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“Catechism of a Polish child” today. About patriotic education in textbooks at the early school stage

„Katechizm dziecka polskiego” dzisiaj. O edukacji patriotycznej w podręcznikach na etapie wczesnoszkolnym

Abstract: In my article, I analyze the patriotic discourse contained in textbooks for integrated teaching. I am interested in the way of forming the national, identity, and homeland discourse. My goal is to determine how the content of the core curriculum for integrated learning is reflected in specific textbooks. Moreover, I will try to answer the question to what extent the discourse related to the native country is closer to national and martyrdom models, and to what extent to civic ones.

Keywords: textbook, early childhood education, integrated learning, discourse analysis.

Introduction

Patriotic education is an integral part of early childhood education and as such is included in the core curriculum, and thus, its implementation is undertaken by textbooks. In my article, I intend to undertake a critical analysis of textbook patriotic discourse. I want to consider how the patriotic narrative is constructed, what image of Poland emerges from early childhood education textbooks, what kind of citizen they want to shape, and what duties are to be internalized by students.

Core curriculum

When analyzing textbooks intended for grades 1-3 of primary school, i.e. the early school stage, one cannot omit the core curriculum, which is a normative document that sets out the main scopes of education. In order to be approved for use, textbooks must meet the educational objectives contained in it. The core curriculum (currently in force since 2017) is written for primary schools, but it contains a separate part for the first educational stage. The core curriculum does not include a separate, separate part containing patriotic education. However, the assumptions concerning it appear at the very beginning, for the general purposes of primary school education. Here, in the first point, the need to introduce the student to the world of values, including patriotism and respect for tradition, is mentioned. The next point, talks about the need to strengthen the sense of national and regional identity. This issue is then elaborated on a little further:

Education and upbringing in primary school are conducive to the development of students' civic, patriotic, and social attitudes. The task of the school is to strengthen the sense of national identity, and attachment to national history and traditions, prepare and encourage activities for the benefit of the school and local environment, including involvement in volunteering. The school cares for the education of children and youth in the spirit of acceptance and respect for other people, shapes the attitude of respect for the natural environment, including disseminating knowledge about the principles of sustainable development, motivates them to act for environmental protection, and develops an interest in ecology (<https://podstawaprogramowa.pl/Szkola-podstawowa-I-III>; 20.05.2023).

As can be seen, the model in which the student is to become both a patriot attached to tradition and culture and, at the same time, a modern citizen, actively working for the benefit of the local community and caring for all living beings and the broadly understood natural environment, is considered normative.

The child should also learn about national culture and its products to the extent appropriate to his or her perceptual abilities. At the same time, the child should also learn about the cultures of other countries. Therefore, as part of cognitive development, the student should learn to understand “legends, historical facts, traditions, elements of material and spiritual culture and concepts and symbols related to them, such as: family, home, nation, homeland, country” (<https://podstawaprogramowa.pl/Szkola-podstawowa-I-III>).

In addition, “in the teaching and educational process, the school undertakes activities related to places important to national memory, forms of commemorating people and events from the past, the most important national holidays and state symbols”. (<https://podstawaprogramowa.pl/Szkola-podstawowa-I-III>, dostęp: 23.05.2023). The issue of the child’s emotional development is also extremely important, which also includes the creation of an emotional bond with one’s own nation, which is cultivated through participation in state ceremonies, as well as the associated identification with symbols such as the emblem, anthem or flag. State education predominates in the core curriculum, but there is also a lot of space devoted to regional education, which includes familiarizing students with issues such as folk costumes or various local traditions, as well as the opportunity to learn regional languages. In the social aspect, however, emphasis is placed on the child’s internalization of the values recognized in the state, as well as the creation of identification with the groups to which the child belongs, i.e. the nation, as well as the local, regional or school community, and finally the class team and family. The core curriculum also assumes that the school should also encourage the child to actively participate in social life.

The core curriculum is of a skeletal nature, it contains only the most important and generally designed learning objectives. Their detailed definition is to take place in the school curriculum and the school educational and preventive program, which, however, must be in accordance with the core curriculum and cannot omit any of the objectives outlined therein.

