



Submitted: 07.05.2019

Accepted: 12.09.2019

Suggested citation: Kalinowska-Witek B. (2019). *Upbringing of Preschool Children in the Opinion of Pedagogues and Journalists of Selected Journals from the Kingdom of Poland in the Second Half of the 19th and at the Beginning of the 20th Century*, "Edukacja Elementarna w Teorii i Praktyce," vol. 14, no. 3(53), pp. 15-26. DOI: 10.35765/eetp.2019.1453.01

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Upbringing of Preschool Children in the Opinion of Pedagogues and Journalists of Selected Journals from the Kingdom of Poland in the Second Half of the 19th and at the Beginning of the 20th Century

KEYWORDS

preschool education,
care institutions
for small children,
children's gardens,
Froebel's garden,
Froebel's women,
upbringing in the
19th century

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to show pedagogues' and journalists' views on bringing up and teaching small children in Poland in the second half of 19th and at the beginning of 20th century. To collect the data, the author used two methods: historical-critical analysis of sources, and analysis of the press content. The material obtained this way was submitted to qualitative analysis.

The pedagogues who were looking after small children approached the society through the rules of functioning of educational institutions, and they paid much attention to preschool education. Journals played an important role in promoting the idea of preschool education, which was mainly targeted at women – guardians of homes, mothers and educators of the young generation. The journalists pointed to the meaning of the first years in the child's life, made parents aware of their mistakes, and gave them some advice and guidelines. They also informed the readers about the newly created educational establishments for small children, such as care institutions and Froebel's gardens that provided the basis for preschool upbringing. The publicists also encouraged young women to take part in courses for Froebel's women and take up work in children's gardens. All these actions contributed to the promotion of the idea of preschool education and improvement of education methods, as well as nursery education.

Introduction

The 19th century introduced a new perspective on the period of early childhood. Polish lands were under partitions at that time. On the one hand, it was a factor hindering the organisation of activities supporting the development of small children, while on the other hand, adverse external conditions meant that the Poles themselves took actions for the benefit of local communities and families, as they knew they could not count on the education authorities of the partitioning countries. A special role was ascribed to the family, which, through the proper education of the young generation, could and should contribute to the survival of the nation. Unfortunately, parents were not always able to fulfil what was expected of them. Support was provided by the teachers who organised care and educational activities for children, but also gave parents a lot of advice and tips, publishing their views in books, brochures and magazines. Well-known social activists and educators of the discussed period, concerned with the issues of educating preschool-age children, included, among others: August Cieszkowski, Henryk Wernic, Adolf Dygasiński, Jan Władysław Dawid, Aniela Szcówna and Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa. Their views and practical achievements contributed to the development of preschool education in Poland.

In the second half of the 19th century, many periodicals appeared on the publishing market, and some of them were addressed to women and families. More significant women and family magazines that were published in the discussed period in the Kingdom of Poland were: *Bluszcz*, *Tygodnik Mów i Nowości* (from 1871, *Tygodnik Mów i Powieści*), *Świt*, *Kronika Rodzinna*, and, from 1901, also *Dobra Gospodyni*. An important role was also played by educational magazines, including *Przegląd Pedagogiczny*, published since 1882. The authors writing for them shaped the views of readers, among others on the upbringing of children and adolescents; they published articles and fragments of works by well-known educationalists, but also allowed readers to participate in the discussion. That is why, they were able to diagnose their needs and meet their expectations.

Both in the statements of educators and authors of the analysed magazines, there was a belief that the basis for effective education of school-age children is their proper upbringing (education) in the first years of life. In the middle and upper social classes, the education of preschool-age children took place in the family home. It was the parents who were responsible for the direction of education, although they did not always have the necessary knowledge. Therefore, the authors writing for women and family magazines set themselves the goal of making parents and the society aware of how to properly handle children by publishing articles on care and education. Poor families, especially of workers and peasants, often could not provide children with proper care. Cieszkowski wrote about the situation of rural children: "... the children

are left unattended in the field or near the house, which is the reason for numerous accidents” (Cieszkowski 1922: 9). The situation of children from working-class families was similar. Therefore, providing care to children from the poorest families in urban and rural *ochronkas*¹ [shelters] was an important social issue.

