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## Upbringing of “Difficult Children” in the Concept of Jan Kuchta

Wychowanie „dzieci trudnych” w koncepcji Jana Kuchty

### KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

Jan Kuchta, upbringing, difficult children, delinquent children, playing truant, teacher, school, family

The purpose of this article is to present the views of Jan Kuchta, a teacher of the interwar period, on the upbringing of difficult children, i. e. the ones who are defiant and play truant. The presented content is a part of the research area within the history of upbringing and historical pedeutology. The analysis and interpretation of Kuchta’s pedagogical publications was carried out with the help of historical-pedagogical research methodology. In addition to an outline of Kuchta’s scientific biography, the article presents his understanding of the concept of “difficult children”, as well as the characteristics of daring children and those who play truant. The author in question paid much attention to the analysis of the behavior of defiant children, creating on its basis suggestions for educational interventions at school. In the case of children who play truant, on the other hand, it was important for Kuchta to learn about the causes of such behaviour. Only on this basis did he propose specific educational measures the effectiveness of which was to be determined primarily by the subjective treatment of children by educators and teachers and the creation of a friendly educational atmosphere. The postulated end result of the upbringing of difficult children was to bring them back to life in society and prepare them to be guided in their behavior by general human, national, state and religious values.

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**SŁOWA KLUCZE**    **ABSTRAKT**

Jan Kuchta,  
wychowanie,  
dzieci trudne,  
dzieci zuchwałe,  
dziecko włóczęga,  
nauczyciel, szkoła,  
rodzina

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie poglądów Jana Kuchty – pedagoga okresu międzywojennego – na temat wychowania dzieci trudnych: zuchwałych i włóczęgów. Zaprezentowane treści wpisują się w obszar badawczy historii wychowania, a także pedeutologii historycznej. Przeprowadzona analiza i interpretacja publikacji pedagogicznych Kuchty została przeprowadzona z pomocą metodologii badań historyczno-pedagogicznych. W artykule oprócz zarysu biografii naukowej Kuchty zaprezentowano sposób rozumienia przez niego pojęcia dzieci trudnych, a także charakterystykę dzieci zuchwałych oraz dzieci włóczęgów. Opisywany autor dużą wagę przywiązywał do analizy zachowań dzieci zuchwałych, tworząc na jej podstawie propozycje oddziaływań wychowawczych na terenie szkoły. Z kolei w przypadku dzieci włóczęgów istotne dla Kuchty było poznanie przyczyn włóczęgostwa. Dopiero na tej podstawie proponował określone działania o charakterze wychowawczym, o których skuteczności miało decydować przede wszystkim podmiotowe traktowanie dzieci przez wychowawców i nauczycieli oraz tworzenie życzliwej atmosfery wychowawczej. Postulowanym efektem końcowym wychowywania dzieci trudnych miało być przywrócenie ich do życia w społeczeństwie oraz przygotowanie do kierowania się w postępowaniu wartościami ogólnoludzkimi, narodowymi, państwowymi i religijnymi.

## Introduction

Systematic scientific reflection on childhood dates back to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was at this time that the results of research in the field of developmental psychology began to appear in increasing numbers, in which the qualitative differences between the mental structure of the child and that of the adult became apparent. At the same time, specific phases of childhood began to be distinguished, and developmental specificities were attributed to these phases, which corresponded to the years of life of the child (Smolińska-Theiss, 2003, p. 868).

In the educational sciences, a special role in emphasising the primacy of the child in social and family life was played by the movement called “new education” by educational historians, which developed in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its representatives discovered the resources and possibilities of the child, postulating the need to take into account in pedagogical activities the respect for the child’s autonomy, individuality and interests (Wołoszyn, 1998, p. 39). As Barbara Smolińska-Theiss emphasises, activists of the new education movement

[...]did much to make the adult world see the child, respect the child and accept the child with all the child's strengths and weaknesses. The child was to gain dignity, respect and rights. Placed at the centre of family and social life, the child was not only to illuminate everyday life, but to offer hope for building a better world through and around the child (Smolińska-Theiss, 2010, p. 17).

