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In the thicket of children's needs – educational significance of popular culture texts based on the *Świerszczyk* children's magazine

KEYWORDS

needs, popular culture, children, childhood, texts of popular culture, modernity, magazine

ABSTRACT

Piecuch Ewelina, *In the thicket of children's needs – educational significance of popular culture texts based on the Świerszczyk children's magazine*. Culture – Society – Education no 2(16) 2019, Poznań 2019, pp. 115–132. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 2300-0422. DOI 10.14746/kse.2019.16.8.

Children raised in today's globalised world face an enormous, globally available and diverse range of verbal and non-verbal messages from the outside every day. In the era of prevailing consumerism, this multitude of information creates new, artificial needs that bring chaos to the children's world. Human needs, as presented by Maslow, starting with physiological needs, through the need of safety, belonging, love, respect, knowledge and recognition are being redefined and disorganised in common understanding. The following considerations outline the result of the analysis of the content and form of several popular culture texts selected from among all the texts available on the Polish market – the *Świerszczyk* magazine, aimed at children.

A few words about popular culture

Academics, who embarked on studying culture noted from the very beginning that culture has a strong impact (influence) on the formation of the human society as a whole. Witold Jakubowski claims that it provides numerous intel-

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lectual resources needed for its development. Various fields, such as art, religion, technology, customs and laws served as a particularly strong inspirations (Jakubowski, 2012). This humanist approach to culture, which emphasises its noble and timeless achievements, has dominated many pedagogical works for many years. The so-called “high” culture has always been the primordial space of pedagogical manifestations and reflections. Popular culture, on the other hand, was usually associated with mass entertainment, which was ignored in educational considerations. Since the 1990s, the trend started to change, and the academics started studying popular culture very thoroughly and comprehensively, covering its governing principles, changes taking place over the course of history, as well as ethnic diversity of cultures that has a real impact on the emerging theory of culture. The adoption of the anthropological theory of culture in its broadest sense was supposed to guarantee that culture would be studied in a holistic manner, along with all its manifestations.

These days, popular culture is no longer perceived as a worse, “darker” aspect of culture. Academics now believe that it is an area where the process of informal education of the post-industrial society takes place, where “...the emphasis is placed on the service sector, in which the majority of citizens are employed. Sectors such as banking, trade, education, transport have become the most important areas of the economy, while at the same time the importance of industry and agriculture has decreased (*Spółczeństwo postindustrialne...*). Through various forms and manifestations of culture, children and adults learn different social roles and thus desirable personal models – behaviours on the basis of which they construct their own lives.

Popular culture texts

David Silverman defines the notion of “text” as a message, which contains all kinds of information made up of words, as well as images, which, however, are not a required element. Text is a specific message in which data is stored without the direct involvement of the researcher (Silverman, 2007). The advantages of the given texts are undoubtedly their richness (meticulous analysis of written texts), their relevance and impact (which are important in understanding the world and creating it anew), their natural origin (they convey the history of social life) and its accessibility (universal access to texts) (Silverman, 2007).

We operate in a world where messages are undoubtedly the main and fundamental link between human communities. Karolina Szczepaniak claimed that

“the written word, despite the constant growth of the popularity of images, the development of new technologies and the resulting simplification of communication, still remains the basic way of transmitting information to each other, especially in the mass media dimension.” As she explains further, these mass media constitute today’s basic, unquestionably credible and often the only source of knowledge about the surrounding world; they provide the audiences with the foundations (basic information, cognitive patterns, models, principles, norms and values) for shaping an internally coherent image of the surrounding reality (Szczepaniak, 2012: 83).

The aim of mass culture is to present the same or similar content from limited sources, such as broadcasters, to broader audiences (Kobus, 2014: 72). Studies on popular culture stemmed from criticism of mass culture at the beginning of the 20th century. “Popular culture is a branch of mass culture, and the key criterion for its production is qualitative and not quantitative – it means an affective bond with a given text, active reception that drives further production of texts, based on mechanisms of negation, reinterpretation and affirmation (Kobus, 2014: 72). According to John Fiske, in order for a text to be genuinely popular, it must meet certain criteria for different audiences within different social contexts “(...) it must therefore already be polysemic in itself and each reading must be conditioned or driven by social relevance, that is, by the interconnections between the text and the immediate social situation of its readers.” (Fiske, 2010: 145).

