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Title: From the issues of perception of visual images in connection with a text by the child at the pre-reading age. Valorisation of visual images expressed in the form of book illustrations in the subjective perspective of a child recipient

Author: Beata Mazepa-Domagala

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**From the Issues of Perception of Visual Images in
Connection with a Text by the Child at the Pre-Reading Age.
Valorisation of Visual Images Expressed in the Form of Book
Illustrations in the Subjective Perspective of a Child Recipient**

Abstract

The presented text results from the research carried out on the issue of the child's perception of visual images which constitute a vivid complement and clarification of the contents of a printed text.

The article presents basic assumptions of the strategy of recognizing the child's receptive preferences of book illustrations as well as the results of research related to valorisation of the perceived picture realizations by the youngest recipients.

Key words: *valorisation, book illustration, visual image, the child at the nursery school age.*

Introduction

Recent years have brought significant changes in the sphere of widely understood culture as well as in the cultural situation of the Polish child. In recent years this reality may be characterized by dominance of the visual form over word, which is essentially reflected by, among others, expansion of images, external visual advertising, a picture book, a cartoon, widespread audio-visual media – electronic sources of experiences and by the invasion of homogeneous – often tacky – mass culture or dominance of adult culture over culture addressed to children, both in the area of offer and reception. Culture has been perceived as an area for business enterprise. Cultural events are accompanied by intensive marketing actions often

carried out under the motto of “cross-sale”, reflected, e.g., at film premieres – often accompanied by a mass book offer, sale of toys and stationary and what is more, all these are signed by film icons. The impact of the rules of economics on the sphere of culture has become distinctly perceivable, which is manifested in the selection of the cheapest forms, since cultural goods in recent years have become expensive and Polish families choose to save on them first (P. Kossowski, 1999, pp.12–14).

In such a situation and following the increasing imagery of our surroundings which is dominated by various forms of visual images, the issue of the responsible distribution of both the contents and the quality of images including picture communication targeted at the child seems to be more and more important, yet these images being the source of experiences and feelings determine the quality of the child’s cultural initiation, and by means of perception (watching) associated with other experiences occurring in contact with an image (or configuration of objects in space) shape the child’s visual competences as well as the ability to detect and valorise visual information (R. Pettersson, 2000, p. 26).

There is also a need to carry out systematic analyses related to various problems connected with visual perception and its impact on a young recipient.

And thus, due to the fact that in recent years as a result of the commercialization of culture – which has already been mentioned – contacts with visual images encounter a series of restrictions and disruptions and due to the preparation of young recipients for the contact with images, some research has been conducted which concentrates on the analysis of a picture, namely a book illustration aimed at a young recipient, looking for some arrangements in the empirical material which provides the knowledge on widely understood visual art.

In order to show the specificity of an illustration in a book for children, it has been established that the visual image in the form of illumination directed at a child shall be subordinated by a young recipient’s perceptive preferences and likes. Therefore, the undertaken exploration was mainly aimed at an attempt to describe, possibly entirely, the child’s preferences in terms of a book illustration in the context of the perceived picture images in the era of visual culture. It has to be emphasized that an important condition to carry out such research was to combine the knowledge on visual images in the form of a book illustration as well as civilisational transformations resulting from the influence of culture with an attempt to define their impact on a young recipient. Thus, the study was aimed at a possibly exhaustive description of the phenomenon and its conditioning as well as formulating basic recommendations for the illustration practice.

It has to be mentioned that the research method is the author’s presentation of the task of recognizing perceptive preferences of illustrations by children at the

pre-reading age. Consequently, the research was carried out using the author's tool on the basis of the appropriately designed research procedure in the form of key and repetitive exploration, the method of a diagnostic survey showing both the quantitative as well as the qualitative aspect of the obtained results.

The research procedure of key and repetitive exploration assumes a prior presentation of the text of a poem to children and an individually carried out checking procedure using a set of illustrations to choose from. After reading the text and analysing it verbally together with a child in order to attain comprehension, specially designed illustrations were presented to the child. It has to be emphasized that the presented artistic realizations had been worked out in the areas of picture realizations (drawing, painting, and graphics) and, due to the dominant features of the way of picturing, referred to the plan of the picture. In the area of each dominant, the researchers presented 5 pictures/illustrations and asked the following questions: In your opinion which illustration suits the poem? Which illustration do you like best? Why do you like the chosen illustration best? The obtained choices and their justification were registered in the worked out Picture Realization Scales.

