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A Portrait of the Contemporary Child
The Discussion in the Context of Children's
Rights in the light of the findings
of Janusz Korczak

SUMMARY

The article discusses the issue of children's rights in the image of modern childhood against a collision with the vision of children's rights by Janusz Korczak. Currently, despite the widely extended activity of many foundations, organized humanitarian aid, children's rights continue to be violated. The child has enough flexibility to adapt to rapid changes in the surrounding reality and the many requirements it faces. Despite the many differences between the age J. Korczak lived in, and present times there can be seen many parallels and messages that apply to the reality of our times. In my work, I would like to rely on several texts of J. Korczak, addressing the issue of children's rights, among others: *Prawie dziecka do szacunku (The Child's Right to Respect)*, *Jak kochać dziecko. Dziecko w rodzinie (How to Love a Child. The Child in the Family)*, *Prawidłach życia (Regulations of Life)* and selected writings. In these works the following children's rights are prevalent the right to life and the right of the child to be what it is, the right to property, its own opinion, fun and leisure. I analyze and present them in a context of contemporary vision of childhood and children's rights contained in the UN Convention.

→ **KEYWORDS** – CHILDHOOD, KORCZAK, CHILDREN'S RIGHT, CHILD

STRESZCZENIE

Portret współczesnego dziecka. Dyskusja w kontekście praw dziecka w świetle ustaleń Janusza Korczaka

Artykuł porusza problem praw dziecka w obrazie współczesnego dzieciństwa w zderzeniu z wizją praw dziecka według Janusza Korczaka. Obecnie mimo szeroko rozbudowanej działalności wielu fundacji, organizowanych akcji humanitarnych, prawa dziecka są w dalszym ciągu łamane. Dziecko musi w elastyczny sposób dostosowywać się do szybkich zmian w rzeczywistości oraz stawianych mu wymagań. Mimo

wielu różnic między okresem życia Janusza Korczaka a współczesnym obrazem rzeczywistości, można dostrzec wiele podobieństw oraz przesłań, które wpisują się do obecnych realiów. W swojej pracy pragnę oprzeć się na kilku tekstach Janusza Korczaka, w których porusza on problem praw dziecka, m.in. *Prawo dziecka do szacunku*, *Jak kochać dziecko*, *Dziecko w rodzinie*, *Prawidła życia*, oraz kilku pismach wybranych. Z powyższych prac wyłoniłam następujące prawa dziecka: prawo do życia i prawo dziecka do bycia, tym czym jest, prawo do własności, własnego zdania, zabawy oraz wolnego czasu. Wskazane teksty poddałam analizie, a następnie zestawiałam ze współczesną wizją dzieciństwa oraz prawami dziecka zawartymi w Konwencji o Prawach Dziecka.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE** – DZIECIŃSTWO, KORCZAK, PRAWA DZIECKA, DZIECKO

Children will not simply become, but already are human beings, yes, they are human, they are not dolls. You can speak to their minds, they will answer to us, speak to their heart, they will feel us.¹

Janusz Korczak

Introduction

In a rapidly changing reality, the image of a child is in constant motion, images of young people appear in the media, on billboards, like a public product up for sale. The child is portrayed in two significant ways: an idealized one, almost utopian, and at the same time as naked, hungry, and sick. For that reason, the contemporary child disappears, the truth is replaced by a catchy vision. Despite worldwide appeals, humanitarian and preventive actions, children's rights are still violated. Despite huge efforts and many successful campaigns, multi-million financial support for children, childhood of many people in the world is a period of enormous trial and suffering. In my work I would like to rely on the thoughts of Janusz Korczak, actually Henry Goldsmith, also known as The Old Doctor – who was a doctor, teacher, educator, writer, psychologist, and a social activist. He was a magnanimous person and sincerely devoted to children. The most important thing is that

¹ J. Korczak, *Rozwój idei miłości bliźniego w XIX wieku*, in: *Na mównicy. Publicystyka społeczna (1989-1912)*, series: *Dzieła*, vol. 3, Warszawa 1994, p. 226 [all quotations from Korczak translated by Author].

through his writings, but also – and most importantly – through his pedagogical practice, Korczak declared, at the beginning of the 20th century, the need for a new approach to children and the childhood.²

Nowadays, the most important document defining the rights of a child is the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20th of November 1989. It contains all the basic children rights – personal, economic, social, and political, they apply to the child and should be accepted and respected on an international level. The first document that formally mentions the Rights of the Child is the Declaration of the Rights of the Child from 1923, created by an international social organization – the International Association of Children's Aid. This declaration contains 5 rules addressed to adult members of society. A year later this document was adopted by the General Assembly of the League of Nations.³ This declaration was later changed and extended with significant new rights adapted to modern times, and remains a valid legal document. J. Korczak, in his book *The Child's Right to Respect (Prawo dziecka do szacunku)*, commented on the declaration with these words:

Lawmakers from Geneva mixed responsibilities and rights; a lot of the declaration is persuasion, not a request, an appeal to good will, nor request for kindness.⁴

The rules contained therein are not the rights of children shown by J. Korczak, but recommendations and responsibilities of adults towards children.

The strength of modern times is the media, which has helped to develop and promote numerous campaigns under the banner of children's rights. One of the best and most active organizations is UNICEF appointed by the General Assembly of the United Nations. Their work is based on the articles of the Convention on

² L. Koursoumba, *Janusz Korczak and the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, in: *The Year of Janusz Korczak 2012. There are no Children, There are People*, ed. B. Smolińska-Theiss, Warszawa 2013, p. 54.

³ Cf. *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna*, ed. W. Pomykała, Warszawa 1993, p. 159.

⁴ J. Korczak, *Prawo dziecka do szacunku*, in: *Jak kochać dziecko. Momenty wychowawcze. Prawo dziecka do szacunku*, series: *Działa*, vol. 7, Warszawa 1993, p. 448.

the Rights of the Child.⁵ Contained in the law they are close to Korczak's perception of children's rights. With the cooperation of organizations from all over the world many actions were initiated, for example current projects carried out by UNICEF – *My dream – vaccination*.⁶ In Poland in 2013 there was a UNICEF conference during which a report entitled *The Conditions and Quality of Life in Developed Countries* was presented. It shows that Poland occupies 21st place in the global ranking.⁷ Many organizations are trying to fight for the rights of children, especially in underdeveloped countries.

Still at the outset, it is worth to define the word "child," which in various cultures and countries carries a different meaning. Under Polish law, the age which marks the end of a childhood is 18, which aligns with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁸ Cultural and social determinants of entering into adulthood include the following: leaving the parental home, emotional maturity, financial independence, gainful employment, completion of high school, marriage or motherhood. Children in many countries are forced to work from an early age, while in developed countries it is noted that children are staying longer in the family homes, financially dependent on their parents. J. Korczak notes that the child is not treated on an equal footing with other people but as a "brat, a mere child, the future man, not present. It is still to become truly an adult."⁹

⁵ Mission of the UNICEF, <<http://www.unicef.pl/O-nas/O-UNICEF/Misja>> (access: 20.12.2013).

⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=prawa+dziecka&sm=3>; <http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=unicef+children+rights&sm=3> (access: 27.12.2013); <<http://www.unicef.pl/Co-robimy/Prawa-dziecka/Biezace-dzialania/Biezace-dzialania/Wakacje-z-prawami-dziecka>> (access: 20.12.2013); <<http://www.unicef.pl/Co-robimy/Prawa-dziecka/Biezace-dzialania/Biezace-dzialania/Promocja-praw-dziecka-w-sklepach-5.10.15>> (access: 20.12.2013).

⁷ Cf. Conference *The Conditions and Quality of Life in Developed Countries*: <<http://www.unicef.pl/Co-robimy/Prawa-dziecka/Biezace-dzialania/Biezace-dzialania/Konferencja-UNICEF-prezentacja-raportu-Warunki-i-jakosc-zycia-w-krajach-rozwinietych>> (access:20.12.2013).

⁸ Cf. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, art.1, <<http://sithi.org/admin/upload/law/Convention%20on%20the%20Rights%20of%20the%20Child.ENG.pdf>> (access: 20.12.2013).

⁹ J. Korczak, *Prawo dziecka do szacunku*, op. cit., p. 435.

*The Works (Dzieła)*¹⁰ of Janusz Korczak are an intriguing reading, but not easy in terms of reception. They require from the reader a lot of reflection, attention and skills in finding hidden meanings. Krystyna Gąsiorek notes that analyzing Korczak's tetralogy (*How to Love a Child, The Child's Right to Respect and Regulations of Life*) leads to the conclusion that ,“(...) the most important problem discussed by Korczak in all his discourses is the child.”¹¹ In my work, I would like to rely on several texts of Janusz Korczak, in which he significantly writes about children's rights, among others *The Child's Right to Respect (Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [1928]), *How to Love a Child. The Child in the Family (Jak kochać dziecko. Dziecko w rodzinie* [1918]), *Regulations of Life (Prawidła życia* [1929]) and several of the writings selected from different periods of the author's life. These works were chosen for analysis.

I've Got the Right to...

History shows that children have always been treated as less important than adults, subjected to numerous forms repressions and forgotten, which also is a subject of Korczak's writings in *The Child's Right to Respect (Prawo dziecka do szacunku)*.¹² In the period of Korczak's activity in the interwar period, the child has the status of a “weaker” – not yet human – being, less valuable and rational than an adult. Korczak worked mainly with Jewish orphans, but in his work as a doctor he had contact with children of the rich townspeople. The peculiarity of his work allowed

¹⁰ The collection of Janusz Korczak's *Works* included: vol. 1 – *Dzieci ulicy. Dziecko salonu*, vol. 2, part 1-2 – *Koszalki opałki. Humoreski – felietony*, vol. 3, part 1-2 – *Na mównicy. Publicystyka społeczna (1898-1912)*, vol. 4 – *Szkoła życia. Obrazki szpitalne. Artykuły pedagogiczne i medyczne (1900-1912)*, vol. 5 – *Moški, Joski i Srule. Józki, Jaški i Franki*, vol. 6 – *Sława. Opowiadania (1898-1914)*, vol. 7 – *Jak kochać dziecko. Momenty wychowawcze. Prawo dziecka do szacunku*, vol. 8 – *Król Maciuś Pierwszy. Król Maciuś na wyspie bezludnej*, vol. 9 – *Bankructwo małego Dżeka. Kiedy znów będę mały*, vol. 10 – *Senat szaleńców. Proza poetycka. Utwory radiowe*, vol. 11, part 1-3 – *Prawidła życia. Publicystyka dla dzieci*, vol. 12 – *Czarodziej. Uparty chłopiec. Opowiadania (1918-1939)*, vol. 14 – *Pisma rozproszone. Listy (1913-1939)*.

¹¹ K. Gąsiorek, *Janusz Korczak i jego bezgraniczna miłość do dzieci*, „Konspekt. Pismo Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego w Krakowie” 2012, vol. 3 (44), p. