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The press without children, children without the press? Contemporary magazines for children in Poland

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ABSTRACT: The article presents educational, entertaining and religious magazines for children in Poland. The authors selected eleven magazines for children aged 7–12 to analyse their content and editorial form. Both the printed and the electronic versions of the magazines as well as their websites were compared. Additionally, a survey of 254 primary school pupils was conducted to assess the value of magazines for young readers as a source of information and/or entertainment. According to the survey, the magazines are of little interest to contemporary children. The research shows poor correlation between reading printed and online press. Despite the children's awareness of the press value, they seldom make use of it. A tendency to choose electronic versions instead of printed ones, a visible trend in adult magazines, was not indicated.

Keywords: children, young readers, magazines, reading, Poland.

Introduction

The contemporary press titles for children are the part of the media market. As opposed to the magazines of 19th and 20th century, they are no longer unique means of covering knowledge and entertainment. The study refers to the Polish contemporary magazines for children at the early school age (under 13 years of age). Having reviewed and analysed the magazines in question, the authors singled out several thematic groups. In the second part of the article in order to determine similarities and differences in the material, content and attractiveness, they compared the paper press offer with its electronic version.

The analysis has been supplemented with the survey of magazine reception by young readers. The aim was to evaluate the interest in magazines, the purpose and methods of making use of them as well as to check both the reception of traditional periodicals and magazines websites. The authors intended to verify the popularity of reading the press as well as the functions it carries at present (educational, entertaining and other), electronic offer of magazines and the relation between the two forms: written and electronic as well as readers' preferences concerning the above mentioned. Do "the digital savages" surf the net to find their favourite weekly or monthly? If so, is it a true copy of the paper version or rather its supplement or extension? Do the traditional magazines have positive future? It is said that modern societies are "pressed out of the press", meaning that they are gradually forgoing reading magazines in favour of websites¹. The results of the analysis presented below also relate to this theory in relation to young readers only.

Types and characteristic features of contemporary children's magazines in Poland

The transformations on the press market in Poland, after 1989 – the end of censorship and the loss of monopoly of state publishing houses had a share in the changes of children's press at that time. Suddenly, the press after the years of state patronage became a commodity. The loss of the privileged tycoon position on the young readers' press market by the Publishing House "Nasza Księgarnia" brought about the inflow of foreign capital and commercialization of publishers. The previous press titles for children and young adults were suspended or faced financial

¹ C. Polak, *Wyprasowani*, "Tygodnik Powszechny" [online] 20.03.2012 [access: 30 September 2013]. Available in Internet: http://tygodnik.onet.pl/30,0,74470,wypra sowani,artykul.html.

crisis². Very few of them have survived until today, most of them have changed meanwhile at least once. New titles started to emerge – those were close copies of Western magazines, characterised by standardized issues, reference to media characters, better design and a bigger number of advertisements.

In the former state-controlled press system there used to be a clear division of titles closely connected with the age groups of readers. Young children were offered such titles as "Miś", "Świerszczyk", "Płomyczek". Those were the periodicals of a "magazine" type – they contained both literary texts (mainly stories, poems and riddles), popular science articles (information about fauna and flora) and entertainment pages (games, crosswords, puzzles, charades, cut-outs, etc.). It was not until 1990 that a few strictly educational magazines aimed at children appeared, e.g. "Zwierzaki". They were published between 1991–1999 by Prószyński i S-ka. There were also some publications of religious magazines published by church publishing houses (e.g. "Mały Gość Niedzielny" since 1927) published on a much smaller scale however. Since the 90s the market of press for children in Poland has been very unstable. New titles have appeared and collapsed one by one, even the magazines with more than a fifty year tradition have not withstood the test of time. It was traditionally believed that the objective of young readers' press was to shape attitudes of young readers – providing them with knowledge about the world and influencing their system of values through literary works and visual forms (illustrations, photographs). What was important was the stimulation of readers' activity, which was reflected in creativity and social action³. At present magazines for children set themselves two tasks: to amuse and to teach. The entertaining part attracts young readers because it satisfies their need for some easy reading (stories, feature articles, anecdotes, humour, games and fun). The popular science pages (articles, tests, tasks, riddles and curiosities) encourage them to develop interests and satisfy children's natural curiosity. Our analysis refers to the periodicals which appeared at the end of January and the beginning of February 2013. We chose magazines which are fairly new on the market however widely

² M. Rogoż, Czasopisma dla dzieci i młodzieży Instytutu Wydawniczego "Nasza Księgarnia" w latach 1945–1989, Kraków 2009.

