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Introduction

Wprowadzenie

We are delighted to present a special issue of the journal, following the 5th National Scientific Conference: “From Korczak to Kulmowa: The Child and the Language of Early Education,” held by the Department of Early Education at the University of Szczecin on March 23–24, 2023.

The conference commemorated the ninety-fifth anniversary of the birth of poet Joanna Kulmowa, known for her plays about Korczak, and the centenary of the publication of Janusz Korczak’s dylogies (*King Matt the First* and *King Matt on a Desert Island*). The selection of Korczak and Kulmowa, renowned for their mastery of language and pedagogical dialogue, was deliberate. Janusz Korczak, an advocate for children’s rights, revolutionized children’s literature with a new language, while Joanna Kulmowa elevated educational discourse to a literary level. Both challenged the traditional communication hierarchy between child and adult, empowering the child and their language in the spiritual transformation of humanity.

The pedagogical legacy of Korczak and Kulmowa, their dedication to understanding and shaping children, and their artistic prowess of the Polish language, revered as a pinnacle of linguistic excellence today, demand recognition and study. Recognizing the significance of language in early education prompts reflection on its primacy in understanding the world. This resonates with the concept of the “linguistic picture of the world,” as described by eminent linguist and ethnologist Jerzy Bartmiński as “a linguistically contained, variably verbalized interpretation of reality that can be captured through a series of judgments about the world” (2006, p.12).

Leibniz (1955, p. 104) famously likened language to the best mirror of the human mind. Building upon Leibniz's metaphor, Ernst Cassirer developed the concept of a child's linguistic symbolic consciousness, wherein play and language "are inherently and meaningfully intertwined" (1995, p. 106). As proposed by the author of "Essay on Man" (1977), child anthropomorphism becomes linguistic anthropomorphism. Thus, in a child's development, language not only mirrors what adults convey about and to them but also enables the child to construct, play with, and manipulate their own utterances. Through joyful songs, rhymes, and stories, children break down linguistic material and fashion their unique constructions. Language serves as the scaffold for them to construct and organize their understanding of the world, shaping their identity within it.

This issue explores both facets of early education language. Articles dedicated to Korczak's pedagogical narratives serve as a reminder that language acts as a mirror through which the child perceives themselves. Meanwhile, essays focusing on the role of poetry in early childhood education highlight that language can be both a material for play and an inspiration, fostering wonder and creativity. Additionally, the *Varia* section offers reflections on the role of language in understanding the mathematical world and constructing knowledge about it.

Philosophical and pedagogical metaphors are deeply embedded in the linguistic picture of the child's world. According to Gadamer, language is the true locus of being, much like education is an ongoing process of self-discovery. "In words we are at home. In words there is a kind of guarantee for what they say. These things are especially clear in the poetic use of language," wrote Gadamer (2003, p. 24). Poetic language, with its non-literal and metaphorical essence, prompts readers to engage in critical thinking, sparks wonder, and unveils new realms of meaning. As Joanna Kulmowa humorously asks in her poem "Depth" (1978):

Must our thoughts be so unclear,
 So self-embracing, they disappear,
 When wrapped in other thoughts' embrace,
 Tangling and twisting in a wild chase?

Do they meander and entwine,
 So they're difficult to define?
 Cloaked in metaphors grand and dense,
 So they seem lofty, yet make no sense?

But once revealed and clarified,
 Do these deep thoughts now fade and die?

Veiled in myriad meanings, do they express,
A boundless
NOTHING
in their excess?

We hope you find these articles engaging and insightful.

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