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Determinants of an Old Text in the Field of Pedagogy on the Example of *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect] by Janusz Korczak

Abstract

The scientific aim of the article is to present the characteristics of an old text: *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect] by Janusz Korczak. The method adopted for the article is a semantic and structural analysis of the pedagogical book, in which the educator presented issues regarding key concepts of pedagogy, such as education, upbringing, and care. The pedagogy book under analysis does not fit into the contemporary framework of scientific language, but it still brings up-to-date findings on pedagogical practice. Janusz Korczak's pedagogical texts should be obligatorily included in the reading canon of theoreticians and practitioners of education.

Keywords: Janusz Korczak, concept, pedagogical term, education, history of education, scientific language, child's rights

Introduction

Janusz Korczak, as Barbara Smolińska-Theiss (2014, pp. 67–70) wrote, was not permanently affiliated with any university pedagogy department,

but was among the practitioners in the broader social and academic movement. He entered the field of pedagogy as a doctor, a member of the Warsaw Hygiene Society. Korczak's educational activity was done at summer camps – which he attended with Warsaw children – in a boarding school for Polish boys in Kiev during World War I, at the Jewish Orphans' Home (*Dom Sierot*) in Warsaw – where he was the head from 1912 to 1942 – and at Our Home (*Nasz Dom*), the Warsaw orphanage for Polish children. The main themes of Korczak's pedagogical books are a system for raising orphaned children and the issues of bringing up a child in a family. Smolińska-Theiss (2014, p. 68), in her pedagogical monograph devoted to "the Old Doctor," emphasized that while most of the achievements of interwar educators have been lost, the texts Korczak published are read and interpreted anew, both in the country and abroad. The canon of his pedagogical works includes *Jak kochać dziecko* [How to love a child], *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect], *Momenty wychowawcze* [Educational moments], *Prawidła życia* [Rules of life], *Pedagogika żartobliwa* [Playful pedagogy], and numerous articles which were part of pedagogical journalism.

The subject of the conceptual analysis is the book entitled *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect], which was published in 1929 in Warsaw by the J. Mortkowicz Publishing Association. It is a small book consisting of five unnumbered parts:

- Lekceważenie – Nieufność [Disdain – Mistrust]¹ pp. 5–14
- Niechęć [Reluctance] pp. 15–24
- Prawo do szacunku [The Right to Respect] pp. 25–31
- Prawo dziecka, by było, czym jest [A Child's Right to be What They Are] pp. 33–40
- pp. 41–43 (the fifth and final part is untitled)

¹ For the most part, the English translation by Sean Gasper Bye was used (Korczak, 2017). The text can be found here:

http://brpd.gov.pl/sites/default/files/a_childs_right_to_respect_-_book.pdf.

In the introduction to *Pedagogika żartobliwa* [Playful pedagogy] from 1939, the eminent educator wrote that the content of the book was presented in the form of a lecture: "Summarizing the series of lectures in a short brochure, I gave it the heading, "The Child's Right to Respect." The keynote was "a child is equally valuable to us" (Korczak, 1939, p. 5; cf. Korczak, 1993, p. 507). During the author's lifetime, this text was published only once, then it was reprinted many times (e.g., in 1993 and 2012).

The Aim of the Research and the Methodology Adopted in the Work

The scientific aim of the article is to characterize the old scholarly book. I use the term "old" for monographs and articles published before World War II that present research within various scientific disciplines.

The method adopted for the article is semantic and structural analysis of the pedagogical text, in which the educator presented issues related to key concepts of pedagogy, such as education, upbringing, and care.

***Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect] as an Old Text in the Field of Pedagogy**

According to the findings of numerous researchers dealing with the characteristics of scientific texts (e.g., Klemensiewicz, 1956; Gajda, 1990, 2001; Furdal, 2000; Wilkoń, 2000; Rejter, 2018), textual statements representing scientific language are characterized by particular content, resulting from their belonging to different scientific fields and reflected in the text being saturated with concepts and terms characteristic of a given scientific discipline. The fact that *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect] is a work in the field of pedagogy is proven by the vocabulary representing the concepts characteristic of the field, among other things.

Table 1. Pedagogical Concepts and the Vocabulary That Represents Them

Concept	Lexical Representations (selection) ²
Upbringing	dziecko [child] p. 5 ff.; prawa dziecka [a child's rights]; dorosły [adult] p. 5 ff.; pedagogia [pedology ³] p. 37; rodzina [family] pp. 9, 15, 26; rodzice [parents] pp. 17, 26; ojciec [father] pp. 10, 42; matka [mother] pp. 17, 42; autorytet rodziny [authority of the family] p. 9; wychowawca [educator] pp. 17, 19, 33, 36, 39, 41; wychowawcy: rzadziej doradca i pocieszyciel, częściej surowy sędzia [educators: advisors and comforters are rare, while strict judges are common] p. 18; pochyła upadku wychowawcy [decline of an educator] p. 18; sąd dla nieletnich [juvenile court] p. 29; zakład poprawczy [correctional facility] p. 40
Education	dziecko [child] p. 5 ff.; prawa dziecka [a child's rights]; dorosły [adult] p. 5 ff.; autorytet szkoły [authority of the school] p. 26; wychowawca [educator] pp. 17, 19, 33, 36, 39, 41; pedagogia [pedology ⁴] p. 37; powszechne nauczanie [universal education] p. 26; registracja i pobór szkolny [school registration and intake] p. 26; przymus pracy umysłowej [compulsion of intellectual work] p. 26; przymus powszechnego nauczania [constraints of universal education] p. 27; szkoła [school] pp. 17, 26, 27; nauczyciel [teacher] p. 20; wychowawca klasy [class tutor] p. 19; urzędnicy szkoły [school officials] p. 27; program szkół [school curriculum] p. 37; lata mozolnej nauki [years of hard learning] p. 7; egzamin [exams] p. 7; kształcić [educate] p. 8; szkolna wymówka [ploy to get out of school] p. 30; szkolna godzina [school hours] p. 35
Care	dziecko [child] p. 5 ff.; prawa dziecka [a child's rights]; dorosły [adult] p. 5 ff.; pedagogia [pedology] p. 37; nieuczciwy opiekun [dishonest caregivers] p. 26; prawy opiekun [virtuous caretaker] p. 17; rodzina [family] pp. 9, 15, 26; rodzice [parents] pp. 17, 26; ojciec [father] pp. 10, 42; matka [mother] pp. 17, 42; wychowawca [educator] pp. 17, 19, 33, 36, 39, 41; piastunka [nurse] p. 16; piastować [to nurse] p. 8; osłaniać [to protect] p. 8; żywić [to feed] p. 8; pilnować [to keep an eye on] p. 12; opieka szkoły [school care] p. 26; internat [boarding school] p. 37; wychowawca internatu [boarding school teacher] p. 19

Another determinant of the genre of a scientific text is avoiding first-person narrative. Nowadays, science recommends avoiding the singular forms of pronouns and verbs in monographs and articles due to the prevailing postulate that the objectivity of scientific communication is manifested in the impersonality of messages of this type. Old scientific texts often did not have this feature. In *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's

² The quoted terms come from the 1929 edition of the book *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect].

³ Pedology was a science developing in the first quarter of the 20th century, which dealt with the physical and mental development of children and adolescents, understood mainly as a process conditioned by biological and environmental factors. The root of the word, *pedo-*, indicates its semantic relationship with a child, descendant, or offspring and is derived from the Greek language (*país, paidós*: child) (Bańko, 2005).

Right to Respect], Korczak directly revealed his presence in the text several times, through pronoun and verb forms in the first-person singular. In the following passage, in an elliptical and then a personal form, he describes his efforts to understand one of the issues related to raising a child:

Years of work have made it ever more clear that children deserve respect, trust, and kindness; that they prosper in a sunny atmosphere of gentle feelings, cheerful laughter, lively first efforts, and surprises; of pure, bright, loving joy; where work is dynamic, fruitful, and beautiful. One thing has caused doubt and concern. Why, at times, does the most certain child disappoint? ... I have stubbornly kept seeking and, little by little, have found an answer. ... I found an explanation for this ... My observation is specific – clinical. (Korczak, 2017, pp. 23–25)

The author also revealed his presence directly in beautiful reflections on time:

When I play with or talk to children, two moments from my life and theirs intertwine, equally mature; when I am with a group of children, I always take time to say hello and goodbye to one of them with a look and a smile. When I am angry, we are once again joined together – but my anger, a single vengeful moment, violates and poisons this mature, important time of their lives. (Korczak, 2017, pp. 34)

The author reveals himself once again in the passage in which he describes how to work with difficult youth (“with the offspring of drunkenness, rape, and madness, with the despairing, rebellious” [pp. 38–39]):

I am reaching for the highest level of initiation, the most challenging revelation. The only thing transgressions and offenses call for is patient, kind understanding; wrongdoers require love. Their angry rebelliousness is justified. We must spurn

easy virtue and take the side of the lonely, maligned offense.
(Korczak, 1929, p. 39)

This direct way of revealing the subject of the utterance through the form of the first-person singular “I” is rare in this text, while the verb forms used in the first-person plural “we” and the second-person plural form “our” appear over 150 times, used to build an understanding with the readers. This linguistic procedure equates the author with the adult recipient to whom he addresses his message, thus slightly softening the tone of his harsh statements (e.g., “We command and demand to be heard” [p. 8]; “We snap and quarrel with children, chastising, reprimanding, punishing, and unkindly withholding information” [p. 28]). This procedure, often used by Korczak in his pedagogical works to include the author within a larger family or social group through the use of first-person plural forms, is important because of a specific feature of such a way of writing. Well, apparently *we* are the senders, *we* say it, but *I*-the author am writing it. The goal of such a strategy is to establish closer contact with the reader and to exert the desired influence on them, changing their way of thinking and acting (Sieradzka-Baziur, 2019a, 2019b). Sometimes the author of the text is also clearly revealed in second-person statements, when they address the recipients directly. Exponents of the dialogicality of this text are verb forms of the second-person singular and plural and pronoun forms (“you”):

A single small, weak child is wearying and individual transgressions are infuriating, but how maddening, beleaguering, demanding, and unpredictably impulsive is a group! Understand once and for all: not children, but a group (p. 19); A bunch, a gang, a pack – not children. One is accustomed to thinking one is strong; suddenly, one feels small and weak (p. 19); Children grow ... They grow by day and by night, when sleeping and feeling, when happy and sad, when they misbehave and when they stand repentant before you (Korczak, 1929, pp. 29–30).

The author also addresses the recipient using imperative forms: "Beware: it is the strong brutes who mold modern life, *homo rapax* – they dictate the way forward" (p. 43).

