately!) was withdrawn from the market on 30 June 2010, illustrates the second example of a title with a long history. It have been published since 1957. Religious periodicals, especially the Catholic ones, represent a separate group comprised in the children's press category.

### **2. The children's press vs. other mass media**

We can encounter various studies concerning the role of the mass media in shaping children and the youth's perception of the world in popular science and science literature. L. B. Clark notices that 'media influence on children has steadily increased as new and more sophisticated types of media have been developed and made available to the public. Availability, as well as greater affordability, has provided easier access to media for children.' The author lists 'early readiness for learning,



educational enrichment, opportunities to view or participate in discussions of social issues, exposure to the arts through music and performance, and entertainment' as positive aspects of this phenomenon. However, she highlights that 'harmful effects may result from sensationalization of violent behavior, exposure to subtle or explicit sexual content, promotion of unrealistic body images, presentation of poor health habits as desirable practices, and exposure to persuasive advertising targeting children.'[1]

Undoubtedly, one must remark on quite interesting, however, concerning phenomenon. Thus, a vast part of authors, who conduct researches examining the media influence on children, identify the media only with television and computer ( a tool of surfing the Internet and playing interactive computer games). The press is given rather the marginal attention; it seems that in numerous situations the press is not considered a means of communication by the aforesaid authors.

As far as the press readership is concerned, the situation does not seem optimistic as well. First of all, editors compete with each other in attracting the biggest possible audience. Colorful weeklies and dailies tempt a potential reader with an attached gadget, e.g. a movie, a book or a practical trinket. Nevertheless, editors of the press more often discuss whether it is a way to nowhere or not, whether the situation, in which it is not clear if a gadget constitutes a supplement to a magazine or vice versa, is normal or not (according to newsagents, garbage cans surrounding kiosks are full of unread magazines as the purchaser takes only an interesting gadget).

### **3. Educational and formative functions of the press**

It is commonly accepted that the media play the following functions: informative, educational, entertaining and opinion-forming. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), "Children are influenced by media—they learn by observing, imitating, and making behaviors their own." [2] It also concerns the children's magazines, which educational role is oftentimes emphasized in the studies. It is highlighted that the children's periodicals "play an essential role in the whole press system: they prepare a reader for the adult magazines. They prepare him for both, purchasing (they help to develop the habits of reading and purchasing the press) and perceiving various press genres and various kinds of content. Children's magazines, therefore, teach by entertaining, transfer knowledge and broaden imagination of a child as an individual and are an integral part of our society. They also prepare a reader and a consumer for the adult press market." [3] The processes of learning symbols, learning about culture and transforming a play into the conscious creation are of particular importance in the child's development. It is commonly known that a child perceives the world through the categories of words and pictures. As far as pictures are concerned, it is sensitive to things which directly appeal to its senses (also smells and sounds). Words represent symbols hence not only can a child get information about the past, but also it can learn about predictable, general, remote and abstract things. The main source of information is included, among other things, in the children's literature and press. A picture, an illustration or a photo also help to expand the boundaries of the outside world as they directly present information about the events. Thus, the child's inward world encompasses verbal and visual elements. [4]

The children's magazines constitute one of the contemporary means of mass communication. However, they are placed on a special position, i.e. on the borderline between verbal and visual transfers. [5] They convey the information differently than television, radio or the Internet. Noticeably, they interact broader thanks to their specificity. Furthermore, the sender-receiver channel and the required intellectual effort distinguish them from the auto-visual media. A viewer who watches TV, in a sense, becomes only a consumer of a particular vision of the author. His imagination is not involved as he passively comprehends the portrayed reality. In this way a child is deprived of the possibility of creating playful situations and transforming the surrounding according to its imagination. [6] Nonetheless, a person who is in a constant contact with pictures and the text always participates in the social process of communication. A message, however, conveyed, for instance, in the children's press, becomes a teaching material as it is transferred by a child and registered, even unconsciously, in its memory. [7] It is crucial to encourage a child to read the press due to its educational virtues that are not granted by television. The educational process of a child relies on supporting its development and providing him with various emotional stimuli, interesting experiences, new instruments of cognition and also on stimulating imagination and answering concerning questions. The contemporary children's magazines achieve this goal thanks to their virtues, reach content and an attractive layout. [8]



The children's journals also facilitate the process of upbringing. D. Zebrowska claims that 'the world and the system of values presented in the children's press are shaped by the elements which are close to the real ones hence close to child's imagination. The action takes place 'here and now' (except for fairy tales and legends). The didactic function, in general, is conformed to the aesthetic function; the moral message (naturally) results from the presented situation. Especially fairy tales present dilemmas between good and evil in the understandable way; a desire for justice is deeply rooted in them-good should be prized and evil punished.'[9]

Shelton L. Root Jr. shares similar opinion and he states that 'literature serves children in four major ways: it helps them to better understand themselves, others, their world, and the aesthetic values of written language.' In addition, it must be observed that 'when children read, they often assume the role of one of the characters. Through that character's thoughts, words, and actions the child develops insight into his or her own character and values. Frequently, because of experiences with literature, the child's modes of behavior and value structures are changed, modified, or extended.'[10]