At the same time, it is worth noting that the representatives of this trend were mainly interested in the tools of cognition of the child and his/her physical, psychological, social and moral development, relegating to the background the real problems of children related to poverty, hunger, disease, homelessness, war orphanhood, or lack of access to school (Smolińska-Theiss & Theiss, 2003, pp. 87–89).

Polish pedagogues presented ideas related to the new upbringing in numerous scientific publications. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, two types of studies could be distinguished in the pedagogical literature dealing with the subject of childhood. The first addressed issues relating to children experiencing educational difficulties. The second group of publications, in turn, dealt with the developmental possibilities of the child (Kabzińska, 2002, p. 24). This trend also continued in books published in Poland after the First World War. What was emphasised in them was that upbringing should be based on a thorough knowledge of the child's character traits and abilities, and that it should create developmental conditions conducive to the formation of creative minds and characters (Wnęk, 2012, pp. 359–360).

In the interwar period, the content aimed at discovering the subjectivity of the child was aimed, first and foremost, at general and secondary school teachers, so it was promoted during various courses for teachers. These contents were also promoted by teachers' trade unions, institutes of ZNP (Polish abbreviation for the Association of Polish Teachers), university teachers, and social activists (Smolińska-Theiss, 2012, p. 12).

In addition, pedagogical research on the child and childhood was conducted in many academic centres. According to Jan Wnęk (2012), the most vibrant centres in this regard were Warsaw, Kraków and Poznań. For a certain period of time, Jan Kuchta collaborated with both the Warsaw and Kraków academic communities.

## Jan Kuchta (1900–?)

Jan Andrzej Kuchta was born in 1900. His childhood and early youth were connected with Lviv, where, in 1918, he graduated from the Długosz Secondary School and entered the Faculty of Theology at the Jan Kazimierz University (Polish abbreviation: UJK). After two years, in 1920, he moved to the University of Vienna, only to return to his hometown a year later to complete his studies at the Faculty of

Philosophy of the UJK in 1925. While still a student, he took up a job as a teacher of Polish language, history and the propaedeutics of philosophy at the Ruthenian grammar school in Przemyśl. In 1926 he began working in Lviv as a lecturer at the State Teachers' Courses and as a clerk at the Educational Centre Board of Trustees. In the same year, he took up ethnographic studies, which he crowned with obtaining a doctor's degree at the Jagiellonian University in 1929.

In the early 1930s, Kuchta settled in Warsaw, where he was an instructor of secondary education at the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment, as well as gave lectures on psychology at the Central Institute of Physical Education. Shortly before the outbreak of World War II, he returned to Lviv, where he became director of the Central Pedagogical Library. At that time, he edited two publishing series: the Lviv Pedagogical Library and the Lyceum Philosophical Library (Winclawski, 2004). His wartime and post-war fate is not precisely known. Stefan I. Możdżeń (2001) claims that Kuchta was killed after being deported from Lviv by the NKWD. Włodzimierz Winclawski, in turn, writes (2004) that, after 1944, Kuchta settled in Lublin where, in the spring of 1949, he delivered a lecture on "New directions of psychology and upbringing" in a hall of the Scientific Society of the Catholic University of Lublin.

In his scientific works Kuchta addressed issues relating to pedagogy, psychology, sociology, as well as ethnography (Wnęk, 2011). Ludwik Chmaj (1963), Stefan Możdżeń (2001) and Janina Kostkiewicz (2013) classify Kuchta as a representative of religious pedagogy. A special place among his scientific interests was occupied by children who were difficult to teach.