³ J. Papuzińska, Wychowawcza rola prasy dziecięcej, Warszawa1972, p. 55.

available and with a stable market position. The aim of the analysis was to check what kind of tendency is on the market of young readers' press on the threshold of 2013.

Educational magazines

Educational magazines inform about their character in their subtitles e.g. a biweekly for intelligent 6–10-year-olds; it will help you at school, won't let *you be bored* ("Kumpel"), *the land of fun and amusement* ("Supełkowo"). The only former magazine, which has survived until now is "Świerszczyk" (published since 1945, at present by Nowa Era). "Świerszczyk" has retained all magnificent features of traditional magazines: a high literary level, one can find there texts written by acknowledged authors, as well as excellent editorial layout created by high class graphic artists. Due to this, "Świerszczyk" has its unique feeling and remains on a high artistic level (see Figure 1). Apart from that, the biweekly broaden their general knowledge about the world, their home country, school, relationships and other fields of knowledge. Over the last few years "Świerszczyk" has covered most frequently: short informative articles with curiosities, riddles, the series I want to know more, big thematic competitions, intellectual activities (mostly rebuses, crosswords, word search puzzles), poems, short stories and texts to be read by children themselves, interviews and information about well-known characters, drama activities, legends, maths riddles and mazes, jumbled numbers, maths fairy tales, crafts, songs (usually with sheet music), English vocabulary.

After 1990 typical educational magazines aimed at children started to appear. They covered texts accepted by parents, educators and teachers. There has been released a wide variety of titles out of which the most stable on the market are those published by Agencja Wydawnicza Aga Press: "Kumpel" (since 2004) and "Victor Junior" (since 2002). Their distinctive features are:

- the dominance of cognitive, educational content, sometimes focusing on one theme (e.g. thematic series in "Świerszczyk"),
- literary education,
- factual knowledge and excellent editorial level,
- cooperation with schools (subscription, demonstration tests),

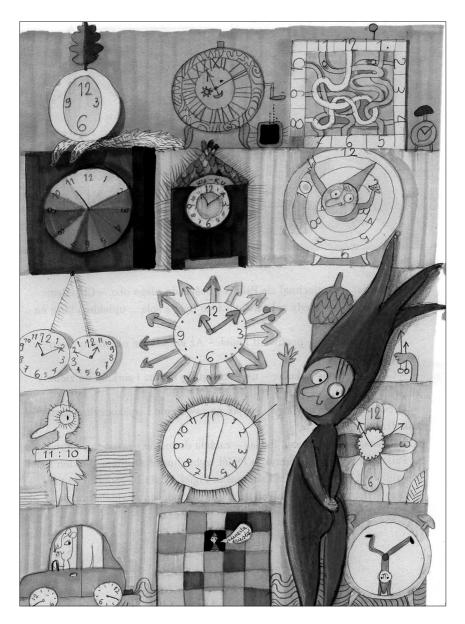


Figure 1. Illustration by Elżbieta Wasiuczyńska Source: "Świerszczyk" 2013, no. 3, p. 23.

- cooperation with parents,
- psychological and pedagogical support,
- promotion of self-reliance in children, intellectual and emotional progress stimulation,
- support of children's play and expression,
- abundance and diversity of themes and forms of influence on young readers,
- supplements mostly posters.

Even magazines recognized on the market of educational press take into consideration specific needs of contemporary readers so as not to lose them, and thus feature cartoons, board games, jigsaw cut-outs, personality quizzes ("Kumpel"). Editors are afraid that too "loaded" magazines, will be of little interest to contemporary children. New educational magazines, such as the bimonthly "Supełkowo" (ed. by "Bigpress") also combine these two or even three content trends: education, general literature and entertainment. Sometimes also contemporary entertainment magazines feature educational pages in order to appeal to average customers looking for both cognitive and amusement content in one periodical. The opinion of parents and guardians is of importance as well, after all it is them who decide what to buy. Magazines containing educational content even to a limited extent seem to be more valuable and have more positive impact on children.

