

THE THESES OF THE DOCTORAL (PHD) DISSERTATION

"Good" children – through adult eyes

*The Transylvanian child's image and attitudes toward children in the light of Cimborra
children's magazine between the two world wars (1922 - 1929)*

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The goal of the dissertation, demarcation of the topic

It is undeniable that childhood is the determinative period of human life. The history of childhood and the interpretation of upbringing at different ages and cultures serve with a paradigmatic explanation, which means that we cannot consider childhood as a universal thing. (Szabolcs, 2004) Exploring different histories of childhood reading, taking a holistic approach to a child and examining the historicity of it must all play a major role in the research of the history of pedagogy. It is even more so because every generation has the right to reinterpret the past and to approach it from their own viewpoint. (Popper, 1997)

No bigger analytic work has been made in Transylvania as regarding the history of childhood and pedagogy and the changes to Transylvanian approach to children which explains the choice of subject. We could even say that empirical research has not been made on the subject of childhood, which is changing with history and culture and is able to reflect conceptions of theory. With all these factors taken into consideration, it becomes necessary that an examination aiming to take into account the happenings between the World Wars and the transformation of the traditional role of children to be made. Obviously we have reduced our focus to a community, which was created at a specific time and place. Thus, the goal is not plentitude, but the demonstration of the problem, which would get a local content to grasp upon.

Taking into consideration the above mentioned elements explaining the stopgaps, our dissertation tries to reconstruct a slice of the history of Transylvanian childhood, focusing on the pedagogy and the mentality of the given time. For the reconstruction, the idea of children that was broadcasted by the children's culture of the given age and the inspection of the conception of children through the children's magazine, *Cimbora* (edited by Benedek Elek) was to be considered a possible option. We chose this children's magazine because it was the only official paper between the World Wars, which not only played a major role in starting the child off on the road of becoming a reader, but talked to young readers according to the nature of children and presented a repertoire of children's literature, whose grammatical tools, format and content did match the requirements to be considered value conveying, didactical, teachable and learnable. (Bárdos 2005)

We approach the presentation of school-age children and the interpretation of the semantic range of childhood developed in Transylvania so that the child could be a subject of a historical

discussion. By exploring different narratives regarding children of the given age we are trying to express the changing parent-child relationship, the attitude towards child upbringing, multiple ideas of children existing side by side and the habits, characteristics of behavior carried by them. Through setting this goal we would like to reconstruct those values which served as a code of conduct and morality for the child back then.

We started our research by asking one basic question: out of all the sources instilling cultural virtue in children which ones were accessible at the time? Which ones were popular? Which ones were effective? We decided to focus on seven main points while analyzing the magazine, and during the investigation of the topic we were searching for the answers to the following questions: 1. Which pedagogic conceptions served as the defining factor in the practice and theory of Romanian and Transylvanian Hungarian education and discipline between the World Wars? How did the tragic historical situation determine the status, the role, the function and the possibilities of the education for Romanian Hungarian students? What sort of challenges were the ones which those had to face who, at critical times, bravely decided to broadcast Transylvanian culture, discipline and arts? 2. What sort of role did the child fill inside the family at the given time? What kind of discipline patterns, social tools, models of action and understanding, parental attitudes and expectations can we find in the Transylvanian conception of childhood? Until what extent is the traditional Transylvanian society idea of children embedded into the history of European childhood and family concept? 3. What role did the Transylvanian Hungarian magazine, titled *Cimbora* play in broadcasting the idea of children imagined by adults? Who was the target audience for *Cimbora*'s structural units (topics, genres, illustrations) in the first place? Did the points suit the target audience's age characteristics? What messages did they carry and how could they affect the transformation of child identity? 4. How did the ones responsible for bringing the child up broadcast the construction of the childhood through the reading of the magazine? What sort of child rearing patterns did the Hungarian magazine of the age, *Cimbora* convey and how can we conclude the characteristics of the conception of childhood at the time through these? Can we identify from the subsisted parts of the text what the goals of the authors and editors were by publishing different narratives? We were curious whether the levels of messages broadcasted by the text are distinguishable, can we identify the explicit and unsaid ones. 5. Who were the illustrators who took part in broadcasting the magazine's idea of the child through visual readings? What sort of goal and intention did they have as authors and what kept them going in publishing the images inside the magazine? By what artistic viewpoint were the different visual products

