

Agata Walczak-Niewiadomska
Department of Library and Information Science
University of Lodz
e-mail: agata.walczak-niewiadomska@uni.lodz.pl
ORCID 0000-0002-9292-1805

THE EDUCATION OF LIBRARIANS WORKING WITH CHILDREN AGED 0-5 AND THEIR FAMILIES IN POLAND



Agata Walczak-Niewiadomska, graduate of library and information science (University of Łódź; 2001), habilitated doctor of social sciences in the field of social communication and media sciences (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń; 2020). Research areas: early literacy and family literacy, biography and quantitative research in bibliology and information science. Author of four books and numerous articles devoted to the history of books in Kalisz, biographical writing and children's librarianship. Since 2006, she has been associated with the publication *Słownik pracowników książki polskiej* (Dictionary of Polish Book Employees). Deputy editor-in-chief of the journal „Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Librorum”. Member of the Kalisz Society of Friends of Science. Coordinator of cooperation with foreign countries and the ERASMUS+ program at the Department of Library and Information Science of the University of Lodz. Four-time winner of the Rector of the University of Lodz award.

KEY WORDS: Librarian education. Children aged 0-5. Public libraries. Early literacy.

ABSTRACT: **The aim** of the article is to present the issue of education of librarians working with children aged 0-5 in public libraries in Poland, as well as to discuss the educational offer available on the market. **The method** of critical analysis of the literature and Internet resources was used to analyze the material. **The con-**

ducted analysis showed that representatives of the discussed professional group, due to the lack of adequate formal education (e.g. at the university level), most often use the offer of courses offered by professional institutions and companies that provide commercial training for employees of the cultural sector. Knowledge and skills related to the methodology of working with the youngest reader are also passed on through cooperation with publishing houses.

INTRODUCTION

For many years in Poland we have had to deal with a deficit of research on early literacy in public libraries. These issues have been tentatively recognized, and have been discussed in the foreign literature of the last few decades, at the same time establishing new fields of activity for libraries. From the 1980s, Polish public libraries slowly began to open up to readers younger than school-age children due to more frequent contacts with pre-school educational institutions (Białkowska, 1980). In 1989, specialists in library methodology drew attention to 2- to 3-year-old children and their initiation at this age, shaping future reading tendencies and preferences (Białkowska, 1989a, p. 13). This was followed by demands for greater "care of the librarian to supply book collections with books for the youngest and to popularize among adult readers (parents) knowledge about the rights of children's reading development (already at pre-school age)" (ibid., p. 18). Thanks to this change in approach, examples of library activities for preschool children began to appear in the professional literature (e.g. Pijanowska, 1996; Kulik, 1998; Kuprel, 2002).

At the beginning of the 1990s, the first voices appeared in Poland suggesting that the target group of users should be expanded to include children younger than 3 years old, which was related to the recognition of research conducted abroad on early childhood education, as well as the modernization of libraries introduced on the basis of this. The postulates of a new concept of a children's library began to be formulated, the essential component of which was to start the child's reading initiation early in cooperation with adults (parents, grandparents, guardians), using the assumptions of the concept of family literacy (Papuzińska, 1992, p. 25). The publications of G. Lewandowicz-Nosal, which were innovative at that time, also contributed to the introduction of changes. By introducing the issue of "a small child in the library" into her research, she encouraged the expansion of the repertoire of libraries for preschoolers and, later, infants. She mentioned the need to create a department of books for the youngest (with particular emphasis on picture books) and to include games and toys in the collection (Lewandowicz, 1994, pp. 14-16, 20-21, 28).

At that time, in addition to the above-mentioned publications, there were works on libraries for children, however they addressed the issues

related to servicing their youngest users only to a small extent, and at the same time there were no general works that took into account the place and role of public libraries in the contemporary system of cultural education of a small child. It was only in 2019 that a book was published in the Polish literature on the subject which more comprehensively addressed the issue of the participation of the public library in the process of literacy of a small child, and not only in the context of children aged 0-3, but also preschoolers (research carried out over the years, especially at the Book and Readership Institute of the National Library, focused mainly on quantitative and statistical analyses). We are talking about the monograph *Wczesna alfabetyzacja i jej miejsce w działalności bibliotek publicznych* (Early literacy and its place in the activities of public libraries), which, in addition to explaining the concept of early literacy, presents the possibilities of public libraries taking part in developing the pre-reading skills of children aged 0-5 in terms of infrastructure, collections, and the methodology of working with a child and his guardian (Walczak-Niewiadomska, 2019).

THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN'S LIBRARIANS – THE STATE OF RESEARCH

The education of children's librarians is one of the points raised in international and national discussions regarding public librarianship. However, an analysis of the available sources shows that, unlike deliberations on the general shape and future of education in the field of library and information science, the situation in the case of this particular specialization is quite different: there are few comparative and cross-sectional studies on the education of children's librarians (e.g. Glistrup, ed., 1986; Fisher, 2000; Walter, 2014; Hamada & Stavridi, 2014). Despite this, several interesting studies have appeared in the foreign literature, referring to the issue of the professional development of children's librarians. These are rather articles whose aim is to indicate new perspectives for the development of this specialization of library staff. Among them is, for example, a text by Frances Smardo, which is one of the first to ask the question of how to prepare librarians to serve small children (1980). A more detailed discussion of the set of qualifications that staff should have when working with children aged 0-5 is provided in the chapter *People and partnerships, skills and knowledge from the collective monograph Library services from birth to five: Delivering the best start* (Rankin & Brock, 2015).

In Polish professional literature, the situation is similar: especially after 1989, there is a noticeable lack of scientific texts discussing the status of education of children's librarians, in contrast to publications relating to the education of librarians in general. In order to develop their compe-

tencies, Polish librarians would mainly use popular publications in which the issue of servicing small children appeared sporadically and did not cover the subject completely (Lewandowicz, ed., 1993; Lewandowicz, 1994; Kumiega, 2003). Most texts dealing with this topic were published in guidebooks and professional publications, serving librarians-practitioners in the daily organization of work (e.g. in the journal *Poradnik Bibliotekarza* ("The Librarian's Handbook")), while only some of them appeared in monographs (Łopińska, 1965; Białkowska, 1989b), including collaborative works (Grabowska, 1996; Woźniczka-Paruzel, 2003; Grabowska, 2013). Greater interest in this problem among Polish specialists was noticeable after 2007, i.e. from the date of publication of the IFLA *Guidelines for libraries serving infants and young children* (up to 3 years old), explaining the role of public libraries in the literacy of the youngest children, as well as providing valuable and universal tips on the preparation of the premises and the offer of classes (IFLA, 2007; IFLA guidelines..., 2009). One of the latest texts devoted to this issue was published in 2016, but even here services for children aged 0-5 are only mentioned (Walczak-Niewiadomska).

THE EDUCATIONAL OFFER IN POLAND

In the 1970s and 1980s, the requirements regarding the skills and knowledge that a librarian working with infants should have were gradually clarified, thanks in part to the commitment and publications of practitioners, especially American ones. The desired competencies of the staff working with the youngest children were discussed, and for this purpose recommendations were developed to support the educational process of librarians. It was proposed, among other things, to expand the content of librarianship students' curricula and professional training to include elements of pre-school education, the theory of learning and play, and human development. It was also suggested that the didactic offer in schools for future librarians be supplemented with classes in the field of child development and psychology, methods of teaching reading, and special apprenticeships (Smardo, 1980, p. 277).

So what is the educational offer for people who want to work with the 0-5 age group in public libraries in Poland? Further in this article education at the university level will be presented and, above all, the offer of courses and training that truly meets the needs of librarians. The departure of Polish academic centers from education for the needs of libraries (and the redirection of efforts to areas closely related to information and knowledge management) results in a reduction in the possibility of obtaining specialist knowledge on the provision of services to children and young people in a public library. The matter is further complicated by the

fact that since 2013, pursuant to the so-called deregulation act, candidates for the position of a public librarian are not required to have specialized education. Analysis of all courses available in the academic year 2022/2023 (as of April 2023) offering education to librarians at the academic level in Poland¹ shows that the subject of children's librarianship is implemented in most in the form of individual subjects, mainly within a specific major (e.g. the subject „Methodology of working with a children's reader” in the „Animation of culture” major at the University of Warsaw within the Bachelor's degree „Scientific Information and Library Science”; the subject „Reading among children and youth” in the „Public and school libraries” major at the University of Wrocław in the MA field of „Scientific information and library science”; the subject „Methodology of working with a child reader” within the „School librarianship” major at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Faculty of Pedagogy and Art of the branch in Kalisz in the field of „Scientific information and library science”). Only in second-cycle studies at the University of Silesia is there a module „The young reader in the world of books and media” as part of the „Scientific information and library science” field of study. Probably the only option for post-graduate studies in this field is offered by the University of Warsaw under the name „Bibliotekoznawstwo” (Library Science). In the path (specialization) „Libraries in the education and culture system” we find the subjects „Public libraries for children and youth” and „Methodology of working with children and young readers”. Despite the presence of didactic elements devoted to working with children in the library at some universities, it is not difficult to notice that these contents are treated more generally, in relation to the entire category of young readers, than to children aged 0-5.