The views of Polish educators on the education of preschool-age children

Polish educators often expressed their views on the parents’ obligations towards their children, and explained the principles of handling and working with preschool-age children.

One of the propagators of *ochronkas* was the philosopher, economist and social activist August Cieszkowski, who lived and worked in the Grand Duchy of Posen. He demanded that rural *ochronkas* be established throughout the country and financed from state funds. He believed that *ochronkas* should be run by properly prepared female educators – housekeepers and guides who have to be educated for working in institutions established for this purpose (Cieszkowski 1922: 17). He believed that children should not be taught to read and write in *ochronkas*, because it is the task of the school. He emphasised the importance of play for the child’s mental development, and recommended combining it with elements of singing and dancing, as well as aesthetic education. He recommended teaching catechism, as well as conversations and stories, and developing children’s attention and perceptiveness (Cieszkowski 1922: 24, 27). Cieszkowski’s book *O ochronach wiejskich* [*On Rural Shelters*] had an impact on the creation of these institutions in the Kingdom of Poland (*Notatki...* 1885a: 182-183).

Henryk Wernic was the author of many works on bringing up and teaching children, including preschool-age children (Wernic 1868, 1881). He dedicated his books to parents and home educators. He emphasised the need to take up educational work already in the earliest period of the child’s life, because education “... is not an accident of one moment, but a long sequence of causes and effects, an uninterrupted chain of causation” (Wernic 1881: 71). He stressed the importance of the right family atmosphere for the proper development of the child. He pointed to the need to learn about the nature of the child and to use an individual approach; he highlighted the role of play the form of which should gradually become more similar to school activities (Wernic 1881: 36-37). In his opinion, the process of preparing a child for

¹ *Ochronka/ochrona* – a charity institution for children from poor families. The first *ochronkas* were created at the beginning of the 19th century. They provided care and education to preschool and early school-age children when their mothers were occupied with work and were unable to look after them.

school begins at the age of 3-4, initially it only includes shaping insights, and only then should generalisations be developed. Wernic recognised the cognitive and ludic value of play (Bobrowska-Nowak 1978: 236-237). He was the author of the book *Nauka o rzeczach. Wychowanie domowe* [Learning about the Environment: Education at Home]. In *Kronika Rodzinna*, he promoted the creation of afternoon *ochronkas* for children from poor families (Wernic 1884: 263) and gymnastic institutes for pre-school-age children. In the latter, he recommended using F. Froebel's method, because "by means of entertainment and gymnastic games, you can toughen up children's health, develop their dexterity, strength, and, by using appropriate activities, develop a perceptive sense, lay the foundations for good taste, and accustom them to tidiness, order and punctuality" (Wernic 1887: 271-272).

Adolf Dygasiński, the author of the book *Pierwsze nauczanie w domu i w szkole* [First Instruction at Home and in School], attributed an important role to play – he emphasised that it satisfies the child's need for movement and action. He argued that parents should, first of all, support the physical development of children, and then improve their moral and intellectual development (Dygasiński 1885: 77-78, 85-86). While discussing the education of young children, he wrote: "the book should not be given priority over life; one should start from life and finish with the book" (Dygasiński 1882: 30). Not only teachers, but also tutors in *ochronkas* and Froebel kindergartens used his guidelines concerning demonstrative teaching and "learning about the environment" (Bobrowska-Nowak 1978: 240-241).

Jan Władysław Dawid was interested in the child's psyche from birth to 20 years of age (Dawid 1886: 128, 167, 199). In the years 1889-1897, he was the editor of *Przegląd Pedagogiczny* [Pedagogical Review]. During that period, articles on various pedagogical systems were published in the magazine. Dawid also published articles concerning "learning about the environment" (Dawid 1890: 85), education using the Froebel method (Dawid 1893: 33), and Froebel teachers (Dawid 1896: 361-362). He appreciated the role of Froebel kindergartens as institutions concerned with the education of children from 3 to 6 years of age under the guidance of professionally trained staff, although, at the same time, he was critical of the Froebel method – he believed that it limited children's physical and creative activity as well as imagination. He found it more useful to "to learn about the environment," as it was a process in which objects were studied in their natural surroundings (Dawid 1960: 515-525).