which carry attributions of the history of childhood made? 6. What particular function does being picturesque have in presenting the conception of childhood? How much do the written and the depicted material of the age differ in terms of content? How discursive are illustrations as regarding the subject? What kind of individual and generational traditions about child rearing were emphasized, and to what extent were these present in the life of the child? Which aspects shaped or formed the activity and the relationships of a child? 7. During the analysis the personal dimension of the pictures was key – who were present and who were absent on the illustrations? Why? What sort of problems can explain the absence of specific personal and material matters? Does the idea of children created by the magazine reflect the socially accepted idea of the time, or does it differ from it? Is it trying to change society or reflect it? By finding the answers to the questions above we can reach the approach to the children of the given time. To understand the correspondences required for the analysis, we have to designate which tendencies are interdisciplinary.

The methodology of the research

The text corpus of the magazine *Cimbora* served as basis for our inquiry into the history of childhood. *Cimbora* was a Hungarian magazine in Transylvania between 1922 and 1929. New issues were published once a week, adding up to 345 issues in total over eight years. Between the World Wars, the magazine served as the most respected organ for the youngest readers (6-12 years old), thus becoming the pioneer of children's literature. The magazine which was taken zealously on Hungarian-speaking territories was founded on February 12, 1922 by Szentimrei Jenő. The paper was published by Szabadsajtó Könyvnyomda és Lapkiadó RT., and Benedek Elek joined the editing process after the release of the fourth issue. He did the editing and kept contact with the readers from his home in Transylvania, Kisbacon, and usually he sent the material through mail to the publisher in Szatmár. The corpus being examined adds up to 345 total issues.

The methods used during our research contained us analyzing the magazine from two different points of view. First, we did an analysis on the text-based material of the paper then went on to parse the imagery by the designated methods, techniques and viewpoints. The methodological base of our research was made up not only by the inspection of the problems being present at the time, but the exploration of different sources, which designated the usage of secondary

sources as well. Qualitative content analysis mixed with fundamental viewpoints when researching press was used as a tool for parsing of text and examining information found in communicational context. We looked through the corpus being analyzed, parsed the macrostructure then quantified the genre elements. We went through the genre repertoire by categories, while searching for childhood-constructions and by assigning elements to different categories we tried to put them into a childhood history context. To explore Transylvanian childhood constructions from different angles we used a research which embraces multidisciplinary territories and requires combined methodological culture. We based the second part of our research on the parse of the imagery, providing a more complex approach to our analysis by using different groups of methods. We adapted several techniques from picture theory and picture interpretation, as well as using points of view taken over from iconology and iconography. For the inspection of imagery we used a picture analysis method consisting of three levels: the pre-iconographical description, the examination of iconographical aspects which take into consideration the anthropological territories and the search for the iconological meaning of the deeper structures developed by visual codes. What helped us during the reconstruction of the idea of children shaped in visual signs and in reading pictures effectively were the monitoring of the toolset of visual communication and the different approaches taken to picture theory and interpretation. Not only did we pay attention to the manifest signs inside texts and pictures pointing to the idea of the latent properties of text as well.

