

A review of the book *Podmiotowość dziecka i wartość dzieciństwa. Współczesna recepcja myśli Janusza Korczaka* [Child Subjectivity and the Value of Childhood. Contemporary Reception of Janusz Korczak's Thought], by Bożena Matyjas, Danuta Opozda and Katarzyna Segiet, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, Poznan 2024

The monograph *Child Subjectivity and the Value of Childhood. Contemporary Reception of Janusz Korczak's Thought*, written by Bożena Matyjas, Danuta Opozda and Katarzyna Segiet, consist of three parts and contains thirteen chapters.

Part One consists of three chapters and focuses on the theoretical aspect of child subjectivity and the process of its formation. Chapter I focuses on the subjectivity of the child in the context of upbringing. The authors discuss issues related to how the child as a person becomes the subject of upbringing, referring, among other things, to the personalist teaching of John Paul II. Inherent in the proper development of the child's subjectivity is the issue of upbringing, which is supposed to support, enhance development and awaken in the child the aspirations for agency.

Chapter II examines subjectivity in the ontogeny of the child, dividing it into two aspects: the subjective self and the object self. The authors show how the development of these two dimensions affects the formation of subjectivity, revealing its complex nature and dynamics at different stages of development from the prenatal period to late childhood.

Chapter III focuses on the child's subjectivity itself, directing attention to its practical implications in parenting. The authors give advice on how to ensure the child's experience of individuality and subjectivity through the everyday situations of nurturing, caring and raising. A very important aspect discussed in this chapter is the recall of the myths of the child and childhood, and the situation of children raised in dysfunctional environments, which act destructively on the child's sense of agency, self-esteem and, consequently, subjectivity. The authors also draw attention to the educator-child relationship, pointing out that while the relationship in relation to individuals (personal partnership) is crucial for effective upbringing, the social partnership (placing the social roles of parent/educator – son/daughter/child on an equal footing), due to the different roles played by the participants in the relationship, disturbs and distorts the educational and upbringing processes.

Part two consists of four chapters and is devoted to the influence of Janusz Korczak's thought on the contemporary understanding of the child and the concept of childhood as a fundamental value. In the fourth chapter, the authors present the conceptual findings, and emphasize that the image of the child and childhood is a social construct, changing according to time and culture. They also re-

veal how Korczak viewed the child and childhood, emphasizing their imperishable importance and dignity. The idea that *there are no children – there are people...* and that the child is not just a future adult, but a full-fledged human being with his own feelings, experiences and plans, rings out clearly. We adults, no matter what role we take on children, have to respect and treat them as partners. Korczak points out the need to treat children with respect and understanding, recognizing them as separate persons, separate individuals.

The fifth chapter concerns with the history of children's rights and the problem of failure to notice and respect children's rights. The monograph presents and systematizes the development of the establishment of children's rights, which occurred place slowly and in stages, depending on cultural and social conditions. According to M. Balcerek, the recognition of children's rights had three sources: the development of social welfare, including child care in the 18th and 19th centuries, the development of legal care for the child in the family and the establishment of the institution of the guardianship court, and the inclusion of the educational dimension in the fight against child crime. As a result, the child as a person being with special needs was recognized in the 20th century and subjected to international protection through the United Nations' 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which followed the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1923. Both acts were key to the establishment of the 1989 International Convention on the Rights of the Child, also known as the World Constitution on the Rights of the Child. Despite the guarantee of a number of children's rights, the reality is not optimistic. The publication draws attention to the deepening poverty of children and the increasing number of orphaned children in Africa and Asia, slave labor and sexual abuse of children in various parts of the world. At the same time, the authors, referring to Ulrich Beck's research, cite in the context of developed countries the concept of "super-modern childhood," which forces the modern child to permanently adapt to various adult demands. Modern children, do not have an easy life, moving in the so-called "island space of life," which consists of diverse, unconnected places, contexts, communities. In addition, children's lives depend on sundry institutions that replace traditional ties and social forms.

