



Submitted: 13.06.2019

Accepted: 12.09.2019

Suggested citation: Szulakiewicz W. (2019). *The Curriculum and Promoters of Preschool Religious Education in the Light of the Magazine "Preschool Education," "Edukacja Elementarna w Teorii i Praktyce,"* vol. 14, no. 3(53), pp. 47-61. DOI: 10.35765/eetp.2019.1453.03

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The Curriculum and Promoters of Preschool Religious Education in the Light of the Magazine *Preschool Education*

KEYWORDS

religious education,
preschool education
history, the magazine
Preschool Education
[*Wychowanie*
Przedszkolne]

ABSTRACT

The paper refers to the history of preschool education in Poland. Its purpose is to show the history of preschool education theories, especially the religious ones, and, on the other hand, to emphasize the significant function of the magazine *Preschool Education* [*Wychowanie Przedszkolne*] in that process. The intention of the reflection included in the text is to show the propagators of the theory of preschool education, with a special emphasis on the promotion of religious education and upbringing in kindergartens. The magazine in question clearly promoted religious education that was to link religious education with moral upbringing and ethics, because it was believed that religion must be connected with life. The curriculum of religious upbringing promoted by the *Preschool Education* aimed at teaching deep religiousness, which is why the promoters of such upbringing argued that, apart from the theory of religion and religiousness, or learning the texts of the Holy Scriptures, religious practices are important. All the principles and guidance included in the methodology of religious education described in the magazine served this purpose. It should be noted that a particular function in this difficult work of religious education was performed by kindergarten teachers. The creators of religious poetry helped them, especially in providing relevant educational contents.

Introductory remarks

The way each discipline or subdiscipline has been shaped can be reconstructed by referring to the publications of its representatives and to other sources among which specialist magazines are worth mentioning. They reflect the theoretical ideas of authors discussing pedagogical subjects, and they provide the readers with an image of educational practice. The development of pedagogical magazines in the interwar period was exemplified by relatively numerous synthetic publications which had already existed on the publishing market. Truchim (1932), Goriszewski (1959), Czerniewski (1968), Możdżeń and Musiał (1981), Jarowiecki and Góra (1994), Lewartowska-Zychowicz (2003: 564-569), and Jarowiecki (2016) wrote about such journals, including pedagogical periodicals. The review of bibliographic publications shows that preschool pedagogy, in the history of its development, also had numerous magazines. *Preschool Education* was one of them.

The article is a contribution to the description of the way preschool education has been developing in Poland. The reflection included in the text aims at presenting the propagators of the theory of preschool education with a special emphasis on the promotion of the idea of religious education in kindergartens. The basic source for the reflection was the above-mentioned *Preschool Education* magazine published in Warsaw in 1925-1939. In this article I am trying to answer the question about the kind of religious education curriculum promoted in this magazine, and about its creators, i.e. the representatives of preschool education, but also the authors who provided content for its creation. It is possible to reconstruct the curriculum by analysing the contents presented in the magazine. Thus, it became necessary to analyse particular volumes that were published within 15 years. Such analysis made it possible for me to capture the main ideas of religious education and its authors, for most of them were the representatives of kindergarten teachers.

Preschool Education – some remarks on the magazine, editorial staff and co-workers

The magazine being the major source for this article was published for 15 years (from 1925 to 1939), initially as a monthly, then as a bimonthly. The Association of Preschool Education, which was established in 1903 (Sandler 1968: 153 and next), was its publisher.¹ It was a specialist journal directed to kindergarten educators. It is estimated that in the interwar period the magazine was published for the longest time comparing to other journals concerning preschool education (Bobrowska-Nowak

¹ The first management board of the Association of Preschool Education included Cecylia Śniegocka, Maria Gebethner and Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowicz as the president.