The deficiencies of the formal mode (at the university level) of educating children's librarians in Poland are being redressed by the libraries themselves and the institutions cooperating with them, e.g. non-governmental organizations (NGOs). For several years, companies specializing in commercial training for employees of the cultural sector have been operating more intensively on the market. Content is most often provided during one- or two-day conferences, as well as being part of workshops or training. These meetings often have a regional character and are part of the methodological offer of provincial public libraries², but there are

¹ Based on data taken from the Wybierz Studia (Select Studies) search engine, which contains information from, among others, the POLON government database on higher education (Ministry of Education and Science, 2023).

² Among others in Olsztyn (April 17-18, 2016) – a nationwide conference “Let's not force children to read – a new look at children's reading”, organized as part of the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Municipal Public Library in Olsztyn and the 10th anniversary of the Multimedia Children's Library ABECADŁO as a seminar combined with workshops (Multimedialna Biblioteka..., 2023).

also national ones, e.g. the annual National Bibliotherapeutic Conference, organized by the Polish Bibliotherapeutic Society³, or one summarizing the 5 years of the campaign "Little book, great man"⁴. The network of pedagogical libraries also presents its own training offer, directed mainly at librarians and teachers of pre-school and early school education⁵. These initiatives are largely devoted to preparation for work with children and youth in a broader sense (but containing elements of animation for the youngest); we can observe fewer focused solely on the 0-5 age group.

The first group includes, for example, workshops regularly organized (for a fee) by the Association of Polish Librarians individually and in cooperation with partners (including the National Library, the District Pedagogical Library of the Commission of National Education, the Stanisław Staszic Public Library in the Bielany District, the Goethe Institute) in Warsaw. These workshops on children's and youth's reading and bibliotherapy can be an inspiration for the participants to introduce changes in the service offer of their facility. Among the topics offered in recent years have been: „Active forms of work with the reader - how to discuss books?“, „New media in the library for young people“, „The use of therapeutic fairy tales in working with children“, „Bibliotherapy in the process of developing reading competencies“, „Unconventional methods of supporting the reading of children and teenagers“, „Board games in the library“, „Fairy tale therapy in the process of supporting child development“, „Bibliotherapy and fairy tale therapy in crisis situations“, „Creative forms of book and reading promotion in libraries“ (Polish Librarians Association, 2023a, 2023b). Currently available courses can be conducted in person or online, depending on the needs of the library.

The National Library has a similarly wide range of proposals, including paid training sessions such as „Selection of new products for library book collections for children and teenagers“, „Book for workshops! On conducting creative classes based on children's literature“, „Genres of publications for children and youth: the theory and practice of cataloging“, conducted onsite (Biblioteka Narodowa, 2023a). Bibliotherapeutic workshops conducted by the Polish Bibliotherapeutic Society in cooperation with the Polish Librarians Association (e.g. Powiatowa Biblioteka..., 2023) are held regularly. In person and/or online workshops are also offered by Good Books, a company that conducts training for, among others,

³ The latest edition is planned for September 2023 (Regionalny Zespól..., 2023).

⁴ It took place in November 2022 (Book Institute, 2023).

⁵ Among others the conference "Children like books – a book as a tool supporting the development of positive behavior in children", which was held on May 9, 2015 thanks to the efforts of the West Pomeranian Teacher Training Center of the Pedagogical Library of Helena Radlińska (Zachodniopomorskie Centrum..., 2018) and the training "Kamishibai, theater of illustration – how to work with text?" (Lower Silesian Library..., 2023).

librarians (e.g. „Working with children and youth in the library using the project method” (Good Books, 2023)), as well as the Public Library Academy, the educational portal of the „Biblioteka Publiczna” magazine (for example „Sensational Reading”, „Creative Forms of Book Promotion and reading in public libraries” (Biblioteka Publiczna, 2023)). Librarians can take advantage of free training options when organizing book fairs, when such meetings are prepared by the organizer in cooperation with publishing houses and industry associations. An example is the 4th edition of the Virtual Fair for Libraries organized by the OSDW Azymut book warehouse in 2022, which included meetings such as „Literature in action! Practical ideas for workshops with a book”, “How to talk to children about values? Workshops with Literature” (Wydawca.com.pl, 2022). The publishers of children’s and youth literature themselves prepare webinars for public libraries, but they are often devoted more to discussing novelties in the publishing repertoire than to the methodology of working with children (e.g. Dwie Siostry, Mamania, Księgarnia Tuliszków, Literatura). On their websites you can find class scenarios (or coloring pages) for specific books. Similar materials are also published in professional magazines (“Poradnik Bibliotekarza”, “Biblioteka w Szkole”, “Biblioteka Publiczna”).