One phenomenon, which is typical of the contemporary society, which experiences an abundance of information, is axiological chaos (Żuchelkowska, 2012: 7). Due to these circumstances, the impact of popular culture messages is very strong and intense, which is why it becomes crucial to introduce a child into the world of values, because it will enable instilling “(...) a permanent and open system of values, which will enable them to distinguish good from evil and will drive them to observe the norms and moral principles relevant in the society,” (Kowalska, 2013: 29) pointed out Wiesława Kowalska. The acquisition of relevant experience is very important for the formation of the human personality (Klim-Klimaszewska, 2010: 7).

The needs of a child

Family has always been the basic and natural educational environment for children (Łobocki, 2004: 310), since it has the greatest impact on the formation of a young person as a full-fledged human being. “This impact manifests itself both

in positive influences and family situations, as well as in conflict and crises within the family, which all shape young human beings,” claimed Iwona Rudek. According to her, the influence on the child is exerted in normal circumstances of life, during the course of observing and performing ordinary everyday activities. (...) A young person, who has an ability to perceive, think and act consciously, both individually and collectively, is perceived as a subject of social life, who needs to have the most favourable conditions for full development in the course of the process of family education (Rudek, 2012: 166). Human needs, as presented by Abraham Maslow, starting with physiological needs, through the need of safety, belonging, love, respect, knowledge and recognition are being redefined and disorganised in common understanding. The current social reality forms new, ever-changing and specific conditions for development. Based on this idea, the concept of development of a sensible child was developed, based on learning and guiding their development.

“The modern world is a world of diversity, a world of transitions and changes taking place on different levels, in various areas, spheres and aspects.” (Rudek, 2012: 167). For example, W. Jakubowski noted that “in a certain way, our electronic surroundings begin to resemble the world designed in *Summa Technologiae*, the classic work by Stanisław Lem. The science-fiction scenes described by the writer are not removed too far from the offerings of our modern technology, enabling us to enter virtual reality.” (Jakubowski, 2001: 55)

No human being is born with innate values, which gradually emerge from their needs. “Through observation and imitation, the child assimilates patterns of behaviour, thinking and imagining. They ask questions like ‘Why? What for?’ asks about the criteria for evaluation, the purpose of action and the existence of things.” (Kowalska, 2013: 31). Krystyna Ostrowska says that through contact with culture, children develop the awareness of their own development and thanks to that it is possible for them to learn more about themselves and their life goals. This process is mediated by other people, but the involvement of the individual is also crucial (Ostrowska, 2000: 84–86).

Children living in today’s global world receive a large number of various verbal and non-verbal messages every day, which are addressed to them from outside. The development of young people is a very complex and long-term process, linked to the satisfaction of all mental and physical needs. The development of a child’s speech and language is one of the fundamental signs of them reaching a certain stage of maturity. Thinking enables children to formulate various statements and messages, thanks to which they express themselves – their states and needs. The upbringing, socialisation and education of children mainly ensure the develop-

ment of their mental, communication, social, but also creative and linguistic competences (Schaffer, 2005: 294).

Presenting the issue of non-verbal communication, Krystyna Ferenz pointed out the significance of family ties. She referred to the bond based on the individual codes of behaviour stemming from the same environment and circumstances, specific to a given family – basic unit of society, taking place between its members (Ferenz, 2011: 15–24). In the age of broadly understood popular culture, which in a way became one of the influencing factors, young people willingly take advantage of its benefits, such as colour magazines addressed to them. The first experiences that have a positive or negative impact on the shape and appearance of a child's life, bear actual significance. It is also important to ensure that the youngest children have a relatively positive contact with the texts of popular culture, which fit into the relationship of changes taking place between the outside world and the inner world of the child in a very constructive and meaningful way, thus giving rise to new experiences.

Methodological basis of own research – on the analysis of the content of selected texts

For the purposes of this paper, I have adopted an approach based on the qualitative analysis of the content of selected popular culture texts. Presenting the meaning of content analysis, Elżbieta Kalinowska started by claiming that it is a research methodology born with the mass production of press at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in the United States (Kalinowska, 2001: 15). Initially, it was mainly included in the quantitative analysis, but over time and with the development of this methodology, the content of the texts started to be analysed in terms of quality. Content analysis has found broad applications in “(...) different practical areas, mainly fields concerned with messages, symbols and their functions, meanings and effects.” (Kalinowska, 2001: 16).

Content analysis is thus an analysis of the products of human activity – above all, written texts, as well as documents which serve as records of actual events (Kalinowska, 2001: 16). “In content analysis, text is treated as a way to communicate, not only as a record of facts, events, views or imagination; and thus content analysis, which encompasses both the analysis of the explicit content of the message (content, lexical, semantic), as well as the analysis of hidden content, enables us to get deeper into the examined phenomena.” (Kalinowska, 2001: 16; Pilch, 1998: 88–90; Łobocki, 1978: 226–237). Therefore, content analysis is a research tech-

nique that systematically, openly and transparently presents content of information messages.¹

In his work, Bernard Berelson distinguished three possibilities of analysing symbolic material. In the case of the first one, the researcher is primarily interested in the content of the text and its features. The second one, based on the analysis of the content, focuses on the conclusions about the author of the content or the reason for creating said content. In the third approach the researcher interprets the content in order to determine its recipients, their features and the impact of the text (Cartwright, 1965: 149). My study was based on the first of the three presented approaches.

While deciding to analyse the educational characteristics of the content and the form of the message, I also paid particular attention to:

- describing trends in communication content;
- tracing the development of knowledge;
- disclosing international differences in communication content;
- comparing media and levels of communication;
- constructing and applying communication standards;
- exposing propaganda techniques;
- measuring the readability of communication materials;
- discovering stylistic features. (Kalinowska, 2001: 18; za: Krippendorf, 1980: 34; Cartwright, 1965: 150–159)

The supporters of qualitative content analysis believe that quantitative approach is difficult to apply precisely in research where things are difficult to precisely determine, due to the rigorous processing of data required by this methodology (Sepstrup, 1981: 137–138). “Some text analyses focus on the processes of emergence, transformation and mutation of ideas, practices and identities, as well as on the mechanisms by which they become relatively well-established elements of the present.” (Ripley, 2010: 206).

A diligent quantitative content analysis should be fully repetitive in nature, while qualitative content analysis is used, among other things, to analyse symbolic meanings and the social role of the message in order to be able to describe the social role of messages in describing the characteristics of communication – what, how, to whom, and why, or in other words, the effects, which may lead to understanding the message in a different way than intended (Kalinowska, 2001: 20). This happens because the understanding of meanings does not need to be com-

¹ “Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” ((Berelson, 1952; Krippendorf, 1980: 9; Pilch, 1998: 90).

mon to different researchers because of the different perspectives of the approach to the subject at hand adopted by them, as well as the socio-cultural context in which the interpretation takes place.

The *Świerszczyk* magazine – a few words about history

This analysis focuses on the content of the *Świerszczyk* magazine, since it is the oldest children's magazine in Europe. Its history dates back to 1 May 1945, when World War II was still raging. The first issue was published on that day by the "Czytelnik" Publishing Cooperative. Łódź, where the event took place, was already liberated at that time (*Magazyn dla dzieci „Świerszczyk”...*). Ewa Szemburg-Zarembina (a well-known writer) proposed the title. "The cricket playing behind the chimney was supposed to be a symbol of what many children lost in the turmoil of war – the warmth of a family home." (*Magazyn dla dzieci „Świerszczyk”...*). The first cover was created by prominent illustrator Jan Marcin Szancer and the illustration was designed by excellent graphic artist and satirist Eryk Lipiński. Wanda Grodzieńska – a well-known and admired literary critic – was the first editor-in-chief of *Świerszczyk*. A couple of years after being established, *Świerszczyk* merged with the Warsaw-based *Iskierki* magazine and was published under the title *Świerszczyk – Iskierki*, but after a short period of time the magazine changed its name back to its original one. At the beginning of its activity, the magazine played the role of textbooks destroyed during the war and was published by Nasza Księgarnia. Since then, *Świerszczyk* has undergone many transformations. "From today's perspective, it is clear that the magazine came back to where it once started – back in the day, *Świerszczyk* replaced textbooks, today it is published by the Nowa Era educational publishing house and still helps children to learn reading and develop their imagination (*Magazyn dla dzieci „Świerszczyk”...*).

After World War II, *Świerszczyk* helped both adults and children to learn how to read. Today, the magazine supports parents in upbringing and educating their kids. In order for the cooperation process between parents and the magazine to run smoothly, an on-line guide to the ins and outs of upbringing, entitled *Magazyn dla rodziców ŚWIERSZCZYK*, was created.

Świerszczyk, like other magazines at the time, was subject to censorship, and as such, the editorial team received guidelines concerning subjects which could and could not be covered. However, the magazine always employed editors with great wisdom and sense, who avoided political topics in the published articles.

“In the 1950s and 1960s, the editorial office of *Świerszczyk* received up to 7,000 letters every month! Today, letters in envelopes are rare – readers prefer to send e-mails or visit *Świerszczyk* on Facebook,” (*Magazyn dla dzieci „Świerszczyk”...*). In the beginning of the 1970s, *Świerszczyk* needed to systematically increase his circulation – back in the day, it set all kinds of popularity records. The magazine was published in 900,000 copies.” (*Magazyn dla dzieci „Świerszczyk”...*). In March 1968, young people gathered in the building of the Warsaw University of Technology played a game published in *Świerszczyk*, which is why they hung a banner on the edifice of the Warsaw University of Technology, saying “The press is lying. Only *Świerszczyk* says the truth.” When the protests stopped, *Świerszczyk* received a commemorative letter from students with the stamp of the University (*Magazyn dla dzieci „Świerszczyk”...*).

In the 1990s, *Świerszczyk* was transformed from a literary weekly into a children’s magazine, filled with advertisements, interviews and reports. Today, *Świerszczyk* is a bi-weekly magazine and its main goal is to provide young audiences with content and illustrations at the highest level.” (*Magazyn dla dzieci „Świerszczyk”...*). Nowa Era publishing house, which has been publishing the magazine since 2005, is responsible for its current layout. “Supporting working with the text, building cognitive structures, developing vocabulary and syntactic correctness, implementing a system of hierarchy of values are just some of the advantages of the columns in the paper. *Świerszczyk* is a modern magazine with traditions.” (*Magazyn dla dzieci „Świerszczyk”...*). *Świerszczyk* has always had some of the most prominent authors of children’s literature, illustrators and graphic artists in its staff.

In September 2008, for the first time in the history of the magazine, *Świerszczyk* published its diary, and revealed the name of the eponymous cricket. To this day, Bajetan Hops the cricket helps children solve all small, big and enormous problems, as well as it can, with great sensitivity and imagination. Because, as Bajetan says, “every well-raised cricket flies high – like mum and dad.” (*Magazyn dla dzieci „Świerszczyk”...*).

General analysis of basic information about the *Świerszczyk* magazine

The magazine is published bi-weekly. It consisted of 24 to 32 pages, which were filled with text and illustrations from the very beginning of the magazine’s existence. Each issue comprises the same columns, which are repeated or undergo a slow metamorphosis to gain new, original appearances. *Świerszczyk* has a num-

ber of columns and sections – the current editions include: “Czarownica Irenka” [Irenka the Witch], “Litery Znam, Więc Czytam Sam!” [I Know the Letters, So I Read On My Own!], “Z Pamiętnika Pewnego Świerszczyka – Bajetan Hops” [From the Diary of Bajetan Hops the Cricket], “Chcę Wiedzieć Więcej” [I Want To Know More], “Kopnięte Królestwo” [Kicked Kingdom], “Wielkie Czytanie” [Great Reading], “Kto Zagadki Ładnie Zgadnie, Tego Nuda Nie Dopadnie!” [Who Solves The Riddles, Doesn't Get Bored], “Kolorowe Zabawy” [Fun With Colours], “Uśmiech Numeru” [Smile of the Issue], “Konkursy” [Contests], “Kotek Mamrotek” [Mamrotek the Cat].

The magazine is a constructive proposition for all those who want to raise their children

(...) in good emotional contact, better and more effectively. Experienced child psychologists and educators answer a number of very important questions, concerning issues such a persuading children to work with their parents, games helping in the learning process, taming naughty children, praising children wisely and, most importantly, how to talk so that children listen to their parents, as well as how to listen, so that children will be willing to talk (based on the book by A. Faber, E. Mazlish, based on the curriculum of the School for Parents and Educators). (*Magazyn dla dzieci „Świerszczyk”...*)

Analysis and interpretation of the study material

I carried out a qualitative content analysis of ten issues 24 of the magazine published in the period of 2004–2014, focusing on examining the content and meaning of educational content aimed at children. I focused on the last ten issues in their respective publishing years, published as issues no. 24. The subject matter of these issues is closely linked to the context of the time in which they were published, namely Christmas, New Year and winter.

The title page of the magazine always refers to the circumstances of the time surrounding publication of the magazine. The issues studied as part of this article featured baubles, Christmas trees, angels, snow, animals in Santa Claus hats, reindeer, mistletoe, gingerbread, presents and Christmas decorations. Under the title – *Świerszczyk* – other important information concerning the magazine were listed in tiny print, including the date of publication (the 15th of December for 10 years now), the issue number – 24, the magazine's website – www.swierszczyk.pl, the price (4.90 PLN, raised to 5.20 PLN in 2011), the publishing house – Nasza Księgarnia and since 2005 – Nowa Era, as well as Index: 378046, ISSN 0491-8193.

Due to the rather significant number of people involved in the creation of this magazine, I will take the liberty not to mention all their names – all the detailed information about them can be found on the website of the magazine (*Tworzą dla nas...*).

In my analysis of the content of the magazine carried out page by page, I noticed the following order. The presentation of the educational content of the magazine starts with poetry. The first pages contain poems with titles such as: “Kocham zimę” [“I Love Winter”], “Wigilijna noc” [“Christmas Night”], “Wigilia” [“Christmas Eve”], “Goście” [“Visitors”], “Te oczy zielone” [“Green Eyes”], “Opowieść wigilijna o zakochanym sumie i niemądrej pannie karpik” [“Christmas Eve Story about a Catfish in Love and a Foolish Lady Carp”], “Kiedy to było” [“Back in the Day”], “Zasypianka wigilijna” [“Christmas Eve Lullaby”], “23 grudnia” [“23 December”], “Kiedy nucę kolędę” [“Singing Carols”] – both titles and their content refer directly to the context of Christmas, winter and the upcoming New Year.

Since 2008, the poems have been moved to the second page of the magazine, but their layout and mood have been kept in the same convention. Since 2010 the poetry department has been named *Strefa Rymów* [Rhyme Zone], and has been recommended by the *qlturka.pl* – children and culture cultural website.

In 2008 a comic book about Irenka the Witch appeared on the first page of the magazine, presenting a short story from the life of a friendly witch. The story emphasised her unusual approach to the theme of holidays in a humorous way. Irenka always has interesting adventure – once she grows too big a Christmas tree, then too small one, uses bats instead of baubles to decorate the tree, dresses the leg of her hut in an original sock, in order to protect it from frost, shares food with animals on Christmas Eve, because on this day no one should be alone, and bakes star-shaped cookies on a starless night, and then scattered them in the sky. The fantastic and humorous approach to the theme of Christmas brings a smile on the reader's face and encourages them to explore the magazine.

The second page entitled “Obieżyświerszcz” [“Cricket-Globetrotter”], which was published from 2004 to 2007 contained various trivia about holiday customs in other countries, such as Venezuela, Germany, the United States, Denmark, and Vietnam. The editorial team also added coupons to the “Editorial Team” section of some issues, and the first several dozen readers who sent them back could receive attractive prizes (such as plastic Filofun strings for making pendants). *Obieżyświerszcz* also explained the meanings of Polish sayings, such as “what does a gingerbread have to do with a windmill”, what is the meaning of lights on a Christmas tree, what is the sleeper's month, the meaning of sweets on a tree, the meaning of mistletoe on the ceiling, the creation of baubles, as well as the Guinness World

Record set by 2800 Santa Clauses, who gathered at the same time in the European Park in Rust, Germany.

The following pages contained short stories, including:

- *Lampa* (The Lamp), which presents the importance of light on holidays, the value that unites people and makes them feel better, encouraging feelings of kindness and peace;
- *Prezent* (The Gift), which presents children's fantasy, their faith in dwarves and other fantastic creatures;
- *Choinka* (Christmas Tree), telling the story of an extraordinary Christmas tree that saved the house from destruction;
- *Noc cudów* (Night of Miracles), about extraordinary adventures of siblings during this one and only night in a year;
- *Bombki* (Baubles) about Christmas tree decorations;
- *Wigilijny* (Christmas Eve) about the Christmas Eve table;
- *Wigilia w Afryce* (Christmas Eve in Africa) about customs on another continent;
- *Puste miejsca* (Empty plates) telling the story behind empty plates at the table;
- *Wesołe* (Merry) about cheerful angels that accompany Christmas and create a festive atmosphere;
- *Gwiazdka i opłatek* (Christmas Eve and the Wafer), *Wigilia obok jodły* (Christmas Eve and the Fir), *Stajenka* (Stable) and *Prezent* (The Gift) are the symbols of Christmas, short stories with interesting pictures and colouring games, which are supposed to make learning letters and reading more attractive for children. The content of the stories introduces children to a pleasant, festive mood and the situations described show them how other people spend their holidays and how they approach them – such stories educate children by increasing their knowledge of the subject matter. Since 2008, this section has been named “Literary Znam, Więć Czytam Sam!” [I Know the Letters, So I Read On My Own!].

The section of the magazine called “Chcę Wiedzieć Więcej” [“I Want to Know More”] always contains interesting trivia about symbols relevant to the circumstances of publishing a given issue. In the analysed case, the 24th issues contained information on:

- the nativity scenes (when were they invented? who came up with this idea? what are nativity plays?);
- the wafer (where does it come from? how are they made? what is its purpose?);
- wafers (how are they made abroad?);

- the Christmas tree (where does this tradition come from and what is its meaning?);
- Christmas Eve (what is it? why is it happening? what is the purpose of the dinner?);
- baubles (predecessors of baubles, where did they come from?);
- Christmas Eve divinations (about weather, harvest, wealth, health);
- the Christmas kindness;
- other Christmas traditions.

This column is a true trove of knowledge, which provides a lot of valuable information on current topics and explains them to children in an interesting and accessible way. The reader can also find additional information on how to subscribe to *Świerszczyk*.

The column called “Kopnięte Królestwo” [“Kicked Kingdom”] is based on a giant named Bolutek, who was once going home in the middle of the night. On the way, he tripped over a small kingdom and... kicked it by accident! Nobody was hurt, but from that point, the inhabitants of the Kicked Kingdom are constantly counting things, learning strange information and asking a lot of questions. Nobody knows why... (Usenko, 2006: 8). The column is devoted to “Letter Fairy Tales” such as the story about a ghastly phantom washed by a girl named Ula, which turned it into a cute phantom. This is an interesting proposal for practising reading and spelling words beginning with the letter “U”. The next one was an excerpt from the diary of Czyścioch, which taught the spelling of words containing “h”, “ch”, “rz”, “ó”, “dz”, “ą”, “d”. Since 2005, the “Letter fairy tales” started being accompanied by the “Mathematical fairy tales”, which included: “Pokolejka”, “Nakrapianka”, “Poplątanką” and “Domalunka” – various tasks combining literary and mathematical exercises, based on arranging something in a logical, chronological sequence, painting it according to the instructions and practising perception.

The 24th issue of 2004 contains an advertisement for the game *Rummikub* – a board game for families, which requires the players to be perceptive and to use their imagination. The 24th issue of 2006, just like in the previous case, one entire page was devoted to the advertising of the *Kołysanki MiniMini* album under the patronage of Radio Zet. The 24th issue of 2007 contained a page dedicated to English language courses.

The magazine offers young readers many interesting solutions, such as “Christmas trees with crosswords – don’t delay, think today” – a colourful, picture-filled way to practise spelling, making associations and using general knowledge to guess the solution. The readers could then send the solution to the editorial staff for a chance to win one of the 50 toys made by BRIO Polska.

The *Świerszczyk* magazine also included a column titled: “Podróże po Świecie” [“Travels Around the World”], devoted to: Bethlehem, the Basilica of the Nativity, the Grotto of the Nativity, the Manger and Chapel of the Milk Grotto, the Shepherds’ Field, the Bethlehem Christmas Eve Mass and the Light of Peace.

In 2004, 2005 and 2006, the magazine also included an advertisement for Dr. Oetker products, as well as a culinary recipe for a tasty New Year’s dessert with jelly and pudding – a simple recipe, enabling children to make themselves a sweet treat. The 24th issue of 2005 included an additional attraction for young readers – an angel made of cardboard elements, which the readers would have to assemble themselves, was included as a gift.

