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Educational Conditions for (Self-)Development of Children’s Resistance to Consumerism in the Family

Warunki edukacyjne w rodzinach dla rozwijania oporu dzieci
wobec konsumpcjonizmu

Streszczenie

Artykuł zawiera wyniki badań przeprowadzonych w latach 2012–2013, gdy zbada-
no rozwijanie przez rodziny oporu wobec konsumpcjonizmu u dzieci w wieku przed-
szkolnym. Celem badań było określenie warunków niezbędnych do rozwijania u dzieci
w wieku przedszkolnym oporu wobec konsumpcjonizmu oraz przewidzenie środków
edukacyjnych niezbędnych dla rozwijania oporu wobec konsumowania u dzieci. Bada-
nia były realizowane zarówno z użyciem jakościowej, jak i ilościowej metodologii ba-
dawczej. Wykorzystano obserwację reklam telewizyjnych, metody niedokończonych
obrazków tematycznych rysowanych przez dziecko, rozpoznawanie reklam telewizyj-
nych, jak również kwestionariusz dla rodziców. Badania pokazały współczesną sytu-
ację rodziny w zakresie wytwarzania oporu wobec konsumpcjonizmu u dzieci. Co wię-
cej, zaprezentowały dotychczasowe doświadczenia konsumeryzmu u dzieci, włączając
w to ich znajomość centrów handlowych oraz samego robienia zakupów, a także ich
świadomość znaków i marek rynkowych.

Artykuł rozpoznaje źródła najważniejszych informacji o konsumpcji i konsumpcjo-
nizmie napotkane przez dzieci, którymi okazują się członkowie rodziny, rówieśnicy
oraz mass media. Wiedza dzieci dotycząca reklam, a także ich świadomość najważniej-
szych elementów reklam telewizyjnych oraz ich postawy wobec tych zjawisk były
również badane.

Zgodnie z wynikami ankiety rozpoznano warunki edukacyjne znaczące dla rozwijania u dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym oporu wobec konsumpcjonizmu: proces edukacyjny zorientowany na dziecko dla wytworzenia oporu wobec konsumpcji, jak również dla wytworzenia krytycznej postawy wobec reklamy; postawy wychowawców i podejście do konsumpcjonizmu (włączając w to osobisty przykład dorosłego); nacisk na potencjalne zagrożenia, okoliczności i czynniki wpływające na niewłaściwą socjalizację dzieci (w odniesieniu do konsumpcjonizmu); wybór spersonalizowanych metod i środków edukacyjnych odpowiednich dla dziecka (włączając w to środki dla rodziców, jako że to oni mają rozwinąć opór wobec konsumpcjonizmu u swoich dzieci); wytworzenie odpowiedniego mikroklimatu oraz wzajemnego wsparcia i współuczestniczenia w procesie wytwarzania u dzieci oporu wobec konsumpcjonizmu.

Słowa kluczowe: dziecko, reklama, opór wobec konsumpcjonizmu, warunki edukacyjne.

Abstract

The article presents the results of the research on the development of 6–7 year old children's resistance to consumerism in the family, conducted in 2012–2013. The research was conducted combining qualitative and quantitative methods of research. The method of interviews with the child and parents' survey was applied.

The research investigated the situation of the development of children's resistance to consumerism in the family, disclosed children's consumerism experience, which includes children's knowledge of places of trade and their visits to them, children's knowledge about the assortment of products, brands and the main providers of knowledge about consumption and consumerism for children, namely family members, peers and the media. The article also presents the analysis of children's knowledge of advertising, children's perceptions about TV advertising and their attitudes to it. Based on research results, educational conditions that are important for development of 6–7 year old children's resistance to consumerism are distinguished.

Keywords: child, advertising, consumer culture, resistance to consumerism, educational conditions.

Introduction

Social, cultural, economic and political processes (globalization, technological development, changes in political and cultural ideologies) influence the conditions of children's development and determine changes in their self-development. Alongside with consumption, which is turning into the existential purpose, consumer culture and consumerism promoted by it are entrenching, resulting also in the changing attitude towards the child as a consumer. Since the end of the 20th century, childhood has been increasingly commercialised and children have no longer been treated as being outsiders of contemporary con-

sumer culture¹; children as a profitable business niche are increasingly becoming the target of advertisers and marketing professionals, whilst children's status and childhood has become inseparable from brands and investment². Thus, from birth, today's children are exposed to consumer culture. It manifests itself by the abundance of goods and services, shopping centres, advertising, mass consumption, etc. in the children's immediate environment, consumption manifestations are not decreasing when children start attending the pre-school educational institution and later, school. Thus, on one hand, from an early age children are influenced by consumer culture, and on the other hand, they are "forced" to live in it.