## Understanding the Term "Difficult Children" and its Presence in the Pedagogical Literature of the Interwar Period

Wincenty Okoń believes that a difficult child "is a child who has difficulties in adapting to the demands of parents, teachers and caregivers" (2007, p. 92). Piotr Kowolik, in turn, defines this term as "a child with whom parents, tutors, teachers and peers are unable to cope in everyday interactions. Such a child faces excessive difficulties in adapting to the demands placed on him or her by parents and caregivers" (2013, p. 94).

Jan Kuchta's understanding of the "difficult child" differs slightly from the definitions quoted above. Kuchta characterises the difficult child in the context of his formulated educational goal, which is to bring difficult children back into social life. Following this line, he states (in accordance with the idea of Zygmunt Mysłakowski)

that a child difficult to bring up “has the basic attitude towards the external world as towards something hostile; something that needs to be feared and defended against” (Kuchta, 1936b, p. 9). According to Kuchta, the behaviour of a difficult child consists of protest and often unconscious internal rebellion, which is directed against social norms, customs, law, and upbringing. Children who are bold, naughty, lazy, fearful, unapproachable, tramps and runaways to be difficult (1936b, pp. 8–9).

The subject of difficult children began to appear in pedagogical literature at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The addressees of the works published during this period were most often parents experiencing educational difficulties. The situation changed in the 1930s. At that time, books and scientific journals began to be dominated by content addressed to teachers and educators, aimed at providing help and support to school children behaving in a socially unacceptable manner (Kabzińska, 2002, p. 46; Wnęk, 2012, p. 72). Among those who took up the subject of raising difficult children, the following authors are worth mentioning: Władysław Sterling (1903), Maria Librachowa (1922), Franciszek Śniehota (1931), Leopold Blaustein (1936), Franciszek Baumgarten (1937), and Aleksander Kulczycki (1937).

In his publications related to difficulties in upbringing, Jan Kuchta provided an outline of the views of selected psychoanalysts on the upbringing of difficult children (Kuchta, 1937) and presented in detail the concepts of upbringing of defiant children (Kuchta, 1936a) and children who behave like tramps (Kuchta, 1929, 1930, 1933, 1936b), which will be presented in this article.

## The Defiant Child in the Concept of Jan Kuchta

Kuchta characterises the defiant child in the role of a pupil. In his opinion, “a defiant student is one who behaves too boldly, sometimes even impolitely and provocatively, as if he/she wanted to consciously show their independence (in views and actions), lack of respect, or even disregard for the teachers’ authority” (Kuchta, 1936b, p. 10). In addition, following Alfred Adler, Kuchta emphasises that a defiant pupil is “unprepared for the social task of school”, unable to submit to its demands, to co-exist with others, and to feel pleasure from being at school. This is also a child who does not try to overcome school difficulties (Kuchta, 1936b, p. 30).

According to Kuchta, the typical protest and inner rebellion of a defiant pupil against the school-educational system manifests itself in specific behaviours:

1. A kind of bravery associated with being too bold, insulting others and showing disrespect to teachers according to the principle: “no one dared to do what I did”.

2. Excessive demonstrativeness, involving the display of resistance, disobedience and stubbornness in an open manner.
3. Striving to satisfy the instinct for power (a term characteristic of Adler's concept of personality, according to which the driving force behind human actions is the desire for superiority), by emphasizing one's self, exalting oneself, striving to win with others.
4. Disregarding and questioning the authority of teachers and school leadership; not showing them respect, and disagreeing with their views, recommendations and guidance.
5. Antisocial behaviour.
6. Disregarding the consequences of one's own behaviour: punishment, loss of life, etc.
7. Unconsidered drive actions, taken "blindly", without thought or more consideration (Kuchta, 1936b, pp. 18–27).

The above behaviour is evidence that the defiant child has a "fictional life plan" created in his/her subconscious. At the basis of this plan is the feeling of one's own inadequacy, resulting in the need to appear important in the school environment (Kuchta, 1936b, pp. 28–29).