1978: 276; Wira-Świątkowska 2010: 258-259; Sosnowska 2016: 31-55). Joanna Sosnowska, who specializes in the magazines related to preschool education, mentioned other journals published at that time, including *Sprawy Przedszkolne* [Preschool Matters], *Opieka nad Dzieckiem* [Childcare], *Dziecko i Matka* [Child and Mother], *Zagadnienia Przedszkolne* [Preschool Issues], *Życie Dziecka* [Child's Life], *Zagadnienia Przedszkolne i Wychowawcze* [Preschool and Educational Issues], *Plan Prac w Przedszkolu* [Kindergarten Work Plan], *Moje Dziecko* [My Child], *Przedszkole* [Kindergarten].

Wanda Bobrowska-Nowak, the author of *The History of Preschool Education*, described the *Preschool Education* as follows:

The *Preschool Education* included methodical and theoretical articles, as well as information about the newest systems of bringing up small children. Prominent practitioners, as well as psychology and pedagogy theoreticians, were associated with it. Generally, the magazine can be described as a guide for kindergarten educators. (Bobrowska-Nowak 1978: 276)

The function of the editor was taken over by Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowicz, who was recognized as a preschool education organizer in Poland. After the country regained its independence, she was the head of preschool education department at the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment [Polish abbreviation: MWRiOP] (Bobrowska-Nowak 1978: 273; Leżańska 2008a: 59-64; Moraczewska 2015: 215-231). She was the editor throughout the whole period in which the magazine was published. In the introduction to the first issue it was written:

We are starting to publish a magazine the programme of which will consist of the following content: scientific and methodological articles in the field of pedagogy, tips related to the use of discussions, storytelling, sensory games, crafts and other activities ... It is not our purpose to limit the teachers' initiative by imposing any schemes or patterns on them. On the contrary, the magazine will aim at providing inspiration to young teachers, so that they can work out their own ideas and show others the results of their own analyses. (Editorial staff, 1925).

After a year of the magazine existence, in the *Editorial* part, further plans to publish the magazine, as well as its programme was presented. It was emphasized that in the year 1926, in the theoretical part, we will publish the articles of well-known psychologists and pedagogues. The practical part shall still present some examples of discussions, lessons, games and crafts. Moreover, we are going to publish music notes for various songs and templates of educational aids. (Editorial, 1926).

This is how the programme of the magazine was outlined. The magazine has changed over the years in terms of volume, co-workers, graphics and discussed issues. In the course of time, the content was enriched with new preschool pedagogy problems, as well as preschool education psychology and methodology of preschool upbringing. The diversity of the contents published in the magazine resulted from the fact that not only outstanding pedagogues published their articles, but also the representatives of psychology, the history of pedagogy, poetry, natural sciences, and even medicine. They included: Wanda Bobkowska, Natalia Cicimirska, Benedykt Daykowski, Janina Enderówna, Wanda Grodzieńska, Pia Górka, Maria Librachowa, Lucyna Molendzińska-Wernerowa, Wanda Magdalena Kotarbińska, Janina Kotarbińska, Stefania Marciszewska-Posadzowa, Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina, Wanda Szuman, Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowicz, Zofia Żukiewiczowa, and sister Barbara Żulińska. This list of names shows that various areas of preschool education were well represented in the magazine (Wróbel 1967; Leżańska 1998), but contemporary readers may be surprised at the number of poets and writers who published their texts in the journal.² They provided resources and contents for aesthetical, musical and religious education. The above-mentioned group of authors was adequately complemented by the authors with rich practical experience who contributed to the presentation of methodological guidelines in the magazine. They were often teachers, preschool education inspectors, supervisors of seminars for shelter teachers, and so-called preschool movement activists, such as Helena Czerwińska or Zofia Bogdanowiczowa.

Czerwińska was a member of the magazine Editorial Committee. Referring to the *Preschool Education* magazine subject area, we can agree with Sosnowska who lists three groups of problems presented in the journal: foreign patterns of preschool education, innovative methodological solutions in the field of working with children, and issues related to child hygiene and health (Sosnowska 2016: 38-44). After analyzing the *Preschool Education* contents, it is possible to look at the magazine from the perspective of the presented education areas: it includes contents related to health, physical, as well as musical, aesthetic, intellectual and religious education.