Today, two approaches to the socialisation of children as consumers are prevailing. One of them highlights that during the socialisation process the child, who from birth is surrounded by consumer culture, may become a competent consumer and the other, that the child may become a materialist, who needs protection from dangers of marketing. However, this dualistic attitude is problematic, since it ignores the importance of the cultural context in which the child is growing, which leads to a too narrow understanding of what it means to be the child in today's society³, moreover that children not only imitate or internalize the world around them; they try to interpret and perceive the surrounding culture and take part in it⁴.

Thus, children (especially pre-schoolers) must learn not only to adjust to consumer culture but also to resist mass culture, levelling everything. Children of such age are not conscious users; this makes it relevant to distinguish the educational conditions necessary for the development of resistance to consumerism, considering the experience and knowledge of children living in consumer culture and the manifestation of approaches and consumer behaviour of the child's immediate environment – family members.

R e s e a r c h a i m : to study the situation of the development of 6–7 year old children's resistance to consumerism in the family and to foresee educational conditions for the development of their resistance to consumerism.

R e s e a r c h m e t h o d s : literature analysis, interview with the child, parents' survey.

¹ L. Martens, D. Southerton, S. Scott, *Bringing Children (and Parents) into the Sociology of Consumption: Towards a Theoretical and Empirical Agenda*, "Journal of Consumer Culture" 2004, № 4(2), pp. 155–182. Available at SAGE journals. Available from: <http://www.sagepublications.com> [accessed on: 6.05.2013].

² D.T. Cook, *Beyond Either/or*, "Journal of Consumer Culture" 2004, № 4(2), pp. 147–153. Available at SAGE journals: <http://www.sagepublications.com> [accessed on: 6.05.2013].

³ K.M. Ekström, *Consumer Socialization in Families*, "Understanding Children as Consumers", SAGE Publications Ltd 2010, pp. 41–60.

⁴ O. Freeman, *'No Buts!' – Researching Children's Consumption, an Exploration of Conversation and Discourse Analytic Techniques*, "Child and Teen Consumption Conference", Copenhagen Business School, Denmark 2006.

Research participants: 18 children (6–7 years old), 310 parents, raising children of this age.

Data analysis methods: content analysis of texts of interviews with children, qualitative content analysis (analysing parents' answers to open questionnaire questions).

The Conception of Resistance to Consumerism

Resistance to consumerism can be treated as the ability of the individual or group to resist and change prevailing political, economic and social structures and in this way become active, free and creative creators of authentic life. The dominant ideology in the article is consumerism, which is distinguished by the authors of the majority of theories attributed to the field of post-modern thought (e.g., of critical pedagogy) as a feature characteristic to modern society. In this context advertising is treated as the cause of consumerism (advertising promotes acquisition of more and more new things and this way possessive attitudes are formed) and a consequence of phenomena related to consumerism: constant requests to buy, to have more things, etc. For the latter reason, it is relevant to disclose the experience of children's consumption and their attitude to advertising.

Child-centred educational paradigm actualises the construction of education from the child's perspective. Therefore, there must be an interaction between the child as the object of educational and social relations and adults, who would try to understand the child's world and adjust education to him/her. Therefore, recognition of the subculture of childhood, its values and, self-development patterns becomes the most important basis for children's education⁵. Meaningfulness of developing children's resistance to consumerism can be based on the idea that living in consumer culture, children must learn both to adjust to it and, on the contrary, create this culture because children's consumer culture constitutes part of the common culture. For this reason, the adult sector of the society, particularly parents and other educators, must recognise this culture and use their knowledge for the formation of new society, which both advocates the ideology of consumerism and contains creative, democratic ideas.

Thus, the question is: What is the child like in today's consumer culture? To answer this is the purpose of this research.

Methods and Procedures

The interview with the pre-primary age child as a research method was chosen due to the openness of this approach, based on mutual trust between the

⁵ O. Monkevičienė, *Į vaiką orientuotas ugdymas: pedagogikos kryptys*. "Inveniēns quaero: ieškoti, rasti, nenurimti", VPU leidykla, Vilnius 2011, pp. 845–855.

communicating parties. Usage of the child's drawing as an additional means or mediator helped the child to relax better and the researcher, to have more freedom giving questions. Pre-primary age children who took part in the research were given the unfinished thematic drawing, depicting the child, empty shelves and the shopping trolley next to him/her (Fig. 1).