The research was carried out on a randomly selected population group consisting of 218 children at the nursery school age in the pre-reading period, so that the age of the population was 5–6 years; 109 children were five-year-olds and the same number (109 persons) were 6-year-olds. Among the children taking part in the research, in the group of five-year-olds the boys constituted 48.6% (53 persons) and the girls 51.4% (56 persons), the distribution among the six-year-olds was identical. The research was carried out at randomly chosen nursery schools located in the urban areas of the Silesian province – in the area of the following towns and cities: Katowice, Chorzów, and Łędziny. These were typical education facilities, where pupils come from various social backgrounds. The research was carried out in the school year 2008/2009 in the individual system.

The investigation carried out according to the adopted theoretical and methodological assumptions – in the light of the gathered material and performed analyses – provided answers to a range of questions, among which some referred to valorisation of the visual image and its criteria of vital significance from the point of view of the children taking part in the research.

Child's valorisation of visual images in the form of book illustration

The empirical material illustrating the issue of valorisation of visual pictures in the form of book illustration is only composed of the child's verbalised statements, the character of which shows acceptance of choice. It has to be mentioned that the data analysis in this case was of qualitative character and thus did not cover statistical verification.

The collected empirical material presented in Chart 1 shows incentives for valorisation of illustrative artistic realizations which consequently allow for determination of types and criteria of the child's motivations given to the accepted pictures.

The distribution of argumentation taking into account the selection of the nicest illustration showed that the child's motivation is directed at: a) not providing an answer or giving a single sentence generalization such as: *because of nice trees, because there is a balloon*; b) providing general information on what the child can see using such statements as: *it is cold and windy*; c) an attempt to analyse what they can see but the information is disorganized: *a big colourful tree, leaves are colourful, strange*, d) argumentation by providing an answer containing many details but chaotic in nature: *because the tree is nice, has got such green and yellow leaves, nice* e) argumentation containing artistic qualities, i.e., children pay attention to shape, form or colours: *because it is so twisted, colourful, has got such nice leaves, so colourful* f) various answers: *I like it, I also have such a teddy bear, I had the same balloon*.

On the basis of the obtained data, it has been stated that within the children's argumentation covering illustrations realized as paintings, statements which are generalizations characterized by aesthetic observations are most common, e.g.: *"Because I like such ones"*, *"Because it is beautiful and different"*. *"It is the best"*, *"Because it is nice"*. The elements of the presented world – included in the painterly illustration such as persons, things and parts of the surroundings turned out to be slightly less important in the performed verbal argumentation, e.g.: *"A nice balloon and girl"*, *"Interesting sky"*. Artistic elements turned out to be the least important, e.g.: *"So colourful and not blurred"*, *"Nice and colourful; it is not strange"*, *"Because this is the most colourful here"*.

In the case of illustrations realized as drawings, also a tendency to give generalizations of the aesthetic nature and containing artistic qualities can be observed, e.g.: *Because this one is the most coloured of all the other ones*, *"A picture like from a colouring book – it is OK"*, *"Children like colourful pictures"*, *"Such a funny picture"*.

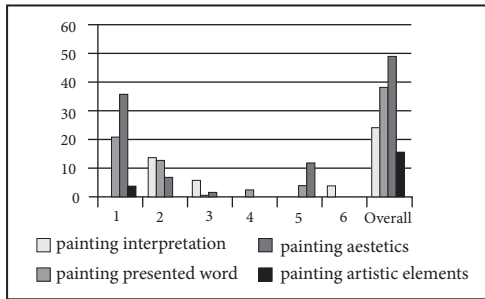
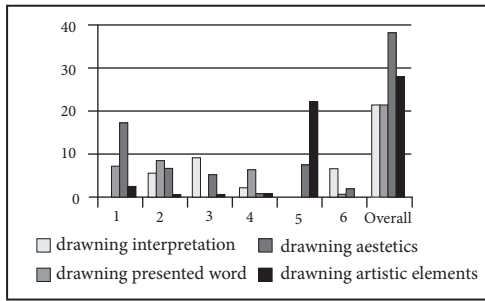