The structure of the thesis: the thesis can be divided into 11 larger content units. These units are in their turn divided into smaller chapters and sub - chapters. The first part contains the specification of the aims of the research and the raise of the problem. It is here that we formulate the questions under scrutiny. The second part presents the methodological approach used, the background for the research, the corpus used for the analysis and the main routes and techniques of research. We present the means of text research and content analysis that fit into the domain of quality research and we lay the stress on the application of the complexity of methods we have designed. In chapters 3 and 4 we have embarked on an important work with a revealing character, in order to unfold the conceptual frame required to be able to adequately prepare our research. The social and historical context of the analysed period (Szász 1986; Köpeczi, 1989; Stanciu 1991; Răduescu-Motru 1996; Balogh 2001; Bíró 2002; Pomogáts 2004; Jakabffy 2005; Fazakas 2009; Romsics 2010) served as a pillar for a many-sided approach in the study of child - identity. The theoretical approach to the references to the pedagogical history of adult narrativity has greatly contributed to the formulation of the questions raised in the research, to

the clarification of the conceptual frame and the thorough incorporation of bibliographic background. This is how the child, who is at the intricate crossroad of different cultures, becomes the subject of an interdisciplinary analysis, and this is where, considering it a social and cultural construct (Szabolcs, 2004a), we take under scrutiny his exciting and multicoloured childhood. In chapters 5,6,7 and 8, we show the results of our research. The presentation of the social and historical characteristics of the studied period are followed by the processing and interpretation of the results. In chapter 5 we start presenting the inter - war child image and child -view, as mirrored in the *Cimbora* children's periodical. We mapped the situation of the Transsylvanian Hungarian children's literature in the given period and we were also able to get a sketchy insight into the many-sided literary and public activity of Elek Benedek. In the chapters presenting the genre repertoire analysis we studied textual narratives and value components. In chapter 6 we studied the importance of illustrations and their value as a source and we attempted to reveal the identity of the illustrators who conveyed the visual reading of the child - image. Next we debated on the visual presentation of social genders. Chapter 8 analyses how children are educated for work and the way this is manifest in the visual aspects of education for work. In chapter 9 we analysed the visual emphasis laid on the child's system of relationships. We wanted to expose the extant adult - child, child - child, and child - animal network of relationships. In chapter 10 we summed up the smaller summaries at the end of each chapter, containing general tendencies and forms of behaviour. We concluded the analysing part of our research with answering the questions and drawing conclusions. In chapter 11, as a final thought, we formulated the necessity of continuing the research and expanding on the subject, by giving a few guidelines and possibilities for a follow up. The final chapters contain bibliography, acknowledgement and appendices. Children, but we considered the latent properties of text as well.

The results of our research

We explored childhood constructions, exposed the relationship between parents and children as a phenomenon of social history that requires complex analysis and parsed the different pieces of the children's magazine. All of this was done while maintaining an adult's perspective. This means that during the construction of content we examined the idea and conception of children created by the parsed material through the eyes of the magazine's editors (adults). To discover the roots of the conception of childhood that expand back to the past, getting to know the social

history of the age served as a guideline. Based on this knowledge, we can admit that the status, role and functions of education and parenting for the Romanian Hungarian minority between the World Wars was dramatically influenced by the school and minority policies of the Romanian rightist parties leading the country. Serial social anomalies and questions of destinies regarding minorities seemed to substantially affect the life, work and parenting of families, which created a special Transylvanian idea and conception of children.

Between the social aspects mentioned above, the idea of children inside the family refers to an interesting dichotomy: accepting and rejecting attitudes of parents mix together, reason for which could be the shifts in mentality. The mentality of “preparing children for life” takes a special place inside the domain of the children being. This mentality specifies that children have to be brought up to be independent, they have to be cut adrift from parents, because children are beings who have a social and natural level that has to be improved. The image of good kids is present in both traditional and civil families. The conception of children was mostly determined by the community’s: mythical beliefs, way of bequeathing traditions, different manifestations, vernacular thoughts and wisdoms. In the traditional peasant society emphasis was placed on bringing children up to be workers by making them work at an early age. Special models of experience and actions made by the territory often joined this. The Transylvanian (and European) families between the World Wars were held together by two things – materialistic and rational interests.