There was also an interesting short story, entitled: *O tym co wół z osłem robili w Betlejem* [(“On what the Ox and the Donkey were doing in Bethlehem.”)] The text is a part of the “Czytam Głośno... Młodszej Siostrze Lub Bratu” [“Reading Aloud... To My Younger Sister Or Brother”] series. The story shows young readers that animals, like humans, also have interesting adventures during the holiday season. In the short story titled *Sekret im. Hermengildy Pokręconej*, children can learn how to get better grades and what is the purpose of it. The readers of *Świerszczyk* could also enjoy an interview with Santa Claus published in the December issue, Along with “Świąteczne łamanie głowy, czyli Wielki konkurs choinkowy” – a Christmas-themed competition with prizes.

Another noteworthy story was “Małych i dużych, czyli Cecylka Cebulka, czyli Cecyleczka Szczypaweczka”, which referred to the subject of violence, showing the readers that everyone – regardless of age, both people and animals – has the right to a life without violence.

In 2010, *Świerszczyk* got a new column titled “Ukryte Obrazki” (Hidden Images), where readers were supposed to find hidden objects – this exercise develops perceptiveness, and the colouring of the black and white image develops manual skills. The next section called “Zagwozdki” contains diagrams and rebuses, which help children develop their perceptiveness, counting, associating, logical thinking, cause and effect relationships. In 2011, the magazine had another column “Zabawy z Endo” (endo.pl) [“Games with Endo”] for a short time, featuring puzzles for children. The year 2012 brought the “Zagadkomat” column, which – as the name suggests – was devoted to riddles. There was also a game “Dookoła choinek od stojaka do gwiazdeczki” [“Around the Christmas tree – from stand to star”] – a board game, which required dice and pawns.

The magazine also contains the “Calendar of Nature,” which contains descriptions of plants characteristic of a given time context – in this case, the calendar featured a description of mistletoe and waxwing, as well as places where animals eat in winter.

The columns titled: “Ćwiczenia z Myślenia” [“Thinking Exercises”], “Ukryte Obrazki” [“Hidden Pictures”] and “Kto Zagadki Ładnie Zgadnie, Tego Nuda Nie Dopadnie” [“Who Solves The Riddles, Doesn’t Get Bored!], contain a number of puzzles and riddles enabling children to practise various skills and abilities. In the column entitled “Kolorowe Zabawy” [“Colourful Games”], children could find interesting handiwork projects. It contained descriptions of projects such as colourful Christmas tree chains, paper baubles, Santa Claus made of cones, pasta on the Christmas tree, bomb balloon, golden haired (angel), stars.

The 2006 issue also featured a contest, which requires looking and understanding, entitled: “SMS from Santa Claus” encouraging children to send text messages for a chance to win attractive prizes. “Not only do puzzles effectively combat boredom, they also help with learning, solving problems and improving memory. A brain trained on puzzles can generate as much energy as it takes to light a light bulb.”

The new column, published since the 24th issue in 2008, entitled “Z Pamiętnika Pewnego Świerszczyka – Bajetan Hops” [“From the Diary of Bajetan Hops the Cricket”], featured stories about the life of the eponymous cricket, Bajetan. His adventures are very similar to those of children in early childhood education. Bajetan is a peer who struggles with situations in which he learns new things. The young cricket gets presents, has interesting adventures at school, also finds presents under a Christmas tree – that is also how he found his name and surname hidden in a green box.

The column entitled “Wielkie Czytanie” [“Great Reading”] appeared in the magazine from 2008 to 2011 and featured stories recommended by TVP Kultura. Starting in 2012, the entire magazine was recommended by TVP2, instead of just one of its columns. The “Great Reading” is followed on the page by another column entitled “Prawda czy Fałsz” [“True or False”], which contained questions to the presented text. Answering these questions taught children understanding the written text, required attentive reading and trained concentration.

The penultimate page always contained “Uśmiech Numeru” [“Smile of the Issue”] with jokes, Christmas and winter jokes and the last page contains a comic about Bartek and Chlorofil (a boy and his dragon friend). The comic book found its way to the magazine thanks to PZU Życie SA insurance company, and the adventures of the protagonists taught the readers to:

- avoid making ice rinks where children feel like it, because it can be dangerous;
- find the urge to look for the spark of the magical Christmas atmosphere and the belief in the existence of Santa Claus;

- remember that everything takes time, training and expertise at doing something comes only with time;
- wear reflective elements when it is dark outside to take care of your own and others' safety;
- in an unfortunate situation, always be humorous and find constructive solutions when it seems to be very bad;
- learn and use metaphors, comparisons in colloquial speech and everyday life.