A characteristic feature of the text *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect] is also the presence of emotionally marked forms, which are another manifestation of the textual manifestation of the subject of the utterance. This is done by communicating feelings using various names of emotional states or phraseologies (Bally, 1966; Grabias, 1981, 1994). Examples of language forms that Korczak (1929) used in this book in order to communicate feelings include kochać ["adore" (p. 15), podziw ["admiration" (p. 5), cześć ["honour" (p. 41), wdzięczność ["gratitude" (p. 17), zawdzięczać ["owe" (p. 8), cieszyć (się) ["enjoy/be happy" (pp. 5, 11, 35), radość ["joy" (pp. 5, 11, 15, 21, 22, 30, 31), radość życzliwej przysługi ["joy of selfless service" (p. 41), uśmiech ["smile" (pp. 25, 31, 35), kwiat uśmiechu ["flower of a smile" (p. 39), roześmiać się ["burst into giggles" (p. 16), zadowolone ["glad" (p. 9), szczęście ["happiness" (p. 11), szczęśliwy ["happy" (p. 15), wesoły ["cheerful" (pp. 30, 41), ciepłe wzruszenia ["positive emotions" (p. 41), niechęć do obłudy ["hatred of hypocrisy" (p. 39), niechęć ["hesitation" (p. 21), uraza do dzieci ["resentment towards children" (p. 16), nie lubić ["dislike" (p. 16), nienawiść ["hatred" (p. 39), nieufność ["mistrust" (p. 14), cierpienie ["suffering" (p. 24), gorycz młodych lat ["bitterness of youth" (p. 29), pochylona rezygnacja ["stooped resignation" (p. 42), bezdomny ból ["homeless pain" (p. 24), boleśnie ["agonizingly" (p. 29), smutek ["sorrow" (p. 5), rozczarowanie ["disappointment" (p. 29), przykrość ["vexation" (p. 28), żale ["regrets" (p. 34), poczucie niemocy ["feeling of powerlessness" (p. 6), uczucie niesmaku i winy ["feeling of distaste and guilt" (p. 22), bezpańskie opuszczenie ["derelict abandonment" (p. 24), niepokój ["concern" (p. 12), młode budzi niepokój ["we fuss over the young" (p. 8), mroczne przewidywania ["dark predictions" (p. 12), and niespokojne oczekiwanie ["restless anticipation" (p. 8). Feelings are also expressed by the writer with the use of expressive linguistic signs, such as expressive, explicit word-forming constructions, metaphors, exclamation marks, etc. (Bally, 1966; Grabias, 1981, 1994). The well-known educator saturated his text with such words and expressions, through which he expressed

various emotions. For example, to stigmatize bad attitudes of educators, he defined them using the following emotionally charged terms:

As educators, what is our role, what is our share of labor? Guardians of the walls and furniture, the calm of the yard, the cleanliness of ears and floors; shepherds for the youngsters so they do not stumble into harm, do not bother adults at work or happily on their days off; stewards of ragged knickerbockers and shoes; and miserly dispensers of porridge. Defenders of adult privilege and idle perpetrators of unprofessional caprices. A little jumble-store selling anxieties and admonitions, a market stall offering moral odds and ends, a license to sell denatured knowledge which intimidates, confuses, and lulls to sleep instead of awakening, enlivening, and cheering. Agents of cheap virtue, we are meant to force honor and humility onto children while warming adults' hearts and touching their positive emotions. Build a solid future on a shoestring budget, mislead and conceal that children are a multitude, a will, a power, and a law. (Korczak, 1929, pp. 41–42)

He expressed compassion about children, calling them "the race of children, the nation of the immature, the class of serfs" (p. 26). Adults expressing their negative feelings towards a child use such terms as "the immature are suspicious" (p. 13), "tiny tot" (p. 11), "little scruff-despot" (p. 15), "a hindrance" (p. 15), "little troublemaker" (p. 16), or "gang/pack" (p. 19).

Korczak expressed his feelings using specific syntactic structures, such as rhetorical questions – "How dare we blame and accuse?" (p. 23) – or exclamations with repetition – "Do not trample, do not abuse, do not enslave tomorrow, do not extinguish, do not rush, do not hasten" (p. 30).

Final conclusions

Janusz Korczak – the author and narrator of *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect] – shows a strong emotional commitment through his text, and this expression of emotions is one of the main stylistic determinants of this old scientific text. It should also be added that in the work of the famous pedagogue there is no documentation in the form of quotes or footnotes and that no bibliographic data accompanies the text. The famous small book by the outstanding educator, published about 100 years ago, does not fit into the contemporary framework of scientific language, yet every serious academic teacher has read it. After all, the essence of pedagogy is not the efficient use of methodology or the sophisticated use of concepts and terms, but most of all the constant search for the truth about how to educate a person, how to look after them, to help them achieve their full humanity. For a hundred years, the pedagogical dimension has been found in *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect] by all those who deal with the welfare and happiness of children. Smolińska-Theiss (2014, p. 51) wrote that Korczak

discovered the child, got to know their joys and cares and introduced them to science. Thus, he stripped the classic academic pedagogy of its façade, formalism, self-righteous scientism, concentration on measures, stages, regularities of development, and methods of working with a child. He introduced the realism of everyday life, common sense, and elements little known to pedagogy, such as a witticism, jokes, and literary narration.

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