Hence, in dealing with a defiant pupil, the main task for the teacher is to discover the fictional plan possessed by the child, and then to make changes in the pupil's character and to bring him/her back to participate in social life. In order to achieve this, individualised upbringing measures adapted to the different types of defiant pupils must be taken (Kuchta, 1936b, pp. 29, 31–68).

The first type distinguished by Kuchta is the "desperate insolents". The author sees them as resigned, desperate, risk-taking, delusional, or rebellious pupils. The insolence of this type of pupil is based on a desire to get one's own way at all costs. It is difficult to discover the source of their hostile aggression; usually, in this case, the insolence is a kind of retribution for humiliations suffered in the past, most often at home. In dealing with "desperate insolents", Kuchta recommended that teachers transfer the pupil to another department or even another school where the so-called therapeutic-pedagogical method should begin. This was to consist primarily of correcting the fictional plan, as well as restoring self-confidence and self-esteem in the child.

Another distinguished type is the "overconfident insolents". Kuchta includes proud, lazy, conceited, arrogant, and ambitious pupils into this group. The author emphasises that the development of this type of behaviour is influenced not only by genetic factors, but also by the upbringing environment in which the child grows up, and by his/her financial situation. The audacious behaviour of overconfident pupils should undergo sublimation consisting in the transformation, under the influence of upbringing, of drive energies into lofty ideas and higher values. The result of these

upbringing measures was to shape "courageous fighters for great causes" (Kuchta, 1936b, p. 51).

Jan Kuchta also distinguishes a type of "maturing insolent" whose defiance is related to adolescence and has its source mainly in the formation of one's "self". This type of insolence needs to be directed by educators and teachers in such a way that the educational interventions they undertake ennoble what is primitive.

Another type of abusive pupil is the "apparent insolent" who is considered to be a child who feels wronged by a teacher. This type of pupil has the courage to make his or her case to the teacher, and is able to tell the truth regardless of the consequences. In this case, the reason for wrong treatment of pupils is the bad educational atmosphere of the school and the teacher's belief that they are right irrespective of the circumstances.

According to the author in question, the greatest danger from a defiant pupil is the constant and consistent violation of class discipline. Therefore, it is the duty of the educator to tame the insolence. Kuchta emphasises that teachers should not focus in their work on suppressing its external signs and applying absolute strictness, training or extermination of the child's bravery, because then they do not address the internal causes of bad behaviour. The most desirable thing to do in terms of education is to try to understand the child's insolence, and to find out the causes of his/her undesirable behaviour/the type of insolence present, and only then to apply educational measures that will effectively contribute to the spiritual rebirth of the pupils, orienting them towards general human values.

Kuchta is aware of the fact that this requires long, arduous and patient educational work aimed at transforming defiance into courage, a desire for the common good, bravery and readiness to act, and thus becoming, as he puts it, "a hero of the nation, the state, the Church" (Kuchta, 1936b, p. 70). Also, an indispensable condition for the attainment of the intended educational goals is the personality of the teacher and the educational atmosphere of the class and the school, which does not awaken in the pupils a sense of low value.

## The Child Tramp in the Concept of Jan Kuchta

Referring to a number of researchers, Kuchta believes that a child who behaves like a tramp has a permanent psychological predisposition to wander. He adds that frequent running away from home and staying away from home for the most part are characteristic of child tramps (Kuchta, 1936a, p. 4). He distinguishes two basic types of vagabond children: pathological and normal ones. The pathological types include

children who periodically feel a sudden, irresistible compulsion to wander, against the environment and also against themselves (Kuchta 1936a, pp. 15, 18–28).

On the other hand, when writing about normal children with tramp tendencies, Kuchta emphasises that these tendencies change depending on the developmental period, environmental factors and also genetic conditions (1936a, p. 28). He points out that tendencies to wander very rarely appear before the age of 7. If they do occur during this period, however, they are most often associated with playing traveller, wanderer or sailor; with fairy tales read and told to children; and with drawing and creating small ships, boats or cars out of various materials.