This stage of research was attended by eighteen children aged between 6 and 7 (11 girls, 7 boys), attending pre-primary groups in Šiauliai nursery-kindergarten (May, 2012).

During the research children were also shown pictures prepared using fragments of selected TV commercials (from 1 to 26) and, showing every picture, children were asked whether they had seen it previously. If children answered positively, they were asked where they saw it, if negatively, they were asked to tell the plot of the shown picture. All the children who attended the research earlier or later identified that a certain picture was from an advert.

The participants of this stage of the research were sixteen 6–7 year-old children attending pre-primary education groups of Šiauliai nursery-kindergarten (10 girls and 6 boys). Research participants were from the same pre-primary education groups as children who took part in the second stage of research; two children (a girl and a boy) did not participate in the second stage.

Demonstration and discussion of pictures were followed by additional questions to children who took part in the research: Do you watch TV? Do you watch advertisements? How do you know when, for example, they are showing a film and when, a commercial? What is a commercial? Why are they showing it? Have you ever asked to buy a certain advertised thing? These questions were given to all children who participated in this stage of research.

The research also encompassed the survey of parents raising children of this age (310 parents participated in the survey). Data of the parental survey were analysed in the aspects of manifestation of children's and parents' consumption behaviour, TV advertising as a means of disseminating consumerism, self-development of resistance to consumerism in the family and educational institution, parents' education and new knowledge for (self-)development of children's resistance to consumerism (in total 7 blocks of questions were distinguished). The localities of the research included Šiauliai city and district and cities of Panevėžys, Kelmė, Joniškis, Mažeikiai and Akmenė.

This article will present only certain data of the quantitative research. The main focus will be on the results of the qualitative research and distinguishing of pedagogical conditions.

Further we will introduce to some basic generalisations of research results.

Manifestation of Children's Consumer Culture

Children who are 6–7 years old have shopping experience. During the research it was identified that in places of trade children are most often accompanied by adults (usually the mother). Visits to supermarkets are among the most frequent ways of spending leisure. However, the problem encountered here is that the supermarket culture usurps other cultural life areas; e.g., visits to theatres, museums etc... This gap could be filled by community and educational institutions, which could offer alternative activities, involving families with children. The research identified several cases where children did the shopping on their own in a shop near to their house. In this way, independent shopping enables children to assess their ability to acquire one thing or another and teaches basic financial literacy and responsibility.

Children are characterised by consumer behaviour. This was revealed by the parents' survey results and the content of interviews with children. Children as consumers behaviour can show significance of consumption for children as well as disclose certain approaches with regard to consumerism and developed values. In this context the roles of both adults that are close to the child (parents, teachers) and other adults (neighbours, supermarket buyers, etc.) are important. Children's consumer behaviour is determined by the development of consumer culture, which can be formalized (through certain educational programs), or spontaneous, for example, through watching TV programs.

Children express possessive approaches. During the research children, recognizing fragments of TV commercials shown to them, told about their requests to buy the products seen in the adverts. Children most often indicated that they had requested the purchase of toys (the children's language is unedited): "When I saw the princess, I really wanted the one with wings and a magic wand; you press there and there's a flower on the wings. And I really wanted. I also saw these small animals, I also really wanted them" (7 year old girl) or "Well, yes, I saw Lego I was telling about, which I desperately want. I saw it for the first time and I really wanted" (6 year old boy). The parents' critical approach to consumerism and attitudes to value can reduce the child's possessive approaches; the children's possessive approaches manifest themselves less often when the children are offered diverse activities that are alternatives for buying and hoarding. The survey results of the parents showed that the more children have, the more they want. Thus, the main role in reducing the child's possessive approaches falls on the family (through changing its traditions, habits and fostering of consumption culture).



Fig. 1. The example of the unfinished thematic drawing “The child in the shop”, given to children, (on the left) and the finished drawing (on the right). Source: Prepared by the authors.

Rys. 1. Przykład niedokończonego rysunku pt. „Dziecko w sklepie” rozdane dzieciom (po lewej) i dokończony rysunek (po prawej). Źródło: Opracowanie własne autora.