Aniela Szycówna was concerned with, among others, the problems of preparing children to start school. She developed methodological guidelines for "learning about the environment" (Szycówna 1909: 1-22). She emphasised the role of the child's interests and the need to use creative activities (drawing, modelling) in working with children. She was interested in the speech development of preschool-age children. She emphasised the need to learn about the child's knowledge base before they

start school. In the book *Nauka w domu. Przewodnik dla wychowawców* [Learning at Home: A Guide for Educators], she published guidelines for group education of young children (Szycówna 1895).

Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa was “the leading organiser and activist of the preschool movement in the Kingdom of Poland at the turn of the 19th and 20th century” (Bobrowska-Nowak 1978: 261). She learned about Froebel’s concept at the courses held in St. Petersburg and during her stay in Germany and Switzerland, where she studied the methods used in Froebel kindergartens. In 1887, she opened a model Froebel kindergarten in Warsaw, which was supposed to be not only an institution for educating preschool-age children, but also a school educating future kindergarten (Froebel) teachers. She published her articles in *Przegląd Pedagogiczny* [Pedagogical Review] (Weryho 1889b: 247-248); from 1888 she was the editor of its supplement entitled “Games and Activities for Preschool-age Children,” transformed, in 1891, into the “Children’s Garden” section. “Children’s Garden” informed the readers about the assumptions of the Froebel method, provided some suggestions for games, activities, stories and texts for children, and discussed the way of conducting classes. It taught how to understand and meet children’s needs. In the years 1888-1889, *Przegląd Pedagogiczny* published a series of articles prepared by Weryho, entitled “Games and Activities for Preschool-age Children” (Weryho 1888, 1889a). In 1890, a series of articles written by Weryho and entitled “Activities for Children” promoted Froebelian ideas in the family environment (Weryho 1890: 6, 39, 64-65, 99-100, 126, 165). In 1895, together with Justyna Strzemeska, Weryho published the book *Wychowanie przedszkolne. Podręcznik dla wychowawców* [Preschool Education: A Handbook for Educators], in which they presented the assumptions of the Froebel method, describing his “gifts” and how to use them in working with children (Strzemeska, Weryho 1895).

Views of the authors writing in women and family magazines on the obligations of parents towards preschool-age children

Journalists also often expressed their opinions about the education of preschool-age children, addressing their words primarily to the parents who were better off financially and could afford to employ governesses. The articles aimed at making the parents aware of their responsibility for the selection of appropriate governesses and teachers for their children, and helping them consciously manage the process of educating their sons and daughters. Anastazja Dzieduszycka emphasised that the education of children in the first years of life should be comprehensive, i.e. it should encompass physical,

mental and moral spheres (Dzieduszycka 1875a: 58). Maria Ilnicka pointed out that the influence of parents on children must be planned and caring, “so that all the faculties and abilities of the young person are properly developed” (Ilnicka 1881: 261).

