THE FIRST SCHOOLBOOK – THE TOOL OF REPRODUCING CULTURE BY THE CHILD OR THE TOOL OF CHILD'S PARTICIPATION IN CULTURE?

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Abstract

Writing and print play an important role in the child's learning: in creating, conveying, and exchanging meaning; consequently, they enable him/her to build an image of the world and him/herself and understand his/her own role in it. This paper aims to prove the hypothesis that in case of early school age children the first schoolbook, when created by themselves, can, as one of important sources of knowledge, be treated as a cultural text - open and simultaneously opening multiple interpretations and, also, as one of the tools that allow the child to build his/her own, cognitive, unique representation of the world of education and him/herself as a pupil in this world. Employing our analysis of the results of the research into the quality and efficacy of the programme *Tworzę swój podręcznik - wiem czego i jak chcę się uczyć* [*I create my own schoolbook - I know what and how I want to learn*], implemented as part of an experiment conducted among III-grade pupils in elementary schools, we show that the schoolbook can be a tool of learning culture, but also a tool of the child's participation in culture. We claim that this is possible when the first schoolbook for children is created by children themselves rather than by adults. This is one of the conditions of reconstructing the concept of first children's books. The results of qualitative research presented in this paper belong within the sphere of phenomenographical approach. In analyzing children's narratives concerning their work on their own schoolbook for grades I-III, we proposed four perspectives (dimensions) of Intimate Nature of the Child's Encounter with the Book: the idea of causality, reflection, cooperation and culture (Bruner, 2006).

Keywords: inter-subjective exchange of meaning, schoolbook, cultural content, awareness of written language, early education

1.   INTRODUCTION

The child's mastery of the abilities to read and write, which in early school age become his/her basic tools of participation in culture, is an important educational task. It is important that mastering those tools take place not following in the "tracks" of the teacher's thinking but, instead, through an authentic, autonomous, reflective, active discovery of their nature and meaning for the child's self and for the community of peers studying together. Writing and print, despite the development of new media and media vehicles, still play an important role in conveying, creating and exchanging meaning as part of the child's learning process, and enable him/her to build his/her image of self and the world as well as his/her role in it. Employing the term „world" rather than „space" emphasizes the child's firm rootedness in actual reality and the necessity to blend education into it. This, unfortunately, is currently not always typical in school practice, which tends instead to create for the child artificial worlds, to present „powder-puff reality", and to offer him/her a staged area of activity, learning, and life. A multitude and variety of changes experienced by the pupils of today suggests that we have irreversibly parted ways with the „old educational order" and are now seeking new forms of „being a pupil" in the world of school which can no longer remain a place of learning and reproducing culture, but must become instead a place of conscious participation in it and of its creation (Mead, 2000; Corsaro, 2000).

This paper highlights the notion that, in the digital era that generates intense civilizational transformations, the teacher's main task in early education is to search for meanings in two worlds – his/her own (pedagogic) and the child's and, then, to discover the sense of accompanying the learning child into a co-created educational -or, more broadly- cultural world. Education is always situated within a cultural context and it gains its strengths from therein (Bruner, 2006). Therefore, to comprehend the world the child is learning one must analyze the child's closest, local, cultural context as the sphere where his/her learning is taking place.

The context of pupils' learning in the beginning years of elementary school is largely mapped by schoolbooks. The quality of the child's first experiences in his/her „encounters" with schoolbooks largely defines the child's attitude towards the world and the culture presented in those schoolbooks and, also, to the written text itself. The child's interactions with the text and his/her extracting of meaning from it demand personal, positive attitudes towards the written text. They foster certain ways of thinking, develop the ability to enter dialogue with the text and, as a result, enable the child to not merely reproduce culture but to fully participate in it, and also, to create it. A question arises: who should decide on the editorial form and content-connected dimension of children's first schoolbooks? The originators and designers of schoolbooks (content and editorial form) have for ages been adult experts, who created first readers without researching the children's opinions as

those to whom their texts and the images were addressed. It was commonly assumed that the schoolbooks' authors knew best what and how children should learn. Is it really so obvious? Bruner (2006, p. 78) emphasizes that in classroom educational practice teachers are guided by commonsense opinions concerning pupils' minds, which do not always "work" to the benefit of the child. It seems that „making children happy" by forcing upon them as reading material of ready-made, colorful but shallow cultural texts is precisely one of the examples of unintentional activity that is detrimental for the child.

Polish scientists also emphasize the fact that contemporary school has created a kind of virtual knowledge, absent outside the schoolbook, and gained exclusively through the rituals predicted by the schoolbook (Klus-Stańska, 2008). Bruner (2006), though, claims that educational system must help individuals who grow up in a given culture to find within it their own identity, since education is a complex process of fitting culture to the needs of its members, and its members and the kinds of knowledge they possess to the needs of their culture. That is why in this paper we assume that the children's first schoolbook which they create themselves can be treated as a cultural text - open and simultaneously opening manifold interpretations. We also claim that such a schoolbook can be treated as one of the tools allowing the child to build his/her own intellectual, personal, unique representation of his/her self, the world, and his/her own place in it. Besides, a schoolbook created by children will allow one to get to know the children themselves as recipients of cultural texts and as creators of culture. To claim that language expresses certain convictions, one's attitude towards the world, judgments, norms, values, aims, and courses of action implies accepting the assumption that critical discourse can help reveal not only a linguistic, but also - and perhaps, above all - ideological image of the world, of the culture created or shared by a social group. We aim, therefore, to use our analysis of the results of the research into the efficiency of the program called *Tworzę swój podręcznik - wiem czego i jak chcę się uczyć* implemented as part of an experiment conducted in grade III of elementary schools, to show that the schoolbook can be a tool by which a child learns his/her culture, but also a tool by which s/he participates in it. We have decided that this can be made possible when the vision of the children's first schoolbook is created by children themselves rather than by adults. It is one of the conditions of reconstruction of the concept of children's first schoolbook. We have also decided that the child as the subject of educational activity has at his/her disposal certain more or less conscious assumptions concerning education, which form a more or less coherent system of his/her common knowledge pedagogy. Those naive theories are accorded not merely with adults but above all with peers. Scientific research into common knowledge psychology and common knowledge pedagogy shows that in theorizing on the subject of educational practice in the classroom, pupils' common knowledge theories constitute direct reflections of their convictions concerning learning, its demands and sources, and should be taken into consideration since they condition a learning

which is conscious, autonomous, and self-regulated (Bruner 2006; Crick, 2007). This demands a meta-learning competence which can be developed in the process of the pupil's independent, autonomous learning of how one can learn (Tzuriel, 2000; James, Black, McCormick, Pedder, & Wiliam 2006; Crick 2007; Jackson, 2004). We believe that after a few years of school education the child is convinced that the teacher and the schoolbook are not the sole sources of knowledge about the world. Knowledge can be obtained also from others – parents and peers can share it, and, above all, it can be acquired together. As emphasized by Bruner (2006), such a pedagogy of mutuality assumes that interaction and discussion allows convictions and ideas to be incorporated into a coherent frame of reference. Children are capable of reasoning, of finding meaning, both independently and in discussion with others. They are also capable of reflection on their own thinking and of correcting their own ideas and messages through reflection – through the so-called „moving to the meta level" (Jackson, 2004; Bruner, 2006, p. 87; Uszyńska-Jarmoc, 2011).

Pillow (2008) synthesized numerous research conducted so far in the field of children's understanding of human intellectual activity, of building common knowledge theories of mind, of social cognition and meta-cognition. Conclusions from his research indicate high awareness of meta-cognitive processes in children in middle and late childhood. Van Deur (2004), on the other hand, conducted research on gifted children aged 4-6 and their knowledge of self-directional learning. He compared the results of his research with the knowledge of the children of average intellectual abilities and the knowledge of the children who found learning challenging. The results of his research shows that gifted children have broad general knowledge concerning the nature of self-directional learning and their own preferences concerning learning strategies and, also, a self-awareness of their own competences in this area. They also have at their disposal the know-how of increasing their own effectiveness in self-directional learning in school and outside of school. Finally, they are aware of what needs to be done when on makes mistakes. Van Deur's (2004) research shows that children are aware that they have their own experience in how to purposefully improve their learning results. Besides, the group researched noticed marked differences between the possibilities inherent in self-directional learning in school and outside of it (to the disadvantage of the schools) and knew where one could gain information in the process of intentional learning. It is worth noting that 4-, 5- and 6-year-olds quote social sources of (peer help) at the top of the list, but know and appreciate the role of the library, Internet, books, and electronic sources (Van Deur, 2004, p. 71) as well.

In this paper it is assumed that children's common knowledge concepts concerning human learning and their own learning from their first schoolbook can be written down as a system of declarative and/or procedural meta-knowledge. Probing the store of this knowledge and, on this basis, assisting the child in integrating these two systems of knowledge, will allow the child to without delay analyze

his/her own private world of learning to ever better understand it and extend his/her influence on it - and, consequently, to participate in culture, its discovery and creation. It is also assumed that the child's common knowledge concepts concerning learning form the foundation of his/her conscious learning process at the beginning of his/her education. The teacher's awareness of its content and scope matters due to firm grounding and permanence of common knowledge concepts which the child has developed, usually unconsciously, in the course of his/her experiences to date. It is also important that common knowledge concepts are characterized by pragmatism. Children's explanations concerning the functioning of the world are simple, fast, and uncomplicated. The strength of the characteristics listed above (permanence, firm grounding and pragmatism) demands that pedagogues appreciate common knowledge concepts in the child's learning, in order to, among others, use them as their basis for designing programs that will stimulate the development of scientific knowledge about learning.

2. AIMS

The main objective of the educational project described here, which constituted also the research project *Tworzę swój poręcznik – wiem czego i jak chcę się uczyć*, concerned the development of children's self-awareness of the process of learning the world and themselves thanks to and through their creating of their ideal elementary school readers – books which would present their personal concepts of the world and culture, in which they share in the process of learning at school. The project also became an inspiration to learning what the pupils would expect from schoolbooks which they would gladly learn from in the course of their education, their opinions concerning the schoolbooks which they are using now, and heir evaluation and modifications proposed.

3. METHOD

The study is a qualitative study in which the researcher will gather data through action research and participant observation over a period of four months. In addition the data collection takes the form of conversations with children about their vision of the children's first schoolbook.

3.1 Sample

Twenty six children (14 girls and 12 boys) from east-northern Poland participated in a four-months programme, based on collaborative learning in a public school. All pupils live in a big city, in Bialystok. The age of children ranges from 8 to 9 years (M=8.7).

3.2 Instrument

This educational project, implemented in the third grade of elementary school as a pedagogical experiment, lasted a few months and was conducted in three stages. The first stage focused on introductory research, whose aim was to find out the pupils' opinions concerning the schoolbooks they were at that time using at school and, also, what schoolbook they would name as model, best, ideal. In the next stage of the research a series of classes in what can broadly be defined as the subject of meta-learning was conducted, the result of which were unique and original schoolbooks made by pupils. In order to note the difference as well as define the changes in pupils' opinions and attitudes concerning their schoolbooks before and after the implementation of the educational project, we have carried out also our final research.

Educational encounters with pupils within the framework of the project analysed here took place during lessons as well as outside lessons. Depending on the pupils' needs and interests, the content which they chose was at times covered in the course of a few meetings. The first module of each class comprised problems such as: *What interests us? What do we want to learn? What did schoolbooks in the past look like? We discover the layout and structure of schoolbooks from various fields of study*. The lessons' objective was to provoke pupils to think critically about the content and form of schoolbooks from various fields of study, and also to develop their self-awareness concerning the subject which they would like to study in their ideal school. This reflective approach to the schoolbooks analyzed encouraged the pupils to engage in problem-solving thinking and, consequently, designing their own textbooks became an activity that was more thoughtful and preplanned. The next module dealt with the issue of: *Our vision of an ideal schoolbook! We design schoolbooks of the future, What do we want to learn from a schoolbook? We design educational content, We invent graphic design for our books, We use Power Point to work on graphic design, We create graphic design for our books in our IT classroom*. Pupils worked individually or in small teams, in school and at home. The books they created reflected solely their own preferences, ideas, and needs. In class the pupils planned, designed, invented various tasks, chose content and instructions, and created their own graphics. They continued work on their schoolbooks at home, meeting up with their peers in their free time. The third module of the classes was: *We know what we want to learn! Why is our schoolbook special? We learn good presentation, We present our schoolbooks and review the schoolbooks created by our peers*. The lessons conducted as part of this module dealt mainly with developing the ability of pupils' self-presentation as their textbooks' authors during public speaking and presenting schoolbooks in front of the class. The meetings which ended the whole educational program allowed the pupils to not only learn the strategies of good presentation, but also to develop the ability to see their strong points, execute adequate self-evaluation, and draw conclusions

concerning the quality of peer cooperation. The lessons conducted had also the aim of maximizing the pupils' own activity and their creative thinking through engaging them in art lessons, music, theater, and in the process of creating their own, unique books.

3.3 Procedure

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of this innovative approach, a four-months experiment was conducted in an elementary school. The innovative approach can be applied to the diagnosis of students' learning "how to learn" problems.

Analyzing the results of the research that came from the various stages of the educational project carried out in the 3rd grade can be a complex and multidimensional task. The schoolbooks created can be analyzed from various perspectives and in many different ways. One can distinguish, among others: their function, the content located within the framework of various scientific disciplines, their thematic novelty, layout, division of content, method and form of presenting the content, kinds of tasks, and also the characteristics of graphic material used (editorial). Such an analysis can, therefore, have a character which is both open and multifaceted. The diversity and originality of those schoolbooks demanded that we choose our own categories for their analysis. In this paper we present an analysis of some of our research results from the perspective of the educational values of the project realized, namely the development in the pupils of early classes of four competences: reflection, causality, culture and cooperation. Those ideas are described by Bruner (2006).

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of qualitative research which will be presented in this text belong to the sphere of phenomenographical approach. Our interests covered the meanings that the children ascribed to content and illustration in schoolbooks they had made themselves, and the criteria they used to evaluate those schoolbooks. We choose this approach to analysis to emphasize the educational values of the project carried out from the perspective of the children's benefit.

4.1 The Idea of Causality

Bruner (2006) emphasizes the fact that the idea of causality in education can be expressed in treating the child's mind as proactive, problem-oriented, focused, selective, constructional, and geared towards final effect. The idea comes through in numerous comments expressed by pupils who emphasized the conscious character of their decisions.

> Gabrysia: … *our schoolbook is entitled „The World and Us". We wanted this title and to do … this schoolbook shows that not only … in school one can do… not only to study and cram various things, memorize multiplication tables, but one can also have good fun by means of mathematics, Polish, biology, history, geography. Our schoolbook comprises different subjects …*

The girl's remark, which she presented as a representative of her team promoting common work in front of the group, evidences a high level of awareness of her own influence on the shape of school education. The same girl, this time as a reviewer of a schoolbook made by another team, emphasizes the possibility of choosing and the desire to independently take important life decisions.

> Gabrysia (voice in the audience): *Miss, once I have a child and would like to buy such a schoolbook, I do not know what it is about it for my child to want to do it. And… this is one question I have. And, secondly, how much does it cost?*

> Zuzia: Y… *we don't yet have the cost because we know that children really like to color in and sing. We have contained here for the girls and for the boys. Y There are various coloring pages, tasks … I know that girls adore littlest pet shop toys. And for example you have to copy the pet shops, and the boys like Spiderman…*

These remarks show also an awareness of the needs and expectations of the schoolbooks' potential recipients and users.

> Gabrysia: *The tasks are creative (…) For example there are tasks to invent one's own song … one's own poem … and (…) it was so very strange, but in the unit on Greek history - to plan an invasion on the Romans. It was simply … a crazy idea, but I am sure it can be popular. And, well, I think that … it will be… popular, this schoolbook…*

The conversation between the girls in the roles of the schoolbooks' authors and recipients or reviewers shows also a conscious choice of content congruent with current interests. Children see the schoolbook as a possible source of pleasure and the basis of broadening knowledge connected with personal interests, connected with daily life.

> Magda: *My schoolbook is entitled „Everything and Nothing" hmmm… because I yyy was afraid that if I start for, example, to yyy… describe yyy… a book yyy… about animals, halfway through this book I will change my mind and I will want to write about something else. Y So I started with filling in definitions, then I started with mathematics, celebrities, fashion, etc… My schoolbook y…stands out because I think I am the only one in the class to have put in information about Justin Bieber… Because I adore him. Questions?*

> Gabrysia (voice from the audience): *That's it, y… for you to like Justin Bieber I am not surprised because y… you very often listen to his music. But from this point of view, why did you make it about celebrities? Everyone does Polish, mathematics, animals, and you as the only one about celebrities, maybe Kinga also did that, but you were guided by celebrities, and not what we are studying now, y… why? Why do you like those celebrities, what do they give you?*

> Magda: *I like celebrities because they are my inspiration as if … I have a lot of posters, magazines, y.. celebrities... are cool for me, I simply like to find out y… new information about them and I listen to their music or I watch… films with them.*

> Oliwia (voice from the audience): *One question. Hmm… Do you have anything that children could learn from?*
>
> Magda: *Y yes, I have mathematics… other things too for example songs y… well many things, poems…*
>
> Antosia (voice from the audience): *What subject do you like best?*
>
> Magda: *Well, I like best the subject with the celebrities, with Justin Bieber (…) Well, because I really like Justin Bieber's songs, when he sings and I will go to his con… well yes.*
>
> Teacher: *And is there a bit of mathematical Bieber?*
>
> Magda: *Well, no … well yes, yes, there is one exercise!*
>
> Teacher: *And is there a unit called Bieber in nature? Bieber discovers, for example, Africa? (…) Bieber studies mathematics, Bieber writes stories, watches nature, admires animals?*

Implementing the idea of causality postulated by Bruner (2006) was possible because in planning the experiment the main assumptions of *Self-Determination Theory and Basic Need Satisfaction* (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004) were taken into consideration. In designing their schoolbooks, therefore, the pupils were motivated internally, were personally engaged and focused on achieving the best possible final result. They satisfied also the important human needs described in this theory, namely the need for competence (causality), the need for autonomy, and the need for social relations – which in turn enabled the realization of another idea postulated by Bruner, namely the idea of cooperation.

4.2 The Idea of Cooperation

In reference to the pedagogical experiment conducted, the idea engages the pupils' entire scope of activity in creating their own schoolbooks. Starting with their independent choice to cooperate and divide into groups, through assigning roles in the process of preparing the content of their schoolbooks, to their presentations of the books created – the pupils independently searched, rejected, or improved and implemented the strategies of cooperation they considered best. Asked about the course of their work on creating books together, most children emphasized that there were conflicts during the execution of their schoolbooks. Problem situations, however, which appeared in the course of the children's work, offered them also an excellent chance to develop their abilities in the area of seeking the best methods of solving difficult social problems.

> Marta: *Our work went well a bit but, also, a bit badly, because the girls fought a little, that is us … that is me too, but in the end we decided who does what and it worked out pretty good.*
>
> Kamila: *That is, our work was, was a bit of … of a fight, but later on we understood each other and we made up.*

Małgosia: *And we divided into a few … into units, so that we avoided bigger fights. That is there were little fights, but in some groups they turned away totally, the schoolbook separated and they well… and there were fewer people, and, well, and us, we were not like that. We separated into units.*

Patryk: *Hmmm… Everyone fought a little, me, I did not fight at all. But Kamila and Gabryśka fought all the time [laughter] We got to understand each other, well, I helped the girls make up … and, well, they did the subjects they wanted.*

Gabrysia M. (voice from the audience): *I have two questions. Do you have some … for example some celebrities, like Fryderyk Chopin, Hans Christian Andersen, well, and did… did you have fights as to this schoolbook, did you get along well, were you happy making it?*

Gabrysia: *Fights? Fights, at least with us there were a few, but feeew.*

Teacher: *How did you deal in difficult situations, since your team is a four-member team (…) and how did you deal in those difficult situations?*

Gabrysia: *It was, like, we fought a little and then only … we felt offended a bit, but then everything came back to normal"*

Engaging all the pupils in educational encounters aiming to develop the cooperative competence in their group, we created for them also the possibility to learn how to take both common and individual decisions and reach compromise, expressing their needs and expectations in an open and assertive way.

Zuzia R (voice from the audience): *I would like to ask how it came about that you fought, that Wiktoria left?*

Oliwia: *yyy… The way we got to fight was, hmm… I don't know … Wiktoria had ideas, she took offence and I don't know … but somehow she left.*

Teacher: *And what does Wiktoria think about it? Wiktoria, can you tell us why it was hard to cooperate and why you created your own schoolbook?*

Wiktoria: *Well, because I had my own ideas and I wanted to create my own schoolbook and also at home I had … I wanted this, my own schoolbook… I wanted to make, well, because we fought too much and so I thought they would be better off the three of them without me.*

A high degree of autonomy that the children enjoyed in organizing their work allowed them to work together and analyze the tasks initiated and the search for optimal solutions to their problems:

Filip: *Well, no… It wasn't easy, but we managed somehow. Yyy… we had to exactly (…) lend each other's ideas to do it like this.*

Krzyś: *We were wondering how to do this, how we, well, how we imagined that we would not make this schoolbook, but as soon as I saw all the information that Marysia had collected I had ideas right away, and we made a schoolbook which had I think sixty some pages.*

Marcela: *Well, it all depends… because for example at the beginning there were some fights for example yyy… like, who will be the graphic designer, who the editor, and the*

> *like. There were such fights sometimes that, for example, only, only the proofreader can correct… spelling mistakes (…)*

Pupils worked in groups made up of several members, choosing the members who would hold certain functions, that is that of an editor, graphic designer, and also professional proofreader. In a few cases children created their schoolbooks individually because they preferred this form of work. Working on creating books together demanded not only appropriate selection and choice of material which, in children's opinion, should be incorporated, but also the taking into account of personal scientific interests of all the groups. It unquestionably demanded of pupils good organization and appropriate planning of their tasks, but asked also that they note the preferences of all peers.

> Gabrysia: *In the beginning (…) we thought about all the topics that can be inclu … can be included, and next we simply assigned different subjects to different people so that they can… what they are interested in more, what they do best, simply, that they do just such a subject and it will be so … so different than a person who can just do it, but does not have to. We divided them like this and I think that everyone got what they liked to do (…)*

> Julia: *Everyone did what they thought, what they liked … Say I like… y… like reading let's say my mom's Avon catalogue, I glued in, say, those things and that the children can rub it and smell it, and when, say, Zuzia, my friend, likes ballet she did something about the ballet.*

The children experienced the degree of autonomy which allowed them to notice learning situations as pleasure, fun and games.

> Zuzia*: Working on the schoolbook was very interesting… We were not bored making … mostly y… it was a pleasure. Not the kind that we have to work, that we have to work on that and get on with it. It was a game, sort of.. as if coloring, only it was us ourselves who created what we would like to have in our schoolbook.*

In the following pupil's response one also sees her strong perception of and awareness of the freedom of choice she needs in her choice of educational activity.

> Gabrysia: *That is, everyone came up with their own subjects, we decided who does what, we conferred with each other and, for example, who was to do what, they did it, brought it… Everyone did what they wanted, there wasn't any you must do this…*

The way the children assigned each other tasks followed from their awareness of their own competences and those of other pupils' who were involved in the project together.

> Kamila: *Hmmm… That means it would depend on that … Gabrysia did the subjects, because she likes to dance, yyy… she did the subjects about dancing, Patryk likes football and cars, he did… players and cars and I did the subjects on sports and about painting because it's my passion and I really like it.*

> Marta: *Our assigning of subjects depended on what we liked, for example, I had mathematics and housework, because I really like to do these kinds of things for my brother.*

And, for example, the girls just had what they liked, nobody made anybody do anything by force, saying you do this and I do that.

As emphasized by Bruner (2006, p. 138), the aim of cooperation „is not to achieve unanimity, but increasing awareness. And higher awareness always implies higher variety". The educational project described here became also an opportunity for pupils' self-reflection concerning the quality and strategy of their cooperation in peer group. The initiatives undertaken by the children steered them towards problem-oriented, reflective look upon their work styles and appropriate choice of the forms of implementation. The task they carried out, on the other hand, whose aim was to develop their self-awareness concerning their preferred working style, created also an opportunity for the children to engage in a broadly defined and multi-aspect self-inquiry. The idea of cooperation, emphasizing the importance of understanding and of conscious, constructive analysis of their activities, can be applied to the whole of the educational project we initiated, and in particular to the stage where children created their own books.

4.3 The Idea of Reflection

The multi-dimensionality of the pupils' work on creating schoolbooks is expressed simultaneously in four perspectives of Intimate Nature of the Child's Encounter with a Book proposed by Bruner (2006). The first one is the idea of reflection, which began the whole process of the children's thinking concerning their future perfect elementary school schoolbooks. The lessons which allowed them to develop critical, problem-oriented thinking concerning their schoolbooks and their own process of learning contributed to the formation of certain notions in their minds that resulted in a vision of a schoolbook from which they would like to learn. Reflection became a springboard that induced the pupils to reject or enrich their initial ideas concerning the layout and contents of the schoolbooks designed. Due to the fact that their awareness concerning learning through holistic, reflective approach to the problematic of contemporary schoolbooks developed, pupils could think about the style and methods of their work, best learning strategies, most convenient way to organize their own actions, and also cooperation with their peers. To encourage children towards constructive thinking about creating their ideal schoolbooks, we organized lessons during which pupils engaged such thinking processes as remembering, comparing, abstracting, generalizing, and also conducting an analysis and synthesis through designing their ideal schoolbook. That is why the main aim of meeting with pupils was to create for them a chance to accumulate experiences in the field of discovering the meaning of their own learning process during the time they were creating their ideal schoolbooks. We also found it important that the process in which children chose content or designed artwork result from their understanding of the main idea of making their own books – that it be an activity that is well-thought of, planned, aware of the needs and preferences of

their authors, that is, pupils themselves. The children's reflective approach to working on their own books became for them an inimitable chance for deeper intellectual consideration of their own activity of creating schoolbooks. As already emphasized, having finished work on their schoolbooks the children prepared for their presentation and advertising. To finish off the presentation of their schoolbooks, the children made a summary and an evaluation, choosing the books they considered most interesting. The latter task demanded thinking, comparing results of the analysis of all the schoolbooks created by particular teams, evaluation, generalization, and presenting to the group of one's own conclusions.

> Gabrysia: *I must say that I like all the schoolbooks… Everyone has its subjects, each choosbook is one of a kind, each has various subjects, and I think that if such schoolbooks were in bookshops I would buy one and I would willingly do such exercises. Thank you.*
>
> Zuzia*: In my opinion the prettiest … most interesting eh… schoolbooks are from group number ten, nine and one… because I love football, I love sports and it was sports and football that the girls from group nine have covered. And I love also fashion and learning and playing, which was in group one*.
>
> Kamila: *I liked best the group of Zuzia Borys, group number six, Małgosia's group, number four, and… number one. Because Małgosia's group inspired me (…) They had very many opinions and it was very c… very cool, and Zuzia's group had very many great topics … interesting, coloring pictures, … and much trivia and sport, and Zuzia Rutkowska's and Julka's group had, hmm… colorful graphic design, interesting topics and much trivia.*

Scientific literature has recently emphasized that the child in early school age is aware of his-her own thought processes, meta-cognitive abilities and meta-learning competences (Crick, 2007; Uszyńska-Jarmoc, 2010; Bostrom, 2012). The development of the pupils' language awareness once the readers had been finished is proven by the fact that during the presentation of their work pupils drew each other's attention to issues such as their linguistic aspects (grammar and spelling).

> Antosia (as member of the audience): *I have two questions. One… are there no spelling or grammatical errors, and the second question is … will be … only the first one for now.*
>
> Gabrysia (co-author of the schoolbook): *I don't think so, but we should check (….)*

4.4 The Idea of Culture

Scientific research shows that the best learning results depend on whether the learning is participatory, pro-active, shared, cooperative and geared towards creating meaning rather than accepting it ready-made. Therefore, the postulate we have signalized, that of children creating culture, is very current, since perceiving „culture" as a static, nearly irreversibly stabilized way of thinking, sets of convictions, actions and judgments, has ceased to be a useful heuristic fiction (Bruner, 2006). Language enables not only constructing but also learning mutual expectations that

are the „matrix upon which culture is constructed". Citing the idea of culture in education as postulated by Bruner (2006), one may claim that schoolbooks created by pupils of III grade of elementary school present a whole array of varied content, tasks, instructions and graphics. They present to us a vision of ideal, perfect schoolbooks which children would gladly use in school. These books reflect pupils' preferences in the area of their own learning process, both as concerns educational content and learning strategies.

The books proposed by children are so atypical and non-standard that they generally fall outside of the framework of broadly understood classifications proposed by contemporary didactics. Intended

> Gabrysia (voice from the audience): *I am quite interested in this schoolbook… Well, then. Really, what … what is this Minecraft about? What does it present really?*
>
> Ernest: *This is a … this is a normal world, where you build and get various things yyy and so, you have to be so… to be so that you appear… you are as if in a new world and must kill animals to get food, build a house and survive.*
>
> Łukasz: *I want to add one more thing … there are various game plans … Hardcore, what else, Filip?*
>
> Filip: *Hardcore, hard, normal, easy. Hardcore is better called survival.*
>
> Łukasz: *Yes, survival, because there you have to survive if yyy because if a little monster kills you… you will not become fulfilled in the same world.*
>
> Teacher: *And how can you, as pupils, use this game you have described as a schoolbook? What does it … Does it teach you anything?*
>
> Filip: *But I am working now to make, to make a CD for Minecraft, a free edition to go with the schoolbook …*
>
> Teacher: *What does it teach you? Tell me.*
>
> Filip: *Teach? That's a lot, a lot of real things, for example one can make sheets of paper out of sugar cane, that is true… from sand one can windows… glass, glass.*

Schoolbooks made by children are decidedly different from standard books created by experts, which proves that children can create, and not merely reproduce, culture. The differences are especially pronounced in the area of content. Children present in their schoolbooks utterly new scientific fields from which they would like to gain information, and on whose basis they would like to build their own system of knowledge. Novelties in this area are undoubtedly mechanics, electronics, design art, film art, sociology and architecture. The issues preferred by pupils focus mainly on the topics of interest to children, namely characters form fairy-tales and computer games, makes of best cars, interior design and decoration, latest fashion trends and famous actors and singers. Research also shows that pupils want to learn not only what is connected to their interests but also all that is popular „here and now", and known from daily life or the media. That is why novel subject matter found in books relates most often to public life of celebrities, contemporary cine-

matography, and computer games. This proves the children's need to learn in relation to cultural content which is close and which children themselves know well from their daily life. In the area of school education, on the other hand, the new issues that appear in children's schoolbooks are detailed biographies of famous people, the history of their country, information on the countries of the EU, and trivia pertaining to various scientific fields: social, biological, humanistic, artistic. This subject matter is definitely outside the obligatory program of education the children know.

> Gabrysia: *Yyy … in school I would like to learn what is very useful in life … the Polish language, mathematics, biology - all that we learn here I think is useful. Of course I would also like to learn about the things I am interested in (…) that is I am interested in theatre as well as music and fine arts. Because I like music, I like to dance, sing, draw, create and… I like to be on stage and I think all that meets in theatre and that I would like to be an actor.*

An awareness of the effects of the act of creation and one's own creative role in daily life is very noticeable in the response cited below:

> Gabrysia*: In our schoolbook there is, there are creative tasks, scientific trivia, and such as develop the mind and thinking. There are in it … units on Polish, mathematics. generally there are units like we study in school, but there are also crosswords, a special unit on games, that is crosswords, tasks, various, very different things, such yyy … that one can play and also learn … We have many tests, of the quiz - test kind and think… well and creative-like, that is invent a song, invent your poem … I think that it is significant because, for example, I and even my friends we are so creative, we have various ideas, you can see some in our schoolbook and I think that there are very many such children, who like to create something and they need it.*

The topics chosen by pupils evidence their need to gain knowledge about the contemporary world, to discover and solve political and cultural problems. Pupils want to keep up with changes that take place in their nearest environment. They want to learn more thoroughly about the reality in which they are growing up, and gain detailed knowledge in various scientific disciplines. Children want also to develop their ability to use the theoretical knowledge they have gained in daily life. They postulate including in schoolbooks of useful information which will develop also their practical abilities. Therefore, pupils incorporated in their schoolbooks content related to cooking, sewing, using the Internet and computer, or using a compass and map.

> Marcela: *In school I would like to learn, for example, such useful things as, for example, for example how to bake muffins, or something like that, to make a good salad, for example, when you throw a party you want to make something special and that is what they should, in school, in school, teach. I think so. But, for example, mathematics should also be taught, because … for example, in a shop one has to count how much we will pay for the whole shopping so that we do not show up with ten zloty, with ten zloty, and you have to pay twenty zloty, one must be able to count this. It's the same if one wants to write a letter, one must be able to write it, and not to shoot at spelling because that works real bad.*

Generally, what differentiates the schoolbooks made by children from standard books for elementary school pupils is that, apart from new content and scientific areas covered, their graphic design, mode of conveying content, and content sectioning are utterly different.

> Kamila (voice from the audience): *I have a question. Does your schoolbook contain picture puzzles, songs, crosswords… And another question, how is your schoolbook special?*
>
> Gabrysia: *Y… that we made it ourselves. Our schoolbook is special because it is unique really. Y… and one can learn a lot from it (…) there are picture puzzles, crosswords, Polish, mathematics, and there is also a how-to book on how to decorate one's house, there is fashion, there is a lot… a lot of interesting things, but I think that children would use our schoolbook very willingly.*
>
> Teacher: *And why would they use it willingly? What's it like? What is it about it that would make them want to use it?*
>
> Gabrysia: *It is such that they can simply discover that learning is not some boredom, cramming, (…) only like… it's a sort of game. And this kind of life they can learn.*

Pupils pay special attention to their books' graphic design, which, in their opinion, should be colourful, interesting, abounding in large-size illustrations. Children postulate, also, that the authors of schoolbooks should give them a chance to co-operate on creating artwork for books. As the children see it, their idea can be made reality through the children's drawing their own illustrations which could later be placed in books designed by adults. What was surprising was also the content placement in schoolbooks made by children. In their schoolbooks, pupils distributed the content not only according to specific subjects or thematic units but, also, created units containing various content without any division into fields or subject areas. Perhaps the children intuitively created books which would present an integration of content from various fields of knowledge.

> Gabrysia: *(…) because children, as everybody knows, like to sing and… because for children singing is such good fun. And in school children should play too, not only study. And we want this schoolbook to show children that learning is not only boredom, just sitting, that one can get up and play (…) Here we have tasks, hold it for example… here are crossword puzzles too, very many, another song…*

Apart from the inclusion in their schoolbooks of typical texts for analysis, such as: poems, songs, quizzes, picture puzzles, math problems, or stories, there appeared also advertisements, jokes, biographies of famous people, cooking recipes, puzzles, and birthday wishes. Children's suggestions of forms in which one can convey educational content call upon the varied culture of daily life, beginning with information concerning Polish and foreign celebrities all the way to jokes and all types of anniversary wishes. The idea of reflection proposed by Bruner, useful in the process of the child's early education, in case of the educational project described above has found its full and complete application.

5.   CONCLUSIONS

The child's and the teacher's functioning in the ever-changing world of education is made possible by dialogic learning conducted within their social networks, in other words via connective learning. Experimental research carried out shows that children in early school age possess varied, rich and complex visions of schoolbooks for grades I-III. These ideas have an important function in developing children's meta-knowledge, meta-cognition, meta-learning, and, as a result, in building learning competences throughout their life. Besides, an important effect of the work on creating their own schoolbook – their first books on culture – is exactly the children's awareness of their own role in the process of its creation.

Moreover, it surprised us to learn the children's opinions concerning the degree of difficulty of the tasks that experts place in schoolbooks. To the pupils, the tasks and exercises in their schoolbooks are too simple, they do not develop their problem solving skills, do not encourage their further queries, do not demand effort, and do not constitute an intellectual challenge. Math problems, especially, are considered by pupils as too easy. They expect their schoolbooks' authors to, in the future, include tasks which will give pupils an opportunity to think, tasks whose form will be complex and which will be adequate to the level of 3rd grade of elementary school, because, as the children themselves emphasize, the tasks and content in their schoolbooks should be more challenging than they are now.

The educational project concerning creating by children of their own vision of schoolbooks for grades I-III enabled them to gain two important competences: that of meta-learning and of meta-communication (i.e. an awareness of the process of communication). It comprises an awareness of the process of speaking, understanding, a linguistic awareness, and an awareness of the text and the factors which determine the effectiveness of the act of speaking. Meta-communication is an important condition of the competence of meta-learning, which comprises intentional, internally motivated and consciously undertaken cognitive activity of the learner; understanding and controlling their own thought processes; understanding of the processes involved in remembering; choosing the best methods and organizing optimal learning environment for oneself; finally, perceiving learning as a positive experience (Crick, 2007; Uszyńska-Jarmoc, 2011). At the start of school education meta-cognitive monitoring and regulating of one's learning processes has an unconscious character, enabling the child to control and evaluate his/her own cognitive activities and their course (Black, Swann, & Wiliam, 2006; Driscoll, 2000). This paper confirms theoretical perspective of interpretative reproduction which focuses on the importance of children's participation in their own peer cultures and ability to create new own cultures in the changing world (Corsaro, 2000; Johanson, 2010). The field setting of this experiment led to a number of limitations. These limitations are discussed in another text so that they can be addressed and improved upon in future research studies (Uszyńska-Jarmoc, in press).

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