It was found during the research that 6–7 year old children recognised TV adverts, distinguished themselves by more positive approaches towards TV advertising. This is so because children of this age have not yet recognised the goal of advertising. According to Berns⁶, Linn⁷, frequent TV watching can be valued as the means of promoting consumerism. However, children’s ability to recognize TV adverts can be treated as an opportunity for the self-development of resistance to consumerism. In this case resistance to consumerism and advertising can be expressed developing the correct conception of advertising and decoding promotional messages. Adverts recognised by children point out children’s preferences. Here, however, the threat to children posed by advertising is encountered, namely, the manipulation of advertising with regard to children. Advertising usually seeks commercial goals and is not concerned about values and attitudes to social roles, which it forms for children. Frequently the advertisers argue that it is not the advertising itself, but the family and educational institution, that should to teach children to correctly understand advertising. Thus, although advertising as an educational factor affects the child’s understanding about the surrounding world, the parents’ role developing a critical approach to advertising is unquestionable.

Children recognise brands. According to Kline⁸, Linn⁹, Butkus, Stravinskienė¹⁰ and others, early attachment to certain brands influences adults

⁶ R. Berns, *Vaiko socializacija*, Poligrafija ir informatika, Vilnius 2009, p. 590.

⁷ S. Linn, *Prodannoe detstvo*, Dobraâ Kniga, Moskva 2006, p. 400.

⁸ S. Kline, *Out of the Garden: Toys, TV, and Children’s Culture in the Age of Marketing*, Verso, London, New York 1993, p. 406.

⁹ S. Linn, *Prodannoe detstvo...*, op. cit.

¹⁰ P. Butkus, J. Stravinskienė, T. Stravinskas, *Prekės ženklų poveikis vaiko vartotojų elgsenai*, “Economics and Management” 2012, № 17(2), pp. 624–635.

too. Our research disclosed what aspects of brands must be present so that the child recognises them. The brand has to be established in the market, the advertised product must be intended for the family or child, it must advertise products that have been tried out or that people want to try out. Being aware of these aspects, parents can change their behaviour as consumers and also set limits for children so that attachment to brands does not trigger the emergence of possessive approaches.

The research disclosed that children had little knowledge about finances. Besides, 6–7 year old children have limited opportunities to make financial decisions. But even without money children influence parents' costs and purchasing decisions. As to the problem of self-development of resistance to consumerism, the aspect of developing financial literacy is important because the child who is able to properly use their own money is able in making certain choices to develop a sense of responsibility and independence.

Children's knowledge and experience that were disclosed during the research, including aspects of TV commercials, shopping, children's consumer behaviour, attitude to money, presupposed the possibility to cognise children's culture through the prism of consumption and consumerism. Knowledge obtained through children's cognition enabled them to distinguish the following research based educational conditions, which should be followed to facilitate the child's independence, responsibility for his/her choices and the prioritisation of spiritual values; in other words a resistance to consumerism.

Modelling of the System of Educational Conditions Based on Research Results

The system of educational conditions is modelled focusing on 6–7 year old children's self-development in the family because the research encompassed this educational environment. Analysing this issue, the authors of the research do not reject the added role of the pre-school educational institution, moreover the children's research and parent's survey results disclosed the role of educational institutions in the development of children's resistance to consumerism. For this reason, distinguishing the educational conditions for the development of their resistance to consumerism, the main educational role falls on family members and the pre-school educational institution. In addition to these segments, the role of other environmental segments, such as their peers, the media and the community, influencing the child, is also significant¹¹. The role of these microsystems is significant in analysing various issues related to children's socialisation; thus, it can also be applied to their development of resistance to consumerism. Moreo-

¹¹ U. Bronfenbrenner names the said environmental segments as microsystems of the model of human ecology – R. Berns, *Vaiko socializacija...*, op. cit.

ver that the “output” of socialisation (values, approaches, motives, self-regulation of behaviour, morality, gender roles, self-esteem) is influenced by “inputs” (enhancement, instructions, practical learning, etc.). In the case of this research it can be considered that the inputs are further distinguished by educational conditions and that the output is children’s developed resistance as a continuous process. The results of the research provided a model of the system of educational conditions which should be followed seeking to develop children’s resistance to consumerism (Fig. 2).