Concern for the physical development of a small child

As early as in the nineteenth century, it was observed that the proper physical development of the child is the basis of his or her proper mental and moral development. *Tygodnik Mód i Powieści* [Trends and Stories Weekly] emphasised the importance of proper infant care from the very first moments of a baby’s life (F.A. 1882: 409). With the future of their child in view, mothers should provide adequate nourishment for babies, preferably breast-feeding them (Prączyński 1875: 312). Slightly older children should be fed according to their age. Eliza Orzeszkowa drew attention to the question of proper nourishment of young children, especially girls. In the book *Kilka słów o kobietach* [A Few Words About Women], initially published in *Tygodnik Mód i Nowości*, she argued that food should be adapted to the child’s age, rich in nutrients and varied (Orzeszkowa 1873a: 70). Similar recommendations appeared in the 1880s in the *Bluszcz* magazine (Fritsche 1880: 120). Mothers were also urged to control the physical development of their children. If they noticed something disturbing in the appearance or behaviour of the child, they were to seek medical attention. At the same time, they had to follow the rules of hygiene, ensure that their child spends time outdoors, and apply a proper diet (Budziński 1905: 137, 164). Magazine writers also raised the issue of dressing children. They warned against dressing children too warmly or putting them at risk of a cold (Ilnicka 1893: 212). They pointed out that parents, by making their children, especially daughters, wear too elegant or sophisticated clothes, restricted children’s movement and hindered their play, thus delaying their development (Gregorowicz 1864: 4-5). An author who wrote for *Dobra Gospodyni* reminded the parents that forcing children to sit still is harmful to the young body. This especially concerned girls, because boys were usually allowed to run, jump and spend time playing outdoors. However, several-year-old girls were required to spend time on needlework, among others embroidery and sewing doll clothes. This led to postural problems, deteriorated eyesight and weakened the body. There was also a belief that girls should not run, laugh loudly, stay in the sun for too long, because they could get a suntan, which was considered inappropriate for young ladies (Zdr 1906: 290). Magazine writers protested against this superstition. Exercise in the open air, contact with nature and toughening up through exposure to unfavourable weather conditions were also recommended for girls (Strokowa 1905: 526-527; Rolicz-Staniecka 1905: 303-304), as such games and activities developed the children’s dexterity and strength (Lipko 1906: 153; Trąmpczyński 1913: 121).

Moral education of preschool-age children

Moral education of children and young people, consisting in shaping feelings, will and intellect, was one of the most important tasks of the family. It was considered as important as caring for physical health. It was believed that moral education should take place at home, among the people connected with each other with an emotional bond. This was the parents' main task in which they could not be replaced (F.A. 1882: 409). An article in *Kronika Rodzinna* from 1913 stated: "the lack of strong personality cannot be replaced with knowledge, skills or cleverness ..., because no matter what trait we would list, they are all dependent on the values of human character" (Maciejowski 1913: 492). Journalists and magazine editors reminded their readers that the child's character is shaped from the moment of conception, and, to some extent, it also depends on the mother's lifestyle during pregnancy. They argued that if parents try to bring up their son or daughter to be an honest person, they give the child a good foundation for all their further life. Parents should overcome negative traits in children from an early age, because it is easier to prevent such characteristics than to fight them later in life. Adam Goltz warned in *Kronika Rodzinna* [Family Chronicle] that surrounding the child with excessive luxury deprives them of their strength to fight against adversity in the future (Goltz 1867: 1). Orzeszkowa convinced her readers that Polish society needs "healthy, brave, sensible and persevering workers," and these traits should be shaped from an early age (Orzeszkowa 1873b: 2).

Józefa Jaxa-Bąkowska made an observation that expensive clothes resulted in vanity and a passion for luxury in children. Similarly, giving girls dolls that are dressed "terribly, tastelessly, brightly, pretentiously, fashionably to the point of ridicule, and expensively to the point of outrage," was harmful for the girls, teaching them to pay too much attention to clothes (Jaxa-Bąkowska 1899: 397-398). Magazines also criticised noisy games, which were thought to have a negative impact on children's health (Starkman 1892: 101), and children's parties that shaped pride or envy in young hearts (Ilnicka 1886: 339).

Concern for mental development as a condition of proper preparation for school education

Preparing a child for school education should begin as early as at the preschool age. It is the parents who should ensure the child's harmonious development. First, "normal body health, its physical strength, dexterity and the capacity for even the hardest work" should be developed in children, and then "their mental powers, especially in a way that supports their inherent abilities," so that in the future they could become useful members of the family and society (Goltz 1869: 65). Dzieduszycka stressed that

the development of the mind is the most important thing in the first years of a child's life. Giving him or her information about the surrounding world should be postponed until a slightly later period. The development of the child's mind is influenced by all the impulses he/she receives, "not only at the moments devoted to learning, but in all moments of life" (Dzieduszycka 1875b: 241). The first instruction (up to 3 years of age) should amount to contact with nature and listening to properly selected fairy tales. The role of play in the child's life and development was emphasised. The condition of good play, which is beneficial for health and mental development, is that "the child gets involved in it freely, unrestricted, with enthusiasm and pleasure" (Zaleska 1888: 481). The choice of toys is important. Those that were regarded as the most useful ones were toys that develop imagination and shape manual skills, e.g. blocks (Reicke 1871: 193).