This description of the magazine is quite general, but it should be noted that *Preschool Education* also performed an informative function. First of all, it provided information about new publications in the field of preschool education. It also included reports from congresses and conventions, including foreign ones, as well as information on courses and exhibitions illustrating the development of preschool education. In some issues of the magazine, a section: *From the Preschool Education Chronicle* was

² As for the poets, not only the texts of living authors were published, but also the poems of people who had died, e.g. Maria Konopnicka (1842-1910), Władysław Bełza (1847-193) or Jadwiga Strokowa (1854-1916).

included. In a word, it can be said that the content of *Preschool Education* reflects the condition of the development of preschool education in the interwar period. The magazine was also the source of promoting foreign educational theories in the environment of Polish educators. In the interwar period, it also played an educational role as a guide for teachers and everyone who was involved in the preschool education. Its good scientific level was insured by great representatives of preschool education, such as Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowicz (Leżańska 2008a: 59-64; Moraczewska 2015: 215-231), Natalia Cicimirska (Kempa 1998: 38), Stefania Marciszewska-Posadzowa (Leżańska 2014: 60-61; Falkowska 2018: 45-56), Zofia Żukiewiczowa (Leżańska 2008b: 1017-1018), and sister Barbara T. Żulińska (Meissner-Łozińska 2008: 1018-1019; Kowalska-Różyło 2013: 191-210). Their pedagogical biographies show that they truly played a significant role in the Polish history of preschool education (Opiela 2014: 101-119).

Religious education ideas in the *Preschool Education* magazine

If we analyse the articles published in the magazine, we can find a lot of threads indicating that the editorial staff and authors writing for the magazine found it very important to promote religious values preschool education.

No wonder that the editors of the magazine were interested and willing to promote religious upbringings, we could find it since the authors who cooperated with them were involved in creating the religious education theories in the kindergarten. Such authors were, example: sister Barbara Żulińska, Pia Maria Górka, Stefania Marciszewska-Posadzowa, Maria Kączkowska, Barbara Stefania Kossuth, as well as Janina and Wanda Kotarbińska. These authors provided most contents related to religious education that could be found in the magazine in question. Sister B. Żulińska, M. Kączkowska, J. Kotarbińska and sister Marciszewska-Posadzowa played a particularly important role in this group.³ These authors provided most contents related to religious education promoted in the magazine in question.

It should be emphasized that in the discussed magazine, the promotion and popularization of religious education ideas took a variety of forms in terms of writing style, content, and characters from religious life who were presented as examples. Already

³ As for Marciszewska-Posadzowa and her relation with the magazine, the scholars first of all referred to her numerous texts on religious education. She was the authors of such texts as, e.g. *O nauczaniu religii: rady i wskazówki dla matek i nauczycielek* [On Teaching Religious Education. Guidelines for Mothers and Teachers], 2nd amended edition, Poznań 1921; *Plan rozmów religijnych w ochronce* [Agenda of Religious Talks in a Shelter], vol. 1. September, Potulice 1936.

in the first issues of the magazine, in its theoretical and methodological part, religious materials were published (especially topics for discussions and stories). Pia Górska was the author of the first discussion. It was entitled *What Can Be Offered to Lord Jesus* (Górska 1925: 12-14).

In another issue of the magazine, the figure of Jesus was presented in the story entitled *Christ and Children*, written by Irena Sienkiewiczówna (Sienkiewiczówna 1925a: 18-20), and the figure of young Christ was presented in the story *Little Jesus*, written by R. Weysenhofówna (Weysenhofówna 1939: 17-19). At the end of the story, in which Jesus was described as a little boy helpful to other people (especially to his Mother and Joseph), the author presented the following poem written by Władysław Bełza:

Little Jesus, your peer, the Saviour of the world,
 Every day, with his own hands, swept His bedroom floor,
 And, as much as He could,
 He helped Joseph work with wood.
 When the Blessed Mother sat to spin the thread,
 He would hand Her wool and watch as she worked.
 He was always still and quiet, kneeling by His Mum
 And studying a book or having good fun.
 (Weysenhofówna 1939: 17-19)

An interesting view on the figure of Christ was also shown in the story *A Garden for Little Jesus* written by M. Kączkowska (Kączkowska 1927a: 15-16), which was illustrated by a picture of Jesus. With reference to the figure of little Jesus, we can read the story about little Janek, who was taught to respect the common good and be patient. *A Gift for Baby Jesus* is another story of the same author in which educational content was included (Kączkowska 1928: 250-253). Another reference to the figure of Jesus is presented in the poem entitled *The Prayer* (Kossuthówna 1939: 116).