Between the ages of 7 and 10, childish games are replaced by the desire to learn about the real world. The child becomes interested in do-it-yourself activities and collects various things, and, instead of legends and fairy tales, he/she prefers adventure and travel stories, which open the gates to the world of adventure and travel ever wider. Nature trips with peers become a reality for children aged 9–11. During these, they play and learn about animal life in natural settings, e. g. in forests and meadows. From the age of 12, however, there is a tendency towards “fantasy rambles”, which are expeditions where children model themselves on characters from books they have read, playing at setting up camps or tracking down “enemies”.

Between the ages of 12 and 14, “fantasy rambles” increasingly intensify the desire to actually experience the adventures of book or film characters. Moreover, during this period, “the love of home begins [...] to fight often very strongly against the desire to escape from it” (Kuchta, 1936a, p. 36). The tramp instinct shows its greatest intensity between the ages of 14 and 18, becoming, at that time, an expression of self-reflection and a kind of protest against the soulless order of the world.

The author considers social factors inherent in the family environment to be a very important cause of behaviour of normal tramp children, especially from an educational point of view. Taking these into account, he distinguishes four categories of child tramps:

1. Children whose parents have found themselves in poverty through no fault of their own, most often as a result of unemployment.
2. Abandoned and orphaned children, condemned to wander from home to home, suffering from hunger and cold, homeless, deprived of education.
3. Children with parents who are not fulfilling their parental responsibilities. Such parents cause brawls, abuse alcohol and lead a life of crime. Forced to run away from their parents, the children don't turn up at home for weeks at a time, sleeping in attics or under the open sky.
4. Children fleeing their homes from being beaten and starved (Kuchta, 1936a, pp. 42–49).



Learning about the causes of escaping from home and wandering should become an important impetus for educational interventions. However, Kuchta explicitly warns that the strength of the tramp instinct can, and in all probability will, render these efforts ineffective. Taking this into account, he recommends that, at the first stage of educational interventions, one should not “roughly and brutally” forbid the tramp child to follow his/her drive. As he believes, “it is better for him/her to go into the world at the will and knowledge of the teacher than secretly” (Kuchta, 1936a, p. 51).

An important educational postulate in the effort to control the tramp instinct is the kindly attitude of the teacher towards the returning child. The attitude of the teacher towards him/her must not be indifferent or characterised by harshness. If this condition is not met, the child will either engage in open warfare with the educator, becoming insolent and wayward, or he/she will show apparent obedience, thus becoming a type of careerist, trying to please the teacher. A third possibility of behaviour will be to combine both ways of behaving by adopting the “mask” that he/she needs at the moment (Kuchta, 1933, pp. 108–110).

In addition to this, the attitude towards the child tramp should also be characterised by the so-called “vital sympathy”, meaning “the ability of the teacher to sympathise with what is going on in the soul of the pupil” (Kuchta, 1933, p. 118). The teacher should be like a parent to the pupil. For this to be possible, the teacher must love the child and be able to make him or her feel this; to accept, as it were, his or her weaknesses and awkwardness, and treat his or her experiences almost as if they were his or her own.

Kuchta is convinced that the effect of showing “vital sympathy” will be that the child will like the teacher and look to him or her as a “mirror of the child’s self-esteem”. Thus, the teacher who sympathises with the child is supposed to compensate for the low sense of value in the pupil and thus prevent wandering which is a manifestation of the child’s antisocial compensatory activities (Kuchta, 1929, 1930, 1933, pp. 119–120).

Associated with “vital sympathy” is the so-called “transition period principle”, which consists in the exceptional treatment of the child during the initial period of upbringing. Kuchta notes that the non-socialised child tramp has deficiencies in intellectual, emotional and moral development. Therefore, in order for the child to establish contact with society, forbearance and kindness are needed on the part of the educator. Also important is the teacher’s ability to accept certain difficulties and to emphasise the good qualities in the child (Kuchta, 1933, pp. 120–121).