At the examined age the *Cimbora* child magazine, edited and- in many cases- written by Benedek Elek, contributed as an excellent tool to the conveying of the child concept and ideal imagined by adults. Besides stopgap, it tried to serve the Transylvanian child reader group and also ensure space for entertaining adults and transmitting their ideas and attitudes towards child-raising. Most of the texts published in the *Cimbora* appeared in concordance with the age characteristics of primary school children, but in many cases it also published genres aimed to adult readers. The structural elements of the magazine, the literature and documentary texts are mostly aimed at children conveying them traditional culture and knowledge. The differentiated genre repertoire of the magazine was propagating value- formation and –guarding, and was carrying pronounced messages to the good child, imagined by adults with the interweaving of scientific point of view and feeling filled text- and image supply. The value centered attitude preferred by adults could have a great effect on the developing of child identity.

At the age many were involved in the group of those who undertook the problem of education:

first of all Benedek Elek and the eminent representatives of the Romanian minority literature, as well as the writers and poets who were willing to spread the exigent child literature education. From the communicative analysis of the texts serving as a basis in the magazine we can conclude the multiple experiences determining the public thinking of the age as well as educational and methodological ways of approaching the child as a human being, able to develop at the level of nature and society. We are presented with an authorial intention which tries to reach moral education but also takes into consideration the new physiological and psychological research results and doesn't oppose the reform pedagogical ambitions. So, the child may be educated on the way of moral values determined and defined by family and society. By analyzing the theories, standards and educational patterns explaining childhood we found the traces of the colorful Transylvanian child- image and – ideal. Following the value centered guidelines in the epic creations that appeared throughout eight volumes we can reach the childhood narratives fed by the editor and authors that were defining in the Transylvanian child history.

The narratives revealed by us worth mentioning are the following according to the ranking of genres: the innocent child in poems, the value obtaining child in the fairy tales, the value-guiding and -conveying child, the naughty and the obedient child, the learning child from documentaries, the reader child in letters, the entertaining child on the basis of play- repertoires. If we analyze the above mentioned narratives, we get a picture of values to be mediated such as values connected to work (perseverance, diligence, firmness, honesty), the values of humanizing society and world concept (the knowledge of homeland, scenery, country, the protection of these and the passing of traditions) and the values of biological life (protection of natural environment, the guiding and realization of a healthy lifestyle).

The illustrators tried to follow the guidelines of texts and immortalize the expectations, models and behavior patterns composed outlined in child-raising. That's why we can find on most of child representations the figure of the innocent child, the rule-obeying child and the child developing and socializing according to the theories of reform-pedagogy. We can observe the value components that could shape the child identity. On the basis of image-codes we can read that the illustrators laid emphasis on illustrating the socializing, moralizing, supporting and empathic attitude of parents too.

The illustration of child conception is emphasized by the instrumental examination of the

pictures. It is because of the functionality of the pictures that sometimes they are more talkative from the point of view of child- history and according to our opinion they could form in an adaptive way the child thinking and conception with their rich system of motives. It can be read from the visual content analysis that they carry and convey message mostly from the main editor, Benedek Elek's life- conception, and present his- and the illustrator's point of view. We can observe the child- parent connection on almost every image, which is formulated not only in the upgrading of the child being but also in the expectations of parents towards their children. These expectations originate in the scale of values of the middle class and those of the traditions of European Christianity.

In the process of child raising such individual and generational traditions were emphasized as honesty and love of work, moral courage in life, caring for homeland and education as regarding the cultivation of folk traditions. We can state on the basis of communicative signals in pictures that the activity and system of relationships of the socializing child was usually formed and influenced by adults.

According to the text- and image repertoire of the *Cimbora* we can see it as a socializing scenario where Benedek Elek, by recreating the child- world of its own time, tries to reconstruct the cross- section of the Transylvanian historical past, the revealing of the pedagogical sequences of child- forming and child identity. In the popular child magazine we can observe a child image that reflects the belief and trust in child educability. From our point of view the textual and illustrational material that can be understood as the representation of the narrative identity could have served as a way of reforming the Transylvanian society between the two World Wars. The practical child conception is somehow diminished as compared to the idealized one through the textual and medial transmitting but it can serve as a proof to reflect the social atmosphere of the age.

According to our experience, the child magazine mostly reflected an idealized child conception but, at the same time, it was also suitable to mirror the everyday child conception. Neither the children of poorer families was suitable to build an example and nor the one of richer, wealthier parents. Despite of this fact the magazine emphasized the education for compassion with the poorer, broken down families. The narrative and illustrational narrative of the beggar child shades off the idealized child image. The practical conception of the child is led by the utilitarianism imposed by parents. The exemplary child is well- educated, reads a lot, he is hardworking, helps his parents inside and outside the house, respects parents and adults, loves

his homeland, cares for traditions, guards the basic mental, moral and cultural values of life and as an adult would convey all these. We think that these narratives served as an impulse to educating a child and developing its power of mind. It can be stated that the child conception of Benedek Elek and the Cimborra may originate in a wider mentality and cultural- historical context. We can observe the belief and optimism coming from the frame of reference of Enlightenment which was also stated many times by Kant.

Overall, our analysis leads us to the conclusion that the textual and illustrational reading of the Cimborra creates a context for the diagrammatic cognition of the past between the two World Wars among the Transylvanian Hungarian community. Furthermore, it creates an opportunity for analyzing how the rules and normative of living together developed and formed in the frames of a community living in minority which could have influenced the development of child identity. This way we can come to the conclusion that the genre and illustrational richness of the magazine inherently includes the child raising imperative of the given age. The explicit explanation of Benedek Elek's writer and educational world (child) vision appears throughout the magazine, establishing a plural, diffuse child-concept that shows the need of innovative child-raising.

Our work would strengthen first of all, the reception of Transylvanian childhood history research, while the topic and the way of its presentation would be a stopgap not only for educational historians and researchers but also for educators and parents from the point of view of different childhood constructions. The research which is considered to be a rarity lets us see into the Hungarian and Transylvanian culture history, enriching the pedagogical culture of educators and it can also cause changes in their life strategy and value orientation. Furthermore, our research will probably have an impact on content and methodological enriching of the Romanian Hungarian pedagogue formation. Our enterprise reveals a new area by following the development of child conception, child image and child fates as a part of childhood history and with its analysis offers a new perspective to further works.



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List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian scientific article(s) in Hungarian journal(s) (3)

1. **Portik E.E.:** A munkára nevelés, munkába nevelődés képi megjelenítése a Cimborá című gyermekfolyóirat tükrében (1922-1929).
Educatio. "közlésre elfogadva", 1-11, 2016. ISSN: 1216-3384.
2. **Portik E.E.:** Az erdélyi magyar kisebbség közművelődési élete a két világháború között.
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3. **Portik E.E.:** Erdélyi magyar kisebbségi sorskérdések a két világháború között.
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Hungarian scientific article(s) in international journal(s) (2)

4. **Portik E.E.:** A felnőtt-gyermek kapcsolat képi ábrázolása a Cimborá című gyermekfolyóiratban (1922-1929).
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6. **Portik, E.E.:** The pictorial presentation of the playing child's narrative in the cimborá children journal.
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Hungarian conference proceeding(s) (4)

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8. **Portik E.E.:** Szöveges gyermekkor-narratívák alapján rekonstruálható gyermekkép a Cimbora című gyermekfolyóiratban (1922-1929).

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10. **Portik E.E.:** Az erdélyi gyermekkép, gyermekszemlélet a 19-20. század fordulóján.

In: Tudás és Tanulás : Neveléstudományi Konferencia 2012. március 30. Szerk.: Fóris-Ferenczi Rita, Ozsváth Judit, Marchis Julianna, Babeş-Bolyai Tudományegyetem Pedagógia, Kolozsvár, 264-270, 2013. ISBN: 9789730147360

The Candidate's publication data submitted to the iDEa Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on the basis of Web of Science, Scopus and Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) databases.

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