Exemplifications of the issue we are interested in (religious education) can be found in the example kindergarten work plans published in *Preschool Education*. Such plans included various areas of education that contained contents referring to adequate fields of religious upbringing. The contents of religious education, which were recorded in work plans, were referred to as *Religious Stories*.⁴ They included such discussion topics as:

⁴ An interesting example of additional support for teachers implementing religious education in pre-school education were the agendas of religious talks, see *Plan rozmów religijnych w Ochronce*, Potulice 1936.

Religious stories taken from the life of Christ, the Mother of God and the Saints (Stanisław Kostka, Jan Kanty, Elizabeth), the *Hail Mary* prayer, the nativity of Lord Jesus, the adoration of the Shepherds, the adoration of the Three Magi, teaching Christmas Carols, twelve-year-old Lord Jesus in the church, Saint Joseph as the protector of Lord Jesus, little Jesus, Palm Sunday, the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, children's impressions after Easter, the joy of Resurrection, altar adornment in May, gratitude and love for the Mother of God, songs: *Worship Mary, Queen of Poland, Christ and Children, God the Giver of Life*. (Konganówna 1934: 140-142).

The *Education in Kindergarten* magazine promoted the content referring to the principles of life resulting from the observance of the ten commandments. A good example is the text on the love of others based on the book by sister Marciszewska-Posadzowa entitled *About Religious Education* (Sienkiewiczówna 1925b: 15-17).

In this text, referring to sister Marciszewska-Posadzowa's interpretation, Irena Sienkiewiczówna showed some examples of how we should understand the love commandment and how we can teach it to kindergarten children. She summarized the meaning of this commandment as follows: *Whoever does not love God cannot love his fellow human* (Sienkiewiczówna 1925b: 16). In the paper she reminded the principle which was often expressed by religious education propagators: it is not possible to schedule an hour for religion learning, because it is the matter of the whole day and whole time in each person's life. To the postulate for the observance of this commandment, we can add the explanation of the saying *Guest at home – God at home* made by Lucyna Molendzińska-Wernerowa (Molendzińska-Wernerowa 1925c: 24). It is another example of propagating the right attitude towards other people.

Texts about celebrations of Church festivals are further examples of the idea of promoting religious education in kindergartens. Recalling the importance of these events in the life of the Church, the authors presented traditions connected with Christmas and Easter celebrations, as well as religious songs and poetry related to such festivals. In particular issues of the magazine, we can find articles about Easter (R.W. 1925: 19-20; Konopnicka 1928: 83; Kączkowska 1929: 63-64; Ottowa 1931a: 55; Nieniewska 1932: 52-53), Christmas or All Souls' day (Kączkowska 1927b: 11-12). A lot of articles were related to Christmas (*After Christmas* 1928: 20-23; Górska 1931: 16-17; Żulińska 1931: 52-53; Kotarbińska 1936: 186; Kossuthówna 1938: 187). To show the importance of May services (M. Witold 1928: 107-108) and June services in the life of the Church, the journal contained some tips on how to talk about them with children (Mackiewiczówna 1929: 134-135). The authors recommended to celebrate these days with the use of well-known Polish religious songs, as well as poems, stories and short texts for discussion. An example of such poem is *Little Star* by Władysław Betza:

We can hear the song –
Our God is born ...
It is Baby Jesus
Who will save the world!

Little stars are burning
With their golden rays,
Joyful news is flowing
Through Heaven and Earth.
(Bełza 1935: 178)

For the needs of preschool practice, the magazine provided the texts helpful in preparing performances and discussions, as well as music notes for religious songs. As we know, the month of May is associated with services and prayers near little shrines. This aspect of religious education was reflected in the poem of Witczakówna entitled *The Chapel*, and the poem of Ottowa entitled *The Month of Mary* (Ottowa 1931b: 75; Witczakówna 1934: 149).