A child 'memorizes various characters and situations' by analyzing them. 'We can identify them later in pictures, games, dreams and verbal utterances delivered by a child. Magazines encompass the presentation of educational interactions on the cognitive level, which allows the improvement of the following cognitive functions: memory, perception, concentration span and logical and creative thinking.'[11]

S.L Root, Jr says that "when children assume the role of a book's (or magazine's) character as they read, they interact vicariously with the other characters portrayed in that particular selection. In the process they learn something about the nature of behavior and the consequences of personal interaction. In one sense they become aware of the similarities and differences among people".[12]

To large extent, shape, profile, content and character of the contemporary children's magazines determine ethical attitudes and sensitivity of their readers. Unfortunately, a similar tendency is visible in both the children's press and the adult press: the contemporary journals do not attempt to educate a reader as the editors treat them only as consumer goods. They do not pay attention to the content as their goal is to achieve the highest sale results. Only the subsidized titles can be more ambitious.[13]

J. Lizak's statement may serve as a conclusion to this thread. She claims that the children's press 'on the one hand, broadens children's knowledge about the world yet on the other hand, it shapes their personality, delivers aesthetic experiences and serves an entertaining purpose. Children and youth's magazines encourage a reader to take various actions, e.g. they deliver ideas about games, prompt artistic and literary creation, inspire diverse practical activities and develop the general intellectual efficiency. The authors of the children's press need to incline favorably to their readers.[14]

Magazines are also used in religious upbringing of children and the youth. As M. Pulczynska notices, we can talk about religious upbringing when our message (verbal, non-verbal) reaches receiver's consciousness and evokes diverse reactions, e.g. arouses his/her faith and thoughts directed to God. We should set good examples of our speech and life. A proper choice of forms and means of communication also plays a significant role in the process of upbringing.[15]

It is worth noticing that editors of the children's press, both religious and secular, run their publishing business in circumstances of cultural pluralism.

#### 4. Conclusion

The children's press market in Poland has undergone significant transformations, which have modified its initial structure. Undoubtedly, there are more magazines than during communism. However, the children's press market encounters many obstacles as it has to deal with the constant competition from television or the Internet. Therefore, some editors consciously enrich their offer by adding multimedia materials or providing teachers with extra materials. It goes without saying, the children's magazines are necessary. Not only do they embody the transfers of educational content, but also they create and develop among children the habit of reading the press and, subsequently, literature. Especially in the era of picture dominance over linear text, the children's press cannot be treated as a minor issue.



## References

- [1] Clark, L.B. Influence on Children Media - History of Media for Children, General Considerations, Studies of Media Influence, Domains of Influence, Recommendations, <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2212/Media-Influence-on-Children.html> (accessed March 28th, 2011).
- [2] Ibid.
- [3] Lisowska-Magdżiarz, M. Barbie is Going to After-Consumption (and She Has No Cash). Trainig of Consumptive Attitudes in Magazines for Children., in: Bogunia-Borowska, M. (ed.). A Child in the World of the Media and Consumption. Cracow, 2006, p.60.
- [4] Konopnicka, I. Children's Magazines in the Early Stages of Education. Opole, 2006, pp. 16-17.
- [5] Ibid., p.76.
- [6] Cf. Bugara, M. Educational Aspects of the Children's Press, Education and Dialog, 2001, nr 4 (127), [http://www.vulcan.edu.pl/eid/archiwum/2001/04/prasa\\_dziecieca.html](http://www.vulcan.edu.pl/eid/archiwum/2001/04/prasa_dziecieca.html) (accessed March 28th, 2011).
- [7] Konopnicka, I. dz. quot., p. 17.
- [8] Ibid., p. 79.
- [9] Zebrowska, D. The Educational Role of the Children's Press, Education and Dialog, 1997, nr 7(90), <http://www.vulcan.edu.pl/eid/archiwum/1997/07/wychowawcza.html> (accessed March 28th, 2011).
- [10] Cf. Root, S.L., Jr. Children's Literature - History, Literature in the Lives of Children, Environment, Awards, <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1829/Children-s-Literature.html> (accessed March 28th, 2011).
- [11] Bugara, M. art. quot.
- [12] Cf. Root, S.L., Jr. Children's Literature - History, Literature in the Lives of Children, Environment, Awards, <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1829/Children-s-Literature.html> (accessed March 28th, 2011).
- [13] Konopnicka, I. dz. quot., p. 80.
- [14] Lizak, J. The Language of the Children's Magazines. Selected Problems. Rzeszow, 1999, p. 7.
- [15] Cf. Pulczynska, M. Religious Upbringing of a Child, Form Tutor, 2006, nr 12, [http://www.wychowawca.pl/miesiecznik\\_nowy/2006/12-2006/07.htm](http://www.wychowawca.pl/miesiecznik_nowy/2006/12-2006/07.htm) (accessed March 28th, 2011).