Entertainment magazines (including online and licensed ones)

Typical entertainment periodicals for children started to appear in Poland in 1990 and were published under foreign licenses. After a few years also Polish companies made efforts to issue similar titles, however with varying degrees of success. Numerous periodicals collapsed after a few issues. In the beginning those were magazines focused around television programmes and then licensed (mainly Disney), connected with cinema and/or TV productions and their characters. At present there is a big number of such titles, and for the sake of the analysis we chose four of them: "Disney Junior", "Kaczor Donald" ("Donald Duck"), "Kubuś i Przyjaciele" ("Winnie the Pooh and Friends") (all published by the Walt

Disney Company) and "Klub Księżniczek" ("Princess Club") (monthly, ed. by "Phoenix Press").

The most characteristic feature of these periodicals is that they are closely related to the media and that their design is a mirror image of film originals. Their whole content covers:

- cartoons (e.g. in "Donald Duck" they amount to almost 100% of the content, the rest are advertisements and Fan club contacts),
- quizz games, word search puzzles, colouring pages, brainteasers,
- games: board games, mazes, jigsaw puzzles,
- experiments, tasks, curiosities from the natural world with photographs of animals ("Kubuś i Przyjaciele", previously: "Kubuś Puchatek"),
- posters.

The hallmark of these magazines is a minimal amount of text. Almost each suggests joining its Fan club and purchasing its own brand products at attractive prices. Parents are encouraged to go to their Facebook page (e.g. "Kubuś i Przyjaciele"). A specific example of an entertainment periodical is "Klub Księżniczek", which at the height of fashion and fascination with princesses created the whole magazine on the basis of only this topic.

Religious magazines

Religious magazines fulfil their mission through: religious instructions, stories, poems, prayers, songs and creativity activities. Apart from promoting religious awareness, they cover both educational and entertainment topics, e.g.:

- supplements (CDs with songs or tests for schoolchildren, e.g. "Mały Gość Niedzielny", monthly, ed. since 1927 by Wydawnictwo Kurii Metropolitalnej,
- cartoons (e.g. about Saints "Promyczek Dobra"), colouring pages, brainteasers, crosswords etc.,
- contact pages with catechists, parents, readers, also on social networking websites,
- educational and entertainment items, e.g. cardboard cut-outs ("Ola i Jaś", ed. by Wydawnictwo AZ sp. z o.o. from Kraków since 2009, previously "Jaś").

"Mały Gość Niedzielny" offers an interesting section of contact with readers: *Darmowe Korepetycje* (Free Private Classes). Readers send their questions by post or e-mail, and a Polish teacher or psychologist answers them in their pages, website or by e-mail. This periodical has a very traditional editorial design and commercially unspecified reading public: young children and adolescents. Actually, in the magazine one can find diversified content, targeted at both the youngest readers as well as teenagers. This does not help to attract a specific reader. Since May 2011 "Mały Gość Niedzielny" is also available in its full electronic version distributed by e-papers. Electronic versions are one fourth cheaper than the paper ones.

Magazines on-line

Two out of all analysed periodicals do not have their websites, only web cards on their publishers' websites: "Klub Księżniczek" and "Supełkowo". The rest of periodicals have their electronic versions in the form of little web portals informing about their paper versions and offering additional attractions; these little web portals somehow accompany the master paper magazine. Their content differs considerably from the traditional paper periodicals. The most extensive online service is offered by "Mały Gość Niedzielny". The features best representing the magazine websites are:

• Knowledge and creativity

All the websites in question inform about the profile and content of their master paper magazines, regular sections and columns and supplemented gadgets. Some of them place fragments of texts from paper versions ("Kumpel") and curiosities ("Victor Junior"). "Świerszczyk" provides information about the authors and shows their photos. What is really popular is competitions on the topics suggested by the editorial staff (poems, rebuses, brainteasers, charades, riddles, quizzes). The editors promote creativity and encourage readers to share their poems, short stories, letters, blogs ("Mały Gość Niedzielny"), reviews of new books and opinions ("Kumpel", "Victor Junior", "Mały Gość Niedzielny"). All the editorial sections inform about the possibility to contact the authors, "Świerszczyk" also offers child helpline.

• Entertainment

Actually all entertainment periodicals are focused on entertainment which is not always of a high standard. They are full of printable colouring pages with the images of film characters, interactive games, plays, films and cartoons. It is more and more frequent to promote iPad educational games ("Kubuś i Przyjaciele"). According to the rule that it is easier to teach through play, one can find some amusement activities and humour also on the websites of educational magazines. They are always designed for a specific age group of children and often take the form of cartoons ("Kumpel") and jokes ("Kumpel", "Victor Junior").