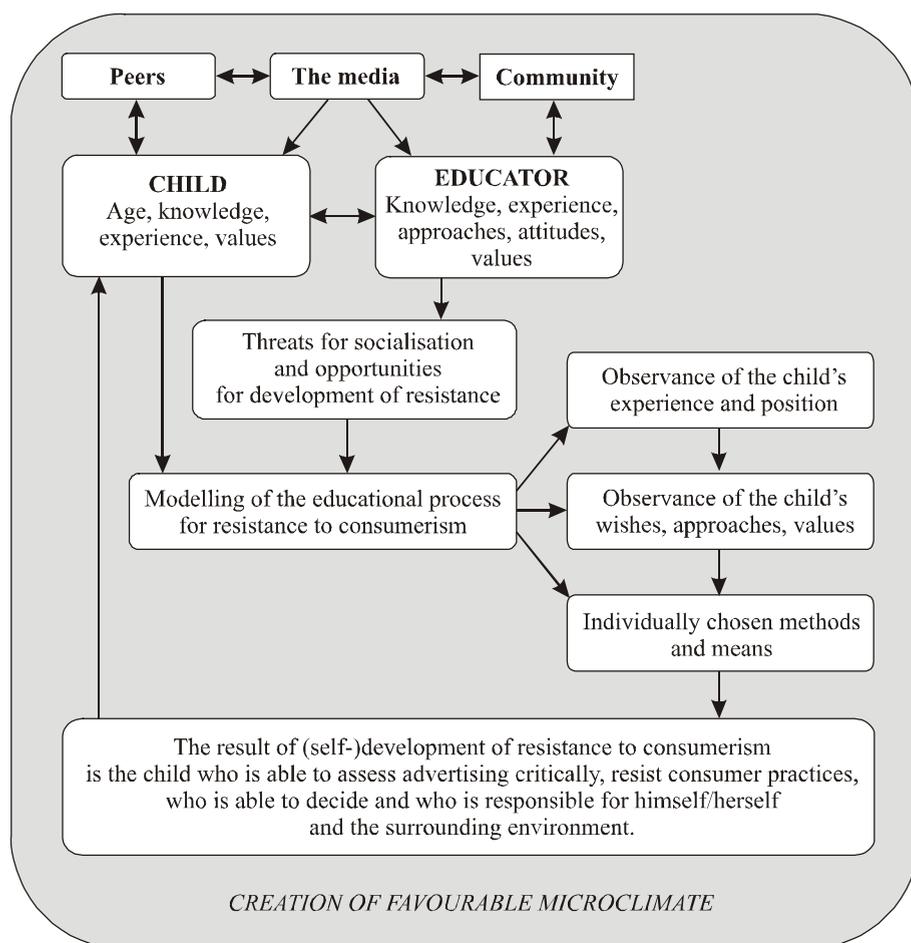


Fig. 2. The model of distinguishing structure of educational conditions. Source: R. Poneliënė, Educational Conditions For (Self-)Development of Pre-primary Age Children’s Resistance to Consumerism in the Family: Doctoral Dissertation (2014).

Rys. 2. Model struktur warunków edukacyjnych Edukacyjne warunki (samo)rozwoju sprzeciwu wobec konsumpcjonizmu w rodzinie u dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym. Źródło: R. Poneliënė (2014).

To develop children's resistance to consumerism, educators must first know the child as a consumer and creator/participant of modern consumer culture. Cognition can take place when it refuses to treat the child as an outsider of consumer culture, reproducing consumer culture created by adults. Seeking to develop children's resistance to consumerism, first we must understand what the child is like in today's consumer culture, what knowledge and experience he/she has. That experience can be disclosed through a variety of methods: the interview with the child, observation of children's play, thematic drawings, etc. Consumption of 6–7 year old children, disclosed during the research, encompasses children's shopping experience, children's consumer behaviour characteristics, approaches towards advertising, knowledge of TV advertising, brands and finance. On one hand, the possessed experience can be assessed as threat: children form material values, become victims of manipulation without realizing the goal of advertising, but on the other hand, as an opportunity: children develop the feeling of responsibility, independence and the ability to select.

The educator's role in the process of developing resistance to consumerism can be identified as another important educational condition. Parents' approaches and attitude towards consumerism and the goal of the development of resistance to consumerism, a critical attitude to consumerism and related phenomena influence children who stay together. No educational process will be effective if educators (both parents and educators) by their personal example show the opposite to that which is discussed during education, or impart contradictory approaches. The research showed the significance of the adult's personal example in the process of developing resistance to consumerism, ranging from parents' attitudes towards advertising, children's observed shopping examples to educators' emphasis on spiritual rather than material values, the promotion of a responsible, sustainable way of life and healthy lifestyle.