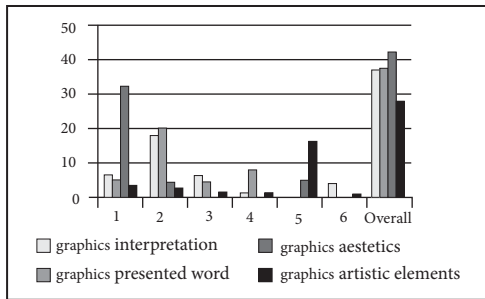
Chart 1: Types and criteria of verbal valorisation in the scope of illustrations such as paintings, drawings and graphics in the subjective perspective of a child in the pre-reading age – a graphic presentation



Clarification

Types of given answers:

- 1 not providing an answer or giving a generalization expressed in a single sentence
- 2 providing general information on what they can see
- 3 making an attempt to analyze what they can see, but this information is disorganised
- 4 argumentation through providing answers containing many details but chaotic in nature
- 5 argumentation containing artistic qualities, it means that children pay attention to shape, form and colours
- 6 various answers



With reference to the graphic forms of illustrations, we can observe – like in other areas of picture realizations – argumentation formed on the basis of generalization containing aesthetic elements and relative balance of motivation showing interpretation and information on the topic of what a child can see, and thus containing elements of the presented world. However, the aesthetic criterion, in which attention is paid to beauty is the most important for children – “Because it is also better”. “Because it is nice”, “Everything is nice”, “Because the window and flower are nice”, “This teddy bear is funnier”, “The teddy bear is laughing and this is so nice”, “Everything is so nice and clean; there is order”.

The analysis of the empirical material showed that such elements as colourfulness/colour of illustration/ pictured situation – an event, humour and a jolly

mood as well as a person's appearance, activities, possessions and their aesthetics constitute the child's criteria of predilection for illustrative pictures.

Presenting the issue globally, it may be claimed that the majority of the argumentation is directed at giving an answer in a single general statement or providing general information on what a child can see expressed as a bunch of disorderly information. However, a small amount is composed of motivation containing pieces of artistic qualities. It shows a necessity to develop communicative competences, also in the area of artistic notions and terms also referring to vividness, something that may be achieved only if one is a sensitive teacher possessing the appropriate knowledge. Thus, it is so important to prepare nursery school teachers in the area of aesthetic education.

Besides, it may be noticed that the young audience pays attention to both the objective, perceivable by the senses, qualities as well as to the emotional aspect, which is noticeable but not leading. It may be also noticed that the verbal justifications of the performed choices are characterized by chaos of thoughts. It is probably caused by a lack of artistic language and difficulties in learning the visual code, and – as it may be judged – by a lack of notions and terms necessary for interpreting an image, i.e., a unique skill of interpreting a visual image, which shall be provided by education.

Final thoughts

The presented conclusions prove that the child evaluates an illustration in two areas: aesthetic, in which the child pays attention to beauty and ugliness and artistic components pertaining to the structure of picturing (colour, structure, shape, clarity), yet in dichotomous opposition there is the sphere for interpretation and discovering the elements of the presented world, which constitute the aspect of intellectual reception and valorisation. And thus the direction of search for a properly constructed illustration in a literary book for children shall, on the one hand, focus on meeting the child's aesthetic preferences and qualities widely emphasized in the analyses carried out by creators and researchers of the art of illustrations, and, on the other hand, leave a margin of "openness" of the visual picture in a literary book (referring again to the idea of U. Eco – U. Eco, 1999; 1994) thanks to which a recipient may actively and intellectually participate in the creation of the meanings of an illustration when it leads to deeper reflection either because it is uniquely "incomplete" or because it contains elements reaching beyond the presentation of the given world.

Summing up, such a form of illustration shall be looked for which will combine both dimensions – aesthetic and interpretative, and then we will fulfil the mission of developing reading culture and let young recipients interpret a masterpiece pointing out its hermetic and inter-subjective character, which yet has to become an area of research in other studies.

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