• Interaction with readers

To meet the expectations of young users of the internet, the socalled "digital savages", some specific "communities" of magazines are springing up on the web. Those who take part in them can add their comments after having logged in. The editorial sections keep initiating new topics and inducing to express opinions ("Kumpel", "Victor Junior"). Some periodicals have subpages aimed at particular groups of readers (section for altar boys – "Mały Gość Niedzielny"). The social networking plug-ins of Facebook ("Świerszczyk", "Mały Gość Niedzielny") prove that readers stay in touch and promote their magazines in the places most often visited by children. The interaction is also triggered by links to blogs of readers ("Victor Junior") and recorded chats with interesting people ("Mały Gość Niedzielny").

• Commercial information

Obviously all the web portals inform how to purchase or subscribe to their magazines. The most commercial websites are those of entertainment and licensed periodicals. There, each section features solely the Disney products, the same situation is with sections devoted to books and film characters. The Funzone is packed with cards, phone wallpapers, screensavers, games ("Kaczor Donald"). Some websites are exclusively connected with the sale of licensed products – books, other magazines, films, audio-books, cartoons, board games ("Kubuś i Przyjaciele"). The websites of magazines are also a good place for other advertisements, various companies place their banners there.

• Online magazines for parents and teachers

Educational periodicals support parents in child education through on-line projects ("Świerszczyk" directed at adults). Every two weeks on the internet Magazine for parents, "Świerszczyk" places texts thematically related to the paper periodical4. The permanent support for parents consists of professional opinions of teachers and psychologists grouped in three categories: Home, School, Leisure/Growth, described in the tags. It allows to find them easily and place comments. Within the project School for Parents the website presents classes promoting psychological and teaching awareness (e.g. "How to help children cope with their feelings?"). Forums for parents are recommended ("Świerszczyk", "Kumpel"). Teacher' sections are coded, they can browse, read fragments and download lesson scenarios ("Świerszczyk").



Figure 2. "Świerszczyk" online

Source: *Świerszczyk – magazyn dla dzieci* [online] [access: 30 September 2013]. Available on the Internet: http://www.swierszczyk.pl/.

⁴ Thus, when "Świerszczyk" introduces children to the ideas of democracy, adults have a possibility to read the text: *Is it possible for a family to be democratic?*; when "Świerszczyk" advises how to deal with anger, parents may find out *How to control anger and anxiety*.

The press without children, children without the press? Modern magazines...



Figure 3. "Victor Junior" online

Source: *Aga press – junior* [online] [access: 30 September 2013]. Available on the Internet: http://www.victor-junior.pl/.

The websites of educational periodicals have the best design in terms of structure and graphics (see Figure 2 and 3). Although online commercial magazines cover attractive content and supplements, their artwork soon wearies because it does not go beyond their media original. The internet portals of catholic magazines are surprisingly rich in content (see Figure 4). Their websites are really expanded. Even modest periodicals feature numerous interesting texts functioning there independently of paper versions. They may be not so popular as a result of quite traditional technical solutions, the use of colours which are too bright (e.g. "Promyczek Dobra"), and the unspecified age of readers they are targeted at ("Mały Gość Niedzielny").

[60]





Magazines as seen by children - the survey results

To find out how contemporary magazines for children are viewed a diagnostic survey in the form of a questionnaire was carried out. The objective was to learn about the essential phenomena connected with press reading. The total number of children who took part in it was 254, out of which 48 children were 7–8 years old, 92 at the age of 9–10 years and 114 at the age of 11–12 years. The participants were the pupils of two primary schools in two cities of Poland: Wrocław, in Lower Silesian Voivodeship (631,000 inhabitants) and Gliwice, Silesian Voivodeship (183,000 inhabitants). Most of the questionnaires were carried out in schools (207), the rest in libraries in Wrocław (47). We have decided to use the voluntary sampling method since it is a well-tried and accurate one in case of educational surveys. The questionnaire form contained 12 closed-ended and open-ended questions and was filled in anonymously. The questions applied to:

- Pupils' free time (forms of spending),
- Ways of finding information,
- Ways of finding entertainment (e.g. crosswords, puzzles),
- Subscription of periodicals,
- Access to magazines (shops, library, friends...),
- The most favourite periodical (and why),
- The most favourite parts and columns in favourite periodical,
- Ideas how to improve favourite periodical,
- Using home pages of periodicals,
- Pupils preferences in using periodicals (traditional-paper/electronic),

 Figure 4 and 5. Educational game in "Mały Gość Niedzielny" online: Forgery in a good style. You can read about the painting (Figure 4) and play the game: (Figure 5). Your task is to find 8 differences using the virtual magnifying glass

Source: *Hieronim Bosch (1453–1516), "Siedem grzechów głównych" 1475–80, Muzeum Prado, Madryt.* "Mały Gość Niedzielny" [online] 4.09.2012 [access: 30 September 2013]. Available on the Internet: http://malygosc.pl/franek-falsze-rz/1112048.Hieronim-Bosch-14531516-Siedem-grzechow-glownych-147580-Muzeum.