Training offers for people who want to work with the youngest children have appeared much less often in Polish librarianship. One of the first initiatives that drew the attention of the community to this issue, directing its offer to a wider audience than the local one, was the project „Laboratory of an active librarian” run by the Municipal Public Library in Olsztyn (Leksykon Kultury..., 2014). The aim of this project was to inspire the community of librarians from all over Poland (from towns with less than 20,000 inhabitants) with the possibility of enriching the offer of their institutions with activities addressed to the group least present in these (e.g. children up to 3 years old), while efforts were also made to promote literature and provide methods of motivating reading in relation to children and their parents. The training offer was enriched by the projects of the Comenius Foundation for Child Development – Play Groups, Library for the Youngest, Library classes for children and parents and Little Researchers – developed in many cases in cooperation with public libraries in rural communities. Each of these required the person conducting the training to develop the animator’s competencies, and to this day you can take advantage of the offer of improvement courses implemented at the Comenius Institute (Comenius Institute, 2023). To some extent, in order to supplement knowledge and find inspiration, one can use the database of ideas available on the LABiB website, a network of Polish public librarians for the purpose of sharing experience (Labib, 2023).

Currently, the educational offer in the field of work with the youngest children is available through courses and workshops of profession-

al associations and commercial companies, mainly for a fee. An example would be the training of the Association of Polish Librarians entitled "Picturebooks – the art of evoking emotions", which provides, among other things, knowledge on how to work with this type of book form (National Library, 2023b). Two free webinars (for subscribers of the magazine "Biblioteka Publiczna" magazine) can be found on the Akademia Biblioteki Publicznej portal ("Into space with a book: ideas for workshops for the youngest readers (from 6 months to 4 years old)" and "Parent with a child in a public library: training" (Biblioteka Publiczna, 2023)). However, the librarian has the greatest choice from the aforementioned Good Books, which offers a series of face-to-face or online meetings around early literacy, family literacy, and issues of reading initiation in the library ("Baby in the library - reading needs of children up to 2 years of age", "Child – parent – senior. Intergenerational integration in the library", "From an infant to a bookworm. How to raise a young reader?", "Parents in the library. Who are they and how do you encourage them to come with their children?", "Moms club in the library. How to organize space, events and an offer for future and young mothers with babies", "Fathers' club in the library – a reading dad as a new type of user in the library", "Shaping reading habits in non-reading children (0-6 years old). Classes for librarians and parents") (Good Books, 2023).

SUMMARY

Although the introduction of children aged 0-5 and their guardians to public libraries occurs at a different pace and intensity, it is comforting that in the field of education of librarians in other countries a specialization has appeared – Early Years Librarian – which is a signal emphasizing the complex nature of library services for the youngest children. This is understandable if we realize that the offer for such children and their caregivers will differ from the one traditionally addressed to older children, and will require slightly different skills, tools, and forms of expression from the librarian. The progressive specialization will require better profiled training options for children's librarians, taking into account the knowledge and skills in the field of the latest publishing offer, forms of work with the youngest children and their guardians, and bibliotherapy.

It is not difficult to notice that the educational offer for children's librarians in Poland most often focuses on a more general approach to serving young readers. There is a lack of specialization towards the 0-5 age group, although this is starting to change, mainly due to commercial trainings and webinars which can be more clearly specialized to reach specific groups of interested audiences. Content related to serving the youngest readers,

especially work methodology and literature, is provided by bibliotherapeutic organizations and industry magazines, as well as publishing houses promoting their publications in this way.

The pandemic has brought several useful solutions in the field of training and education, which can be seen in the multitude of webinars and online training offered. This is probably of great importance for people working in libraries who want to develop and improve their qualifications, but do not have sufficient funds for travel and accommodations. However, can we definitely say that online training is the optimal form for acquiring knowledge and skills in working with such a demanding group of users as infants and small children? Certainly not, but combining online training with subsequent practice in the library would help to develop staff competencies.

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