It is also extremely important to find a social outlet for the tramp instinct by organising excursions to replace escapes. This is important because, during field trips, the teacher has the opportunity to arouse the child’s interest in the surrounding world, changing “the tramp, rushing aimlessly ahead, into an eager learner”

(Kuchta, 1933, p. 148). Important methods for mastering the tramp instinct are also games, talks, appropriately selected readings and, interestingly, the creation of so-called associations of tramp children. Such associations may aim, e. g. at going around the villages and towns to do some work (e. g. take dairy products from farmers and deliver them to food processing plants).

Kuchta's valuable educational initiative is also the professional orientation of child tramps in such a way as to enable them to creatively use their vagabond instincts in the future. He believed that they were predestined to become railwaymen, tourist guides, messengers, itinerant bribers or distributors. Kuchta reserves a special professional role for those children tramps who, in the process of upbringing, have been imparted with all-human, state, national and religious values and, through this, a love of the homeland and humanity. His recommendation was to sublimate their vagabond instinct in such a way that, in the future, they would become brave sailors serving their homeland, learned travellers, patriot pilots, explorers, "wandering apostles of ideas", and missionaries (Kuchta 1936a, pp. 49–55).

If all the suggestions for educational interventions fail, a psychiatrist should be asked to make a diagnosis that identifies the pathological causes of behaving like a tramp, which, if the instinct persists, are the most likely cause of escapes from home (Kuchta, 1936a, p. 52).

## Summary

Jan Kuchta attached great importance to the diagnosis of difficult children and to the analysis of their behaviour, on the basis of which he investigated the causes of their educational and school difficulties. This allowed him, with the help of foreign-language literature, to distinguish the types of bold children and children tramps, and then to propose educational measures aimed at achieving the educational goal of full participation of difficult children in social life.

In the case of defiant pupils, he did not give simple prescriptions on how to achieve this goal. It is hard not to get the impression that the educational methods he put forward were general recommendations. The situation is different with children who wander like tramps. In their case, he suggested a number of educational methods, ranging from talks, assigning specific tasks to be carried out, organising excursions, to professional counselling and creating "associations" of child vagabonds.

In Kuchta's educational concept, the influences of the new upbringing are visible. In his suggested educational influences, he is far from an authoritarian style of upbringing, the use of coercion and strict discipline. Instead, he emphasises understanding the child and sympathising with him/her. In doing so, Kuchta emphasises that

children's outwardly visible behaviour is only a manifestation of more serious problems experienced by the child. Without getting to the root of children's misbehaviour, it will not be possible to help the child, but only to mute, probably for a short time, what is wrong in his or her behaviour. Like the representatives of the new upbringing, when looking for the causes of difficult behaviour among children, he looked first at biological and psychological factors. However, he did not overlook environmental factors and their impact on children's functioning.

Kuchta recognised the problem of difficult children both at school and in the family. His proposals for educational interventions should be regarded as valuable and necessary. However, in the school reality of the inter-war period, which was dominated by issues related to literacy or the enforcement of compulsory education, teachers often lacked the tools, opportunities, time and sometimes also the knowledge to search for the causes of children's didactic and educational difficulties, and consequently to help them. In families, on the other hand, upbringing was often hampered by poverty and unemployment, the main reasons for leaving children to fend for themselves.

In Kuchta's upbringing concept, it is worth noting references to mechanisms of compensation and sublimation, which are characteristic of psychoanalytic theory. He was convinced that, in the process of upbringing, children should be helped to overcome low self-esteem and supported in overcoming antisocial and aggressive behaviour. This was to be done by creating an emotional bond with the child and empathy.

It is also worth emphasising the relevance of Kuchta's upbringing guidelines, especially those relating to the subjective treatment of a difficult child. The author draws attention to the significant role of the teacher who is supposed to support children in strengthening their self-confidence and their own capabilities. The teacher should also accept them, respect their autonomy and educate them to consciously choose higher values and be guided by them in everyday life.

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