- What would you change in your favourite periodical if you were its chief editor?,
- The value of reading periodicals.

Traditional paper magazines

• The 7 and 8-year-olds. The youngest children most of all like playing. Reading books takes second place as far as pastime is concerned (60% of girls, 61% of boys), computer games take third (53% of girls, 55% of boys). Magazines are read by a small number of children (13% of girls and 27% of boys).

Magazines are not considered by children as a source of information. Only the youngest children deem them helpful in doing homework or finding additional information, still magazines take last place in case of girls and the one before the last in case of boys (before television). As far as entertainment activities are concerned (crosswords, riddles, colouring pages) books are the most readily chosen, then the internet. Periodicals are the fourth option – the last one. Most of the girls (70%) do not read any periodicals on a regular basis, likewise boys: 77,7%. Those children who frequently read magazines choose commercial (with gadgets) or nature ones. Altogether, the children named 15 titles, and most of them were commercial periodicals [11]. Also religious and educational magazines were mentioned individually.

• *The 9 and 10-year-olds.* The results in this group differ a lot of from the ones of the youngest group. As far as pastime is concerned television and computer games come to the fore – boys and girls are still absorbed by playing, spending time outside and reading books. In comparison with the youngest group, in which few children looked for information on the internet (40%), in this group we have respectively 75% of girls and 61,5% of boys. Children still resort for help to their parents (80%) and textbooks. They only marginally point to the use of magazines as the source of information: 13%. Crosswords, riddles, colouring pages are searched for in the net and books, however as many as 56% of girls point to periodicals as their source. Children do not have a regular contact with magazines. In case of boys 64% of them do not read any magazines regularly, in case of girls this number is even bigger – 74%. Those who reach for periodicals on a regular basis named 16 titles (5 titles named by boys and 11 titles by girls). Children mentioned various magazines,

which indicates that at this age the tastes of readers begin to vary. The children named commercial and educational periodicals ("Kumpel" and "Świerszczyk"). This age group is not fond of looking through the periodicals in bookshops, libraries or at friends' place either. The boys are keen on sports magazines, and the girls on magazines for older girls. Both groups occasionally reach for educational and religious press. The gadget magazines come to the fore since they are connected with a specific pop culture product: a film or less often a book character. Beside the information about the product, readers additionally get a small gadget with a trademark of a given character. There is also a subgroup of commercial periodicals which feature nature and provide information about animals.

• *11–12-year-olds.* In the oldest group of children reading magazines is not mentioned as a pastime activity. Both sexes mention other, however different activities. The boys prefer to play computer games and play outdoors, while the girls are more inclined to watch television, meet friends and read books. All the children use the internet to find information (more than 70%). They are as eager to support themselves with textbooks, however they less frequently ask parents for help. This age group looks for entertainment in the net (crosswords and quizzes), then in magazines. Nevertheless the majority does not regularly read periodicals, only 26% of the girls and less than 18% of the boys subscribe to a magazine/s. This group also named mainly commercial magazines. They like paging periodicals at their friends' place, in a library or in a bookshop (36% of the girls, 31% of the boys). This age group reaches for magazines which are targeted at older teenagers. The girls indulge in looking through magazines for adult women (with fashion, gossips, stars and celebrities). The boys tend to choose magazines on computers, football and history. The girls are ahead of the boys as far as reading is concerned, they named as many as 25 titles (10 were commercial ones). The educational press is of interest to both sexes when they look for examination sheets having finished the primary school. In all the age groups it was difficult for the children to differentiate between serial cartoon publications and typical magazines, the youngest group also confused books with periodicals.

