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Article Critique  
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***Evaluating and Selecting Online Magazines for Children***

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With the influx of electronic resources trying to “overtake” the place of print materials in library collections, I felt this article was timely. Magazines for children are not included in all school libraries. Some factors contributing to a decision include cost, durability, currency, age appropriateness, and storage concerns. E-zines, or online magazines according to this article, break down some barriers and the author presents criteria to use when considering e-zines in the school library collection.

The author cites factors that contribute to the popularity of children’s e-zines.

These are:

- Cost: reduced production cost for publisher and readers do not pay for shipping
- Accessibility: immediate and wide access / no geographical restrictions
- Timeliness: online nature helps editors and author edit and update easily / to ensure authenticity, accuracy and currency of information
- Content: hyperlinks allow broader scope and coverage / provides user control
- Interactivity and reader participation: hyperlinks, connection to authors and other readers by participating in surveys, submitting their own work, artwork, play games, and meet others online
- Modes of media presented: multimedia capacity / expands texts, tables, charts and images to include audio, animation, and video clips / allows presentation of information in the most appropriate format

Criteria to evaluate children’s e-zines were developed from recommendations from articles cited by Abdullah and Agosto along with guidelines from ALSC Children and Technology Committee (1997). I looked up the ALSC and found that it is the Association for Library

Service to Children (part of ALA) [<http://www.ala.org/ala/alsc/greatwebsites/greatwebsitesforkids/greatwebsites.htm>].

Abdullah's and Agosto's articles\* were cited but there were no links to read these items.

Lu condensed the recommendations into the following criteria for evaluating children's e-zines:

- Content: accurate, current and relevant to the purpose of the magazine, age- and developmentally appropriate, stimulating learning and imagination, unbiased
- Functionality and Stability: clearly stated purpose, minimal advertisements, easy to use, load time 10-20 seconds, appropriate language (directed at age of users), designed for accessibility when appropriate, links that are current, relevant and of high-quality
- Authorship / Sponsorship: properly identified, contact information available for comments or questions, compliance with copyright laws
- Design: attractive and conducive to reading, high quality and clear multimedia components, respect and protect child's privacy

Lu provides 7 examples of quality e-zines based on the criteria above. Ironically, several of the links in her article did not work or were not up-to-date. However, this is a common phenomenon; links and URLs move or change rapidly. With a little fishing, I was able to visit these sites and I included the current links. My comments are included for each site. I felt 6 of the 7 sites would be appropriate for an elementary school library. The last one may be more suited for high school, and one item was truly meant for parents and children (not children alone).

1. **EEK: Environmental Education for Kids** <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/caer/ce/eeek/>

My comments: the best of all these examples as far as reaching the audience intended in an *online* magazine format. Highly engaging and inviting – geared to students in grades 4 – 8 (but I think younger grades would enjoy and benefit too). Clear, consistent format on each page within site allows the user confident searching and navigation. Filled with interesting and relevant child-centered information, artwork, letters, etc. Although wildlife species focuses on Wisconsin, students everywhere will find the site valuable. Definitely a site I will bookmark in my school library's web portal. I rank this one tied for #1 as best e-zine, for elementary students and above.

2. **MidLink Magazine** <http://longwood.cs.ucf.edu/~MidLink/>

My comments: didn't feel like a magazine to me, but more of a web portal leading to other useful sites; rather linear in use. I searched around in the options available and found one very terrific link: <http://eev.liu.edu/KK/federalholidays/federalholidays/index.htm>. This link is an exemplary model of what school library media specialists could do with collaborative partnerships. A second site, of great quality was <https://project1.caryacademy.org/PortraitsofAfghanistan/04-05/PortraitsofAfghanistan/default.htm>. This site is the result of Delia DeCourcy's course requirements for her 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade language arts classes. I followed the link to her home page and added it to my bookmarks. I love the way she organized her courses, the HW, showed the student work, etc. I crawled around the Teacher Resources of MidLink and found a fabulous link for rubrics. All in all, even though the site does not work like an *online* magazine "should" (according to me), it was a very worthy site! I bookmarked several links within and also forwarded the site to fellow teacher-librarians.

3. **Parents and Children Together Online** <http://reading.indiana.edu/www/indexfr.html>

My comments: more geared to parents or other adults – does not make effective use of multimedia capabilities of the web. Linear on-line format; not interactive. Text based pages of poems or stories with a picture. Content broken up by age groups as a means to help adult using this site in selecting appropriate reading material for their child. Not very visually appealing. I am curious about using this site with a child. (*Don't have access to any child right now, but would like to try introducing this site to one in the future for my own experiment.*)

4. **Stone Soup Magazine** <http://www.stonesoup.com/index.html>

My comments: online version of the printed subscription magazine aimed at creative 8 to 13 year olds. Linear online example of current issue; not really an interactive site. Limited use of web capabilities: audio (read along with a story), email/chat. However, using the site map led me to discover an archive of pictures, stories and reviews written by children. This makes a great forum for showcasing student work. I enjoyed perusing the Holocaust stories (found through the site map, under writing). I feel without the site map, this site would have been a flop. Intended for a very specialized audience.

5. **Scholastic News** <http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/>

My comments: format is like an adult online magazine, not very impressive. Geared to adults (mostly) and students (upper el and above); users can navigate from article to features very easily, but kind of boring. Because Scholastic is a huge company, there are "commercial" links to subscribe, to order, etc. Thus, much like any other "magazine" online for adults, the user may end up shopping.

6. **Wanna Bet** <http://www.wannabet.org/>

My comments: an e-zine targeting a special age group with a special message... "This is a magazine by kids for kids, and it will focus on gambling issues for kids," says editor

Carrie Jacobson-Langseth in the first issue. The page immediately loads with pulsating music. Good use of the multimedia capabilities of the web. Designed with youth in mind: effective colors, graphics, tabs, navigation etc. I rank this as tied for #1 e-zine for Youth (upper elementary and above).

7. **WireTap** <http://www.wiretapmag.org/>

My comments: surprised this was on the list. Although “wiretap” magazine is supposed to be “*an online magazine by and for socially conscious youth*” (About Us <http://www.alternet.org/about/>), it is embedded within the definitely adult-targeted “*infomediary*” platform/blog of AlterNet. Maybe when Lu’s article was first written, this wiretap magazine was more kid-friendly. I don’t think it is meant for kids/children. I didn’t find it to meet the criteria: content and design.

Overall, I enjoyed the article, the factors to consider regarding children’s magazines for school libraries, and criteria for evaluating online magazines (aka e-zines). I spent a lot of time going through her examples to see how the criteria matched. I think these choices are good starts. The examples gave me a lot of practice looking at sites critically; something I will do as a school librarian.

\* [Abdullah, M. (1998). *Guidelines for evaluating web sites*. Bloomington, IN: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication. ED426440

Agosto, D. (2003). *Questions to ask when evaluating websites for children and young adults*. Retrieved August 20, 2003, from Drexel University web site: <http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~ntilde;dea22/print.html>].