Another literary form of promoting religious values was describing Biblical characters and saints. The authors described such figures as Saint Joseph (Krzemieńska 1932: 57), Saint Francis (J.Z. 1935: 181-182), Saint Martin (Zaręba 1927: 15; W.M. 1928: 228-229), Saint Theresa (Kączkowska 1925: 10-12), and many others. The authors of articles about saints portrayed their characters and everyday attitudes in a way that was understandable to preschool children.

The authors of the magazine paid special attention to the promotion of religious songs, especially Christmas carols, in preschool religious education (*Preschool Education* 1927: 15; 1935: 178-179; 1936: 187-188; 1937: 13-184; 1938: 185).

Not only methodological examples of how to implement religious education were given in the *Preschool Education*. In the magazine, the readers could also find theoretical considerations of the contemporary authors' idea of the essence of religious education in kindergartens.

The concept of preschool religious education was thoroughly presented by sister Żulińska (Żulińska 1925a: 5-6; Żulińska 1925b: 6-7). Defining what religious education in kindergarten was, she wrote: "Religious education is turning the child's spirit to everything that is beautiful and lofty: to truth, good and beauty, and turning it away from everything that is low – particularly from their selfishness" (Żulińska 1925a: 5). She also claimed that "religious education must embrace the whole human being, his mental and emotional powers, as well as his will. It must be adjusted to the child's age" (Żulińska 1925a: 6).

In her reflection, she tried to evaluate the implementation of the religious education curriculum in kindergartens, providing both theoretical considerations and

practical tips concerning the fulfilment of the postulates of the curriculum in practice. She recommended to follow the principles of child development psychology while organizing the practice of religious education: “We should remember about the child’s changeable temperament, sensitivity and poor intellectual abilities, which is why we should limit the practices to the minimum and choose the most important ones” (Žulińska 1925b: 6). She postulated that religious practices such as evening and morning prayers, singing religious songs, presence in the Church, and participation in Easter and Christmas ceremonies, should be made pleasant for the child, so that later they can flow from the need of the child’s heart. According to her opinion:

Religion must be connected with life. The most beautiful stories or the most powerful ceremonies are useless unless religion makes it possible for the child to fight the forces of evil. There is no religion without morality, nor morality without religion. The child’s self-development is a fruit and, at the same time, strength of reliable religiousness. (Žulińska 1925b: 6)

She argued that a child should be taught to love God by overcoming evil tendencies even if it sometimes requires little sacrifices. She believed that this is the way children should be brought up, and in order to achieve such educational objectives we can use appropriate moral discussions, warnings and admonitions given at the right time. Also, we should teach children to undo the damage they had caused (Žulińska 1925b: 6). At the end of the explanation what religious education is and what its functions are, she argued that religious education is the foundation of moral and social education. It consists of: the family home atmosphere, protection, pedagogical influence, contact with nature, religious talks and practices, and the child’s self-development (Žulińska 1925a: 6). Some elements of religious and national education can be found in her article entitled *About the Social Education of Children* (Žulińska 1925d: 1-3). According to sister Žulińska, social education is a natural part of national education: “... it is the extension of the new commandment ‘to socially love one other’” (Žulińska 1925d: 1). She claims that the main task of such education is “to introduce young people to learning about somebody else’s rights, feelings and needs against the background of everyday life” (Žulińska 1925d: 2).

Education understood in this way includes the basic principles social life, respecting someone else’s opinion and rights, teaching to forgive others, looking for fault in oneself and not in others, and learning to trust other people. If education means preparation for social life, it is important to teach children to respect the work and

property of others, which is confirmed by God's commandments. In order to implement these postulates, a kindergarten teacher cannot moralize or refer to pathos in her work.