Modelling the educational process, it is important to distinguish potential dangers of consumerism, reasons and factors negatively influencing children's socialization. Theoretical studies revealed that TV advertising as one of the means of socialization influenced children's consumer behaviour. The media (including advertising) as a microsystem presents a stereotypical portrayal of the child in the aspects of gender and age. Another potential danger is commercialised TV advertising, usurping areas that are possibly significant for children and determined not only by material values. For the latter reason, it is important for educators to model the educational process in such a manner that stereotypes or unsuitable values promoted in the media (and sometimes in the society) do not take root in the child's subconscious. TV watching without rules and without adult supervision is to be assessed as an aspect making a negative impact on the child. As mentioned above, parents'

decision as to what children should watch on television is the most important factor ensuring the positive impact of TV on the child's development¹².

In a child-centred process of developing resistance to consumerism, cognising the child, being aware of threats and educational opportunities, educators can choose educational methods and means that are suitable for every child. It may be possible that some resistance development methods that are suitable for some children can cause a negative reaction to other children. For example, decoding of the messages of advertising, investigation together with the child can be more suitable in home conditions, when parents organise the process of developing a critical attitude to advertising at home, employing certain tools and knowledge necessary for education. The educator using analogous methods at the educational institution may encounter difficulties or controversial children's and parents' reactions if there are children in the group who do not watch TV or watch only channels and/or programmes intended for children. Advertisements shown to such children and their discussion within the limits of the child's opportunities may lead to the wish to watch advertising or to purchase the advertised product. Parents' survey also enables distinguishing other proposals as to what methods and means could be employed for distancing from advertising: involvement in joint active activities with children, the performing of relaxation exercises, active leisure, etc.; working in a group or at the pre-school educational institution, it is advisable to arrange festivals of exchanging toys, recreate toys for "new life", this way fostering children's creativity as the antithesis to consumerism.

Choosing suitable methods, it should be emphasised that the process of development of resistance to consumerism should not be focused solely on the children's group. It is also important that during the educational process suitable methods are chosen for parents as educators of the children's resistance to consumerism. The research demonstrated that information about the problem of consumerism should be provided for educators in attractive forms that are easily available anytime (web portals, magazines for children). At the pre-school institution such topics as pocket money can be actualized for parents, success stories can be created (modelled) and conversations with parents about the negative effects of excess possessiveness, emphasising parents' shopping examples as ways of (non)promotion of consumerism, etc. can be held.

Development of children's resistance to consumerism is the joint work of the family, educational institution and community. Creation of a favourable microclimate, mutual support and assistance during education are also among educational conditions which are important for development of children's resistance to consumerism. The research disclosed that children were primarily provided with knowledge about commodities and services by parents

¹² D. Boyd, H. Bee, *Augantis vaikas*, Vaistų žinios, Vilnius 2011, p. 782.

as well as other adults, peers and the media. Joint work by all participants to the micro system towards the development of resistance would contribute to the existence of a healthy and democratic society. Educational ideas of resistance to consumerism can be implemented at a wider level than the micro-level, e.g., J.D. Rumbo¹³ indicates that resistance can be expressed through boycotting certain groups of goods or brands (e.g., “Buy Nothing Day”), changing habits of consuming the media (e.g., “TV Turnoff Week”), etc.

Generalisation

The process of the development of resistance to consumerism presented in the structural model must be consistent and holistic. The originality of the structural model of educational conditions lies in the methods used to disclose the child’s experience and knowledge, when educational conditions are disclosed through investigation of children’s and parents’ experiences, perceiving children as active participants who are able to self-develop a critical attitude and be resistant to the influences of consumer culture, and the implementation of proposed measures for prevention of consumerism.

Thus, educators (parents and educators) have to treat the child as an active individual, creating new knowledge, who, based on experience existing in the society in general, is constructing his/her experience. Educators should envisage the dangers of the modern consumer culture for the child, monitor manifestation of the child’s experience, processes of consumer behaviour and act as intermediaries between the consumer world and the child’s culture, not devaluing the child’s experience and capabilities. The educator in this process could not only apply child-centred self-educational methods for self-development of resistance to consumerism but also provide educational advice to parents on the development of a critical approach to television advertising.

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¹³ J.D. Rumbo, *Consumer Resistance in a World of Advertising Clutter: The Case of Adbusters*, “Psychology and Marketing”, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2002, №19(2), pp. 127–148. Available at EBSCO Publishing. [accessed on: 21.08.2013.]

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