It was suggested that only after 3 years of age children should begin a more systematic education in particular subjects (Dawid 1890: 85; Szycówna 1909: 1-22). It was necessary to develop perceptiveness in children, train their senses, and develop their "judgement of different matters." To prepare children for school, they had to be taught to "look, hear and be aware of what they see and hear" (Jedna 1893: 3). Professor Jan Papłoński recommended systematic learning starting from 7 years of age, but one and a half years earlier "it is necessary to watch over anything that has struck the child's eyesight or hearing, for it is a time of edifying conversations and stories" (Nowicki 1871: 81). Speech development is also important. Parents should ensure that the child uses the mother tongue correctly, hence foreign nurses and governesses speaking to the small child in their native language were not the best choice. That is why, it was recommended to employ young Polish girls to look after children and make sure that they have proper professional preparation (Olszyc 1877: 276). Some magazine writers argued that the first teacher for a child should be the mother who would "direct their education and protect them against bad influences" (Rzep 1884: 177).

Conclusion

Both educators and journalists of the cited magazines from the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century supported the idea of well-considered and well-organised education of preschool-age children. Attention was drawn to the need to take care of their physical, moral and intellectual development. Children had to be protected against anything that could adversely affect their physical, spiritual and mental health. That is why, it was recommended that children should be taught through play, conversations, and creating a pleasant atmosphere: "talk to the child, laugh with them, joke, play with them" (Seidlerowa 1903: 502). It was emphasised

that the child should not be idle and bored as it is detrimental to his or her health and development. The activities they got involved in should be reasonably selected and edifying, and they had to be carried out under the supervision of adults (Seidlerowa 1903: 502).

Magazine authors addressed their words mostly to parents, especially mothers, because journal readers usually came from the middle or upper social classes, in which the education of children until they began school (and in the case of girls sometimes until they finished their schooling altogether) took place in the family home. Educators were much more involved in recommending and organising institutional care for preschool-age children. In the case of children from the poorest families, the purpose was usually to provide care for them when their parents worked and there was no one to look after them. That is why, *ochronkas* primarily performed compensatory functions, although sometimes secret teaching was also organised there. Froebel kindergartens were usually the place of pedagogical experiments, allowing for the development of the most effective ways of influencing preschool-age children. They contributed to the development of the concept of preschool education. However, magazines also featured articles about *ochronkas* and Froebel kindergartens. In the first case, the aim was to encourage young women from the landowning and noble classes to take care of children from working-class and peasant families, in the second – to promote the idea of preschool education in the society and to make the readers familiar with the new methods of working with young children.

In 1897, Janina Sedlaczkówna presented the differences between *ochronkas* and Froebel kindergartens to her readers. She also described the activities conducted in both types of facilities – games, singing, gymnastics, practical classes. Better equipped Froebel kindergartens offered greater development opportunities for children (Sedlaczkówna 1897: 125). A writer for *Kronika Rodzinna* encouraged young girls to learn about the Froebel method and to undertake the work of a Froebel kindergarten teacher (*Jeszcze...* 1868: 42). The role of rural *ochronkas* was noticed by a journalist in *Bluszcz* from 1885. He observed that rural children are particularly deprived of care during the summer, when their mothers work in the fields. He appealed especially to young middle-class girls, who were not yet burdened with family or household responsibilities, to establish *ochronkas*. He argued that it was their social duty (*Notatki...* 1885b: 206).

Wanda Grot-Bęczkowska wrote about “children’s gardens” founded in Warsaw in 1899 by Wilhelm Rau and similar establishments in the Saxon Garden, as well as in Wola and Praga districts. The garden “at Sobieski” was also popular. The journalist defined the role of these gardens as follows: “From these *Gardens*, managed under the loving care of enlightened and good people, and with the help of intelligent play guides, a golden ray of ... higher culture of the spirit will flow to the masses deprived

of it so far ...; it will be a bridge bonded with a permanent cement of love, and cast over the spiritual abyss separating two previously hostile camps” (Grot-Bęczkowska 1902: 326). Institutions such as *ochronkas* and Froebel kindergartens, contributed to the development of the concept of preschool education in Poland.

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