Online magazines and websites connected with magazines

More than a half of the participants claim that they prefer paper magazines to their online versions. However, the majority does not know

neither these magazines nor the websites. When asked if they reach for them, very few children answered positively (4%, 6% and 3,5% in the consecutive age groups respectively). The opinions were more or less split half-and-half, as far as the sex of the readers is concerned, only 11 and 12-year-old girls preferred electronic versions, and their group was twice as big as the boys'. The children are willing to find mostly games with characters from films and cartoons, jokes as well as surveys, fan clubs, films, news, blogs and forum. Although the children rarely reach for paper versions, they eagerly defend this form (the youngest and the oldest group). To support their views they stress that paper magazines are:

- convenient to use: moveable, independent of electricity and other devices (I can read them everywhere; I can read them when I'm bored, and when I don't have access to the net),
- pleasant to touch because of the contact with paper (I like the rustle of pages; I like holding magazines in my hand, I can take out an interesting article and show it to my friends; I don't have to print the part which is interesting),
- trustworthy and valuable (there is too much information on the internet, which confuses readers; you can't think in front of the computer),
- physically durable and so is even the content (I remember better what I read in the paper magazines),
- attractive because of supplements (gadgets),
- ready to be read also by parents (mum reads them together with me at bedtime),
- full of attractions such as traditional crosswords, colouring pages, cut-outs, etc.,
- very handy (you can take them to school, read them at night; you can easily show them to friends; you don't have to log in),
- associated with a rest and pleasure.

The majority of those few children supporting electronic versions or related websites claim that they cover more information and content, are more convenient, enable high-speed contact with other readers (forum) and you do not have to buy them (thus the selection of them is immediately larger). They make a point that electronic versions reach readers faster, we do not lose them and they ... do not wrinkle.

Conclusion

The contemporary magazines for children in Poland have departed from the format of magazines and diversified the way of affecting their readers. Beside the group of educational periodicals set apart clearly from the rest (demanding a lot from themselves as far as their programme is concerned), there has appeared a group of magazines of a cartoonlike and entertainment character (licensed magazines). In general the magazines have a tendency to become more commercial in the course of years, they adjust to mass tastes (they must be easy and nice to read). Electronic versions of magazines available on the internet are usually loosely connected with their paper originals. They present lists of content, provide supplementary materials (visual and multimedia ones) and other types of communication. They cannot replace traditional, paper magazines (except for "Mały Gość Niedzielny"). Their advantage is the technology Web.2.0, which enables high-speed contact with parents/teachers, gives opportunity to comment on children's opinions and react to their needs. Contemporary young readers don't read periodicals regularly and in most cases do not prefer electronic press. They appreciate traditional magazines, however they mostly search for entertainment and gadgets in them.

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The titles of periodicals described in the text (and their English translations)

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"Disney Junior"

"Kaczor Donald" ("Donald Duck"),

"Klub Księżniczek" ("Princess Club")

"Kubuś i Przyjaciele" ("Winnie the Pooh and Friends")

"Kubuś Puchatek" ("Winnie the Pooh")

"Kumpel" ("Mate")

"Mały Gość Niedzielny" ("A Little Sunday Guest")

"Miś" ("Teddy Bear")

"Ola i Jaś"

"Płomyczek" ("Flicker")

"Promyczek Dobra" ("The Ray of Goodness")

"Supełkowo" ("Knotland")

"Świerszczyk" ("Cricket")

"Victor Junior"

"Zwierzaki" ("Animals")
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Prasa bez dzieci, dzieci bez prasy? Współczesne czasopisma dla dzieci w Polsce

STRESZCZENIE: Czasopisma edukacyjne, rozrywkowe i religijne w Polsce. Omówiono 11 tytułów pism dla dzieci w wieku 7–12 lat. Przeanalizowano ich zawartość oraz charakterystyczne elementy formy edytorskiej. Zwrócono uwagę na wersje elektroniczne czasopism dziecięcych oraz na powiązane z nimi, samodzielne strony www. Na podstawie sondażowego badania ankietowego przeprowadzonego wśród 254 uczniów szkół podstawowych oceniono przydatność współczesnych polskich czasopism dla dzieci pod kątem treści informacyjnych, edukacyjnych i służących rozrywce. Określono preferencje młodych odbiorców czasopism zarówno w zakresie treści, jak i formy (tradycyjna – elektroniczna). Zauważono brak trendu widocznego w prasie dla dorosłych: odchodzenia od wersji papierowych na rzecz odpowiedników elektronicznych. Badani uczniowie wprawdzie doceniali znaczenie i wartość czasopism, ale niestety rzadko z nich korzystali, najczęściej sięgali po nie z powodu atrakcyjnych dodatków.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: dzieci, czasopisma, czytelnictwo, czytelnik dziecięcy, Polska.

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