Sister Żulińska argued that

the most important thing is the social character of the teacher, her love for people and their souls, and the desire to dignify these souls by being an example to be followed, having a good word to say to others, and providing them with help and compassion. Social work requires enthusiasm, selflessness, confidence, generosity and the mercy of judgments, words and acts. (Żulińska 1925d: 3)

Kotarbińska also referred to the essence of religious education (Kotarbińska 1926: 3-5). She provided some tips related to this field of education and talked about the responsibilities related to shaping particular attitudes of children. She recommended that children should be taught to love God and other people, and, most importantly, to pray and understand the objects of cult and the saints. She wrote: "If we teach a child to pray, they shall live with God; if we teach them active love for others, they shall become worthy of being called a Christian" (Kotarbińska 1926: 4). All contents of this field of education should be presented to the child, along with ethical and historical contents. We can watch them in the attitudes of particular people living in harmony with God's commandments. According to Kotarbińska, educators are responsible for the correct implementation of the religious education process. Therefore, "the educator who wants to bring the child closer to Christ, should have proper education, live in the truth of Christ, love children to have an impact on their education, and encourage them to Christian life based on her own example" (Kotarbińska 1926: 3).

Among the statements regarding the implementation of religious education in kindergartens, it is worth to mention those that refer to the proper preparation of religious discussions. Sister Żulińska and M. Kączkowska dealt with this issue. The former formulated several postulates on how to make it easier for preschool children to learn the contents of religious discussions. In my opinion, the most important of those postulates concerned the necessity to include moral elements in religious education (Żulińska 1925c: 20-21). M. Kączkowska, in turn, presented the examples of appropriate topics for religious discussions to be carried out with children (Kączkowska 1926: 13-15). They included texts about Jesus as a little boy, His relationship with His Mother, as well as various aspects of religious life.

It should also be noted that the propagation of religious ideas by the magazine authors was often connected with communicating patriotic content, which was associated with important national holidays. Examples of such national holidays included: 3rd May, 11th November – the anniversary of regaining independence

(Bluszczówna 1925: 16-18; H.G. 1931: 75-76; H.G. 1932: 173-174; *Patriotic Poems* 1935: 177-178; Molendzińska-Wernerowa 1925a: 14-15; Molendzińska-Wernerowa 1925b: 17-19). The journal contained a lot of texts, especially poems, related to regaining independence and shaping the love for the homeland. Here is an example of the poem written by J. Strokowa, entitled *How to Love the Homeland*:

How to love your homeland?
 Love it deeply,
 Love it hard,
 Love it with all your heart.

How to love your homeland?
 Love it honestly,
 And study hard
 To live honest life.

How to love your homeland?
 More than yourself
 And pray for its good
 To the Mother of God.
 (Strokowa 1928: 218)

Apart from poems and discussions about the love of homeland, the articles about national colours were published, as well as the stories about important characters from the history of Poland.

Final remarks

At the end of this short essay, it is worth asking: How was the curriculum of religious education in kindergartens presented in the *Preschool Education* magazine? What was it characterized by?

A specific quality of the suggested religious education curriculum was the recommendation to link religious education with moral and ethical upbringing, because religion had to be connected with life. Also, the reader's attention is focused on the combination of preschool religious education with both patriotic and social education. Such combination is understandable, because in the Polish culture it is not possible to celebrate the 3rd of May without religious and patriotic elements altogether. However, I am well aware that my point of view on that matter could be specific, as I am a graduate of the Preschool Education Study who learned the history of Polish preschool education and found it to be a very important element of Polish culture and

education.⁵ In my opinion, the aim of the concept of religious education promoted by the *Preschool Education* magazine was to teach children deep religiousness. That is why, the promoters of such education argued that not only the theory of religion and religiousness, or the Holy Scriptures reading, is important, but it is also crucial to participate in religious practices. All the rules and guidelines related to the methodology of religious education presented in the journal, served this purpose. It should be noted that a special function in this difficult work of religious education was played by kindergarten teachers. The creators of religious poetry helped them a lot, especially in providing relevant educational contents.

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⁵ I am a graduate of the Preschool Education College in Łańcut and I owe a lot to this school, especially in terms of historical and pedagogical education.

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