Chapters six and seven discuss the aspect of the educational role of the family and parental responsibility during child development. The authors analyze the changes occurring in modern families, pointing out the factors responsible for this, such as social differentiation, deinstitutionalization, cultural pluralism and structural individualism. A contemporary threat to the family is any action aimed at weakening the family, and family values commonly accepted, lowering the status of upbringing and the authority of parents. The media have an unquestionable role in these activities. The chapter asks important questions about the condition of modern families, the competence of parents and their confidence in their own parenting skills, the position of children in changing family arrangements, and the future of the family as the first educational environment for children. Referring to the concepts of T. Andrell's social constructivism, among others, the authors point out that parenting is social and a responsible process. The key here is the parent's attitude, autonomy, and awareness of duty. The conclusion concluding part two of the monograph is as follows: *if the functioning, the condition of families deteriorates, it reflects negatively on the functioning and fate of both the younger generation and society as a whole.*

The third part consists of six chapters and is devoted to the educational system of Janusz Korczak, referring to numerous practical applications and examples. Chapter eight contains a detailed description of the system, its origins and main assumptions. Janusz Korczak lived and created in the era of new education, working in parallel with such pedagogues as John Dewey, Ellen Key, Édouard

Claparède, Maria Montessori, Ovide Decroly and many others. He emphasized that the child should be treated as a subject of education, not an object to be molded according to preconceived patterns. For him, upbringing is a relationship and contract between the child and the educator, which means that both parties are active in it. The methods of upbringing should respect the needs and aspirations of the child, while encouraging the child to be responsible and work on himself. A key role was played by the principle of cooperation, co-management, and the use of community opinion in the educational process.

Chapter nine contains examples of the implementation of the assumptions of Korczak's system in various institutions, such as the Orphans' Home, the Dormitory and the "Różyczka" Colony in Gocław, showing how theory translated into practice. Detailed descriptions of educational techniques and innovations, as well as teaching aids, illustrate to the reader Korczak's ideas and provide invaluable inspiration for practitioners. The authors describe such elements of Korczak's educational system as the blackboard, the letterbox, the closet of found things, the store, the brush hanger, duty, the Welfare Committee, the newspaper, the parliament, memorial postcards, the college court, the plebiscite, betting shops, the notary, categories of cleanliness, diary writing, collecting, theater, book reading, etc.

In Janusz Korczak's system, a good teacher had to know the child, enter into a relationship with him. He was supposed to be a child's friend, a confidant of children, he was to see their needs and help satisfy them. At the same time, he could not become *an indulgent buffoon*. The teacher was subject to the same law as children and duties were equally enforced. Undoubtedly, this approach gave children a sense of real partnership, of responsibility for the fate of the community in which they were raised. The subject of the attitude and qualities of a good educator is brought closer in Chapter X. The next chapter presents other forms of support for Korczak's system of upbringing, including the "Little Review," a newspaper for children, and the Old Doctor's Radio Talks, which popularized Korczak's ideas to a wider audience.

The system created by Korczak looked at the child holistically. He realized that the family and the school are the basic communities in which children live, which is why he analyzed these environments in his publications and activities. Chapter XII is devoted to the family and school as forms that support the implementation of Korczak's system. The authors cite not only Korczak's critical remarks about upbringing in the family and school, but also extremely valuable, modern and innovative proposals for changes to be made in remodeling the system of upbringing in the first half of the 20th century.

Janusz Korczak is a well-known and respected educator who dedicated his entire life to children. Many institutions and events have his name (schools, orphanages, hospitals, the Korczak Prize, etc.). His ideas are timeless and many teachers are inspired by them in their work. The last, the 13th chapter of the monograph is a reference to the present day, giving inspiration for today's education and upbringing, referring to Korczak's Dream Schools, which under the aegis of the Korczak School operate in several Polish cities, being an original educational initiative.

The monograph is an important contribution to the understanding of the meaning of childhood and children's rights, highlighting the timeliness of Janusz Korczak's ideas in the context of contemporary social and educational challenges. Undoubtedly, this publication is an inspiration for both theoreticians and practitioners, teachers, educators, psychologists, as well as students of all majors related to work with children. I also believe that this monograph will be an invaluable help to parents in their in the process of raising children, providing inspiration and a base of up-to-date advice. The

publication, accompanied by numerous quotations from the works of Janusz Korczak, allows us to move to the world in which Korczak lived and created, and the reader, exploring the subsequent pages of the monograph, almost moves to the school corridors full of bustle and children's laughter, becoming a participant in the *school of life*, postulated and implemented by the invaluable pedagogue.

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