Homeland as home

In the case of the *Lokomotywa* series published by Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Oświatowe, we are dealing with the shaping of a narrative centered around the concept of home-Poland. Poland becomes at the same time the point of departure and arrival, the home where the child lives. Along with the understanding of the country as home and what is one’s own, *Lokomotywa* at times narrows and broadens the perspective. So we are dealing with the use of the trend of small homelands, in this case, we are dealing primarily with the example of Gdańsk and Pomerania, where the GWO publishing house is located. Although the narrative of “little homelands” as a place of origin, and its places in the country are used in relation to a selected area of Poland, the authors of the textbook take students on a journey around the country. As part of working with the manual, children will get to know different parts of the country, the richness of its nature, and the wild animals inhabiting it.

As part of learning with the *Lokomotywa* series, children learn about folk costumes from different parts of Poland, they learn what a dialect is.

In the case of *Lokomotywa*, the discourse of Polishness seems to be the overriding aspect organizing the textbook. We are dealing with the starting point, which is the home country, and the gradual widening and narrowing of the perspective. Narrowing refers to the above-mentioned small homelands, individual parts of the country, and its diversity, while speaking of expanding, I mean indicating and positioning Poland in relation to its closest neighbors, as well as on the map of Europe and the world. Together with the national identity, the authors of the handbook set themselves the goal of creating a European identity in students. It seems that the notions of a Pole and a European belong to the same weight. However, the notion of a European seems to be secondary to the strictly national category. This issue is considered as follows: "Poland is in Europe, therefore Poles are also Europeans." (*Lokomotywa*, 3, part 3). A short text on this topic ends with the conclusion that the common history of all Europeans is very interesting. At the bottom of the page is the anthem of the European Union, Ode to Joy. At this point, the need to create in students not only a Polish identity but also a European one, which has been particularly strongly emphasized since Poland's accession to the European Union, becomes apparent (Jakubowicz-Bryx, 2008). On the next page, we find a poem about three Viennese composers: Mozart, Haydn, and van Beethoven. This is one of the few references to art and culture created by artists other than Polish.

This kind of narrative seems to be aimed at overcoming the abstractness of the concept of homeland, as well as the imaginary character of the nation (I use the term in accordance with the category created by Benedict Anderson). A child in the early school period functions mainly among concrete concepts. Both preschool and early school children reduce abstract concepts to familiar people, relationships, and phenomena. Children in this developmental period display a realistic attitude, focused on things rather than ideas and concepts (Bełtkiewicz, 2012). The concept of Poland and homeland is something difficult for a child to grasp, an abstraction that eludes them. Therefore, the child learns about the native country as something that surrounds him, which gains a tangible context as a result of recognizing that what is known, the entire area of familiarity, belongs to the homeland. The student learns that the native country is also nature, animals, and landscapes. Linking the concept of the homeland with the concept of home not only makes it possible to specify the concept of a homeland but also includes it in the most basic way of understanding the concept of the country of birth

(Głoskowska-Soldatow, 2009). The essence of patriotic education at the early school level is to fill the concepts of homeland and nation with content. This process is carried out by presenting students with as much positive content as possible that can be contained in the semantic content of the homeland, so that later the child has the opportunity, through abstraction and generalization, to create the concept of homeland (Głoskowska-Soldatow, 2009).

The functioning of a child in the area of concrete and relational meanings refers not only to its language area but also to its social area. The main spaces of functioning of a child at an early school age are the family and school. The child is just becoming aware of its existence in the sphere of the state, culture, and the world. The school is an institution that initiates the process of a child's inclusion in the public-civic sphere. Consequently, the school educates a citizen, and depending on the adopted educational program and the reproduction of specific patterns of a patriotic nature, the child receives a recipe for functioning in the country.

In the cycles of textbooks *Ale to ciekawe*, *Ja i moja szkoła*, and *Elementarz odkrywców*, we deal with a lesser degree of subordinating the narrative of the entire textbook to the aspect of patriotic education. Of course, students will learn about national symbols, the most important holidays, and traditions, but the structure itself does not focus on this issue. On the contrary, one can get the impression that the patriotic and Polish history and tradition content has been artificially added in the right places (related to the dates of national holidays).

Personal role models

In all the analyzed textbooks, we deal with the presentation of certain characters as role models to which young generations can refer. These authorities are artists, writers, poets, great composers, and military men. In the case of the creation of a role model, authority, and role model for the young recipient, we are dealing with the characters of Poles and Polish women. Interestingly, however, their creation, unless it is based only on enumerating them in a collection of well-known and distinguished people, is usually combined with a description of that person's childhood. Little Ziuk dreams of independence for his homeland, so adult Józef Piłsudski (*Lokomotywa*, class 3, part 1) wins it. Little Frycek impresses adults with his playing on the piano, and later the adult Fryderyk Chopin becomes a famous composer (*Elementarz odkrywców*, class 2, part 1). There is also the poem Monument to a great man, whose main idea is the conviction that everyone can become a great man. The juxtaposition of the characters shown as exemplary, masters

in their fields with their childhood seems to be aimed at convincing students that they also have a chance to reach for the highest laurels. Thus, education of a patriotic nature is combined with the generation of motivation to learn and the development of students' life aspirations.

Although Monika Popow has not researched textbooks for early childhood education, her observations that the male, chivalrous, and therefore elite cultural model dominates (Popow, 2015) also hold true here. In the textbooks I have analyzed, we deal with the characters of knights, including the legendary Zawisza Czarny and the explanation of the phraseological relationship "to rely on Zawisza", as well as the concepts of knightly honor. Constructing personal authorities concerns, on the one hand, people outstanding in their field, and on the other hand, the concept of a collective knight and contemporary soldier. Both of these forms are a kind of ideal type and are in the same semantic field. They differ only in the historical time of their lives, while its model and the virtues attributed to them remain the same. As a result, we are dealing with a reference to a narrative of a romantic nature.

Reflection on cultural patterns?

Polish culture constantly draws on romantic and martyrdom models. There is no space here to develop this idea in detail, so I will limit myself to the above observation. It is also important to create models of ethos and heroism, as well as constructing death for the homeland as an expression of the highest sacrifice and triumph of the patriotic idea (Kłobukowski, 2012; Toniak, 2015; Grzęda, 2011). Thus, also in school textbooks, we are dealing with the clear presence of the knight-soldier model, the Polish-warrior, who was formed in Sarmatian times as an expression of the identity of the nobility, and then was adapted by Romanticism and it was then that it was fully formed, in a way that functions in the sphere of cultural myths to this day. Its consolidation and reproduction were influenced by the political situation of the 19th and 20th centuries, i.e. the fight for independence and world wars (Olejnik, 2019). Apart from this model, there is another one, namely that of the citizen. It is formed as a modern one, covering today's way of functioning in the country. It is based on the values of concern for the common good and respect for democratic standards. It is assumed that civic education should combine social, political and legal aspects. Urszula Lewartowicz (2013) notes the need to turn to multidimensional civic education and recognizes that its creation is an important challenge for education today. According to Lewartowicz, civic education should "disseminate state and national values, taking into account cultural phenomena taking place

globally" (p. 159). Currently, we have two patriotic patterns functioning in the educational discourse - the historically formed model of the knight-soldier, specific to times of war, and the contemporary model of the citizen, related to life in a democratic state during peacetime.

When analyzing textbooks for integrated education, two clearly different patterns of attitude toward the martyrdom tradition can be found. In the *Lokomotywa* series published by GWO, we are dealing with a thoughtless continuation of the patriotic pattern present in the school discourse for centuries. The key seems to me to be the use of Władysław Bełza's poem *The Catechism of a Polish Child*, along with the last lines: "Who are you for her / Faithful child. / You owe her something / Give your life". The final lines have been omitted in recent years in school patriotic education. After all, isn't the issue of giving one's life for the motherland too much of an abstraction for a child in early school? The fact that generations were educated on such a patriotic pattern does not yet constitute a determinant of the legitimacy of using this work. Interestingly, the song is not treated critically in any way, and thus children do not have the opportunity to think about and respond to its message. The piece is placed in the context of reflections on the choice of the future life path and current interests of children, while on the next page, there are, among others, photos of a drawing boy, a performance by a folk band, and a ski jumper. In addition, above the poem, there is a question about the meaning of the phrase "growing like a weed".

A polemic with the tradition of the *Catechism of a Polish Child* is taken up by textbook *Jakie to ciekawe* (class 2, part 2), with the help of Michał Rusinek's poem *Where do you live?* Its protagonist is a modern child who feels rooted in his place in the world, from his own room and home to a country and continent, to the planet. At the same time, the protagonist of the poem presents an open and inclusive attitude, opposing all kinds of xenophobia or nationalism, and wants everywhere to be like in his room, which is always open to various cool guests. Another of Rusinek's poems also refers to the tradition of Bełza's poem, included in the same textbook, but in its next part (part 4), *What is this earth?* The piece ends with the statement that the place of residence is unimportant because Poland lives within us. In the instructions for the poem, located below the poem on the same page, students are asked to explain the meaning of the ending of Rusinka's poem and to describe what Poland means to them. These tasks are aimed at specifying the meaning of Poland as, on the one hand, the name of the students' home country, which at the same time is for them an empty set. Which makes it necessary to write down the meanings proper to it, and

at the same time, due to the need for the school to conduct and implement patriotic education textbooks, primarily positive meanings. On the next page, another of Michał Rusinek's poems, *Something I Owe Her?*. Among the duties that the addressee of the poem, in this case, a child, should observe, which is emphasized by the author mentioning such behaviors as honesty in writing tests and helping weaker colleagues, there are also such behaviors as validating a ticket on a tram or cleaning up dog excrement. In this case, the student is faced with a completely different sphere of requirements than in the case of Bełza's *Catechism of a Polish Child*. The patriotic, romantic ideal of sacrificing one's son on the homeland's altar is changed into a catalog of everyday, trivial activities. There is an absolute deheroization of the attitude, in place of sacrifice and the obligation to give one's life and shed blood, there is the ideal of a decent child-citizen, friendly, functioning properly in society, caring for the environment. Below the poem are instructions for the student who must answer questions about how to behave towards the homeland, as well as interpret the poem and explain how the author understands patriotism and present his own opinion on this issue. In addition, the student must give examples of patriotic behavior and attitudes, such as an example of sorting garbage. Thus, the authors of the textbook transpose the notion of patriotism from the old sacrificial, battle attitudes and attitudes highly located in the emotional registers to the space of everyday human functioning, care for people, and the environment. It can be described as a transition from romantic registers to the dimension of citizenship, and modern citizenship, devoid of pathos and including in its area of interest not only the state or nation but above all every area of everyday activity of a citizen, for whom it is important that his living environment is as the most pleasing to everyone around, so its functioning is characterized by care for people, animals and the environment. This kind of civic attitude emphasizes above all what depends on each individual person.

All the poems quoted above by Michał Rusinek belong to the series *What is your sign? Poems for another 100 years of independence*. The series is inspired by Bełza's poem, whose successive lines determine the themes of the works, creating a contemporary dimension of patriotism instead of the old martyrdom tradition. Their use in place of the canonical *Catechism of a Polish child* is an important ideological declaration in terms of the approach to the issue of the homeland. It is a rejection of the old romantic and martyrdom patriotism that still dominates education (Gruntkowska, 2022), recognizing it as unsuitable for our times, in favor of shaping the values of everyday life in children, raising citizens who can find themselves

in everyday life and understand what attitudes are required for harmonious social coexistence.

It seems to me extremely controversial to include the figure of a small insurgent in the narrative about World War II included in the textbook *Elementarz odkrywców* for grade 3 (part 1). The theme of the Warsaw Uprising and the person of the little insurgent, a person-symbol, it must be said, is introduced through the memory of September 1939. The website presents a map of the Second Polish Republic and the places from which the attacks on Poland took place on September 1 and 17. On the next two pages, there is a short story by Anna Onichimowska, *Little Insurgent*. The plot of the story is simple, and at the same time, the story itself is devoid of ending. We know that the title character is not yet fourteen, he admits that he is lying when he gives such a number to one of the participants of the independence underground. The boy's parents live in Warsaw and do not decide to leave the capital, even though they know about the planned uprising. The boy's older brothers are already active in the conspiracy and he wants to join it. The brothers refuse him, but he does not give up and gets the task of delivering insurgent mail from one of the participants of underground Poland. He becomes a liaison. The hero reports that he went on missions every day, despite his parents' fear and his mother's tears. The poem remains devoid of an ending, the final sentence is the protagonist's answer to his mother's question if he is not afraid. The explanation, however, is addressed not to her, but to the reader. "I was scared, sure. Bombs were exploding all around, houses were collapsing and people were dying". The title character is deprived of individual features, even a name, and seems to be one of the figures typical of his time. There are many elements typical of insurgent narratives in this story: sewers, insurgent mail, Gray Ranks, choosing the uprising despite his young age, resistance, and reluctance of his older siblings and parents... It seems that the author wanted to present a small insurgent as a personality type in which many people who took part in the uprising could find themselves in a sketchy description. Onichimowska's story is a kind of homage to all the little insurgents, but an unreflective homage. It is dominated by a narrative about war adventure, testing oneself, and a kind of initiation into adulthood. This is Sienkiewicz's war. At this point, there is not even a shadow of reflection on the tragedy of children's participation in armed conflict.

The story about the little insurgent is complemented by a photo of the Little Insurgent monument, located by the insurgent walls of the Old Town in Warsaw. Children are to complete the elements of the description of the monument, such as a rifle or "too big shoes". There are no tasks that would

encourage children to think about the person of the Little Insurgent himself, the life tragedy of his generation. The same is true of the story discussed above. Students are only encouraged to try to figure out how to serve their country in times of peace and to explain why the boy wanted to take part in the uprising. The first of the questions allows us to conclude that the attitude of the title character is considered right in the face of war, and contemporary children are asked to consider how they can try to live up to this ideal. I am inclined to believe that the authors of the textbook have never considered the insurgent tradition themselves, but only replicate a well-known pattern and, convinced of its correctness, want to instill it in the next generation.

Other issues

In addition to the above-mentioned aspects of education of a patriotic nature, it is impossible to omit the issue of holidays and thus familiarizing the student with holiday traditions specific to Poland, as well as specific regions. Here it is possible for the teacher to take the initiative and compare the different customs existing in the country or in the students' homes. In addition, students will also get acquainted with interesting places in the country, Europe, and the world. So there is a perspective of going from locality, family home, your region, to the country, neighboring countries, the whole of Europe, and finally the world. Thanks to this, children develop the perspective of being part of a global community, and at the same time aware of their origin.

Patriotic education is also revealed in learning about the national symbolism, anthem, emblem, and flag. Dates of important national holidays are reflected in textbooks. Legends, fairy tales, and tales are also an extremely important element, as they allow students to get acquainted with what makes up the tissue of the national myth and formulate the memory of specific places, and thus a specific imaginary map of the country. The legends and fairy tales in all the textbooks I analyzed are written in a simple language that students can understand, they also contain rich illustrative material that facilitates understanding of the text. It is worth adding here that the content of the elements that make up patriotic education in integrated teaching remains relatively constant, it is developed through school curricula and methodological publications addressed to teachers (Dudel, 2009).

Summary

In the textbooks I have analyzed, we are dealing with a similar set of elements that make up civic and patriotic education. This is due to the fact

that the content resource is organized by the core curriculum for the first stage of education. However, the very way of arranging and selecting the specific content of education is sometimes very different from each other, mainly due to the way in which the emphasis is placed. It can be placed on the aspect of developing national identity and the traditional vision of martyrdom. The second option is to expose broadly understood citizenship and to form virtues and ways of behaving appropriately for a conscious citizen, caring for the environment, and his neighborhood, and actively participating in culture.

At the same time, it is difficult to determine that education of a patriotic nature was carried out by the authors of textbooks in a uniform manner, creating a broad concept characterized by specific elements. One can often get the impression of a certain randomness and lack of a homogeneous narrative. In addition, it is also worth noting that textbooks intended for the first educational stage display the same ways of narrating about the country, its tradition, and history, so the martyrdom and war aspects and the ethos of the knight-soldier as a personal model come to the fore. The use of the semantically and imaginatively organizing metaphor of homeland allows children at an early school age to conceptualize the concept of homeland in a way appropriate to their developmental period.

It is worth considering at this point what the relationship is between the educational content in textbooks and the cultural patterns of patriotism and way of being in the state functioning in society. I believe that the relationship between the educational content included in the core curriculum and implemented in textbooks is an expression of existing cultural tendencies and, at the same time, produces them. This creates a feedback loop in which it is impossible to determine the beginning and end.

The study of the discourse formed in school textbooks is only one stage of the study of patriotic education, although in my opinion it is important and worth describing. The same applies to today's patriotic culture. Its heterogeneity and immersion in cultural myths may constitute an extremely intriguing study, falling within the scope of investigations into political culture, as well as ideas, paradigms and myths present in social and political life.

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