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## Introduction

The subject of this issue of “Elementary Education in Theory and Practice” includes the way of understanding the child in the contemporary world. Referring to the Report for UNESCO prepared by Jacques Delors (1998), in which it was indicated that the 21<sup>st</sup> century education should be based on four pillars: “learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together; learning to be”, we wish to reconsider the child and childhood, especially their “being a child” and “learning to live in the modern world”.

The research on children and childhood is carried out by many Polish and foreign scientists who analyse those issues from the historical-comparative, sociological, pedagogical and psychological perspective (inter alia Ariès 1995; Brzeziński 2002; Kehily 2008; Smolińska-Theiss 2014; Szczepka-Pustkowska 2009; Waloszek 2006). On the basis of their books we may conclude that education is the reflection of the image of child and childhood functioning in the society. So what is that image like? Are we able to overcome the tension between the child’s infantilism and independence?

Danuta Waloszek justly states that

the 21<sup>st</sup> century inherited unsolved problems of children and childhood, and, unfortunately, made those problems even more complicated”. Childhood has become sold and taken over by corporations, producers and politicians. Childhood is manipulated like never before, and it is all for publicity, money and popularity. What is the most dangerous is the attitude of many parents and pedagogues who approve of such manipulation. Many families place their children on a career path. In many kindergartens children stopped playing and learning; instead, they are entertained by actors or magicians (...). Preschools and families stopped bringing children up; instead, they started to organise the children’s future which the children do not understand” (2014: 35).

This is not the only problem of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, related to “being a child in the modern world”. We may also consider whether an adult understands a child? Do adults give the children the right to be self-reliant and independent?

Please be encouraged to read this issue of “Elementary Education in Theory and Practice” and reflect on the way of understanding the child’s right to independence and subjectivity.

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