Since 2010 the comic strips about “Bartek and Chlorofil” was replaced by the comic strips *Zajac Kicaj*, which in a similar humorous way taught children to appreciate the value of friendship, admiration, festive mood, Christmas greetings and helping each other. There are also short, detailed information about subscribing to the *Świerszczyk* magazine.

Conclusions

In the era of prevailing consumerism, this multitude of information creates new, artificial needs that bring chaos to the children's world. In the era of ubiquitous consumerism, society created new – artificial – needs that are triggered in children by means of various unusual creations of popular culture, including colour magazines. They tempt children not only with their colourful graphics, characters from animated films, but also with attractive gadgets, which the child will get as soon as they get a given issue of the magazine in the entire publishing series. Young people are encouraged to participate in the reception of selected pieces of content published by the publisher. “A person, as long as they are authentic, are their own main determinant. Each person is in part ‘their own design’ and creates themselves.” (Maslow, 1986: 188). My deliberations present the result of the analysis of selected content and forms presented in deliberately selected children's magazine *Świerszczyk*. “Its methodological reflections are noteworthy because of the specific situation in which the subject and the object of research are inextricably linked, such as the situation of the study of a popular culture by its participant, or even an aficionado, which calls into question the requirement of research objectivity, which hinges upon maintaining a certain distance.” (Kobus, 2014: 76).

Of all the popular culture texts (magazines) available on the Polish market aimed at children,² I wanted to pay attention to the educational significance of

² There are over fifty different magazines on the Polish market, addressed to children as young as the age of 3).

these popular culture texts, because the richness of the offer addressed to the reader deserves attention and recommendation to the young audiences. The child's intellectual, manual and emotional development subjected to exercises and stimuli of the kind presented in the magazine creates a unique educational situation. The social development of the child is also another key matter, since it is strongly influenced by the environment in which it takes place. Danuta Opozda points out that it is also about placing "(...) an individual educational relation in the system of mutual relations and interactions of individuals and relations between them on other persons and other intra-family relations." (Opozda, 2012: 6; 120). Influencing the child with the content of the message becomes a medium of patterns and models of desirable attitudes and behaviours of selected main characters. The number of rebuses, puzzles and exercises stimulating imagination, creative and logical thinking requires engagement in the magazine and in the analysis of its content. The magazines show situations in which the main characters help each other.

The analysis of popular culture texts cannot ignore the fact that fundamental models of behaviour are passed on in childhood, because childhood is the period which shapes the fundamental social attitudes. These attitudes are acquired by the child as a result of participation in culture and reception of popular culture texts.

"The child adopts both desirable and socially undesirable forms of behaviour towards other people or groups from their immediate social surroundings – including their family (Rudek, 2012: 172). Because of that, parents who want to satisfy their child's needs can offer them magazines adapted to their age and requirements.

Social interaction facilitates socialisation. "Raising children is a difficult art, which is fascinating and hugely satisfying to parents, who can love their children with wise love," claimed Ewelina Szydłowska. She then goes on to say that it is defined as a set of measures to shape a person in physical, moral and mental terms, and as the deliberate and conscious actions aimed at comprehensive development of personality and preparation for life in a society (Szydłowska, *Wychowanie...*).

The desire to have various gadgets (boxes, clothes, school supplies, toys) adorned with images of children's favourite characters makes them reach for magazines and papers very early in life, bringing them closer to the world of popular culture. Although these activities are not essential to their life, they still feel happier being able to have them. "One of the interesting things (...) when analysing a text is its rhetorical power. In other words, the way the presented issues are or-

ganised and structured, as well as how the text at hand tries to convince us of the validity of its interpretation (Ripley, 2010: 197).

To sum up, I believe that *Świerszczyk* magazine deserves special attention of children and adults. Its varied, attractive and rich content is an interesting adventure for the reader, who can embark on a journey to the world of letters and numbers. The fantastic and unique names surround children with an aura of uniqueness and unrealism, while offering bite-sized doses of knowledge presented in an interesting way that does not tire the reader, who can feel joy and satisfaction from the time spent constructively.

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Netography

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