Designer & User

Substantive and graphic elaboration of a series of books for children and complementary materials for teachers and carers

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FIELD

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The **Designer & User** series comprises three activity books for children and two complementary publications for carers:

1. **Monsterious design**. A story with tasks for 8-11 year olds,
2. **Monsterious design**. Tasks for their younger siblings,
3. **Machine Design**. A story with tasks for 11-13 year olds,
4. *Helper*. A guidebook for carers,
5. **Contexts**. A book for the more inquisitive carers.

The score of this dissertation:

- Developing the learning outcomes based upon which the series of books was created (see details in chapter 3 of **Contexts**):
  — graphic design (information architecture, importance hierarchy, typography, composition),
  — informational graphics (plans, maps, wayfinding, spatial orientation, warnings and instructions, visualisations of numerical data),
  — visual vs verbal communication,
  — visual communication (symbol, graphic sign, icon, the symbolism of colours in different cultures).
- Developing exercises based on the appointed learning outcomes.
- Adapting the difficulty of tasks to the current Polish core curriculum for children in pre-school and the primary years programme (7-10 year olds) and primary/middle years programme (11-13 year olds); apart from the curriculum of the subject Plastyka (Art), others were taken into consideration as well: Technika (Technology), Informatyka (IT), Przyroda (Natural Sciences), and others.
- Creating a story which contains information from design area (e.g. copyright issues, intercultural communication, project process and others). The main characters of the story are twins, Alice and Matty; the story's twins are of the reader's age. The plot has been adapted to the typical interests and hobbies of the target age group. The story sets to motivate its readers to carry out exercises. In tests, a page of the story was read to the children. They could

know the continuation of the story once they have completed the planned exercises.

— ***Monsterious design***: Alice and Matty spend their winter break at their Aunt Theresa's cabin. Living alone in a cabin near the woods, Aunt Theresa always has some chores to do. During they stay, Alice and Matty discover the traces of somebody's presence. These traces lead them to the hidden denizens of Aunt Theresa's cabin. Things turn out not to be as they seemed to be.

— ***Machine Design***: Alice and Matty begin 6th grade. As the elections to the Student Council near, Alice drops her lone wolf routine and becomes a real community activist. Meanwhile, mysterious creatures appear in the school... Thanks to the help of programmer Marcel DeFlat and Ms. Librarian, the twins achieve huge success and realise their dreams.

- Graphically designing the activity books. They needed to be designed in such a way so as to enable them to be used in two main ways: in the form of a fully printed activity books or in the form of separate pages, whether printed or copied.

- Designing illustrations which seek out to provoke children to both complete the assigned exercises and to freely scribble in the margins of the story.

- Creating the ***Helper*** – a guide for the carers which supports those without any education in Arts to realise the learning outcomes. Examples in the activity book have been chosen in a way which allows the carers the acknowledge the importance of understanding visual communication. Apart from that, the activity book also contains elements of media education and critical thinking. Tested conducted with adult readers allowed the ***Helper*** to be accessible to user without art or design education. The content was adapted to be used with each activity book for childrenfrom the serie. Only when it is necessary does the ***Helper*** refer to the specific activity book for children. Each task present in the activity books is paired with a detailed description structured in the following way:

— necessary tools,

— description of the task,

— helping questions and discussion items,

— correct answers,

— group work,

— bonus exercises for working with a single child,

— what's the use?

The activity books for children have been developed based on analyses from areas related to design and design education. The publication ***Contexts*** presents these analyses. The subsequent chapters of this publication answer the questions relevant for visual communication which needed to be answered while designing content for children: ,how?', ,why?', ,what'?

Hence, the first chapter explores how visual communication is taught in the school, family, public space and Internet. The concluding subchapter entitled ,Fine arts and art conservation' (oryg. ,Sztuki plastyczne i konserwacja dzieł sztuki') details the evolution of the school subject concerned with the arts. The way in which the word ,plastyka' (being also the name of the school subject) changed, explains why this school subject is not treated with equal respect to other school subjects.

The second chapter explains why should visual communication be taught at all; it analyses both projects whose main aims are to be useful for society as well as the everyday work of a graphic designer who completes commercially viable projects.

The third chapter is a review of educational books for children from Poland and other countries (such as The United Kingdom, the Netherlands and France) and a description of the project choices made for the ***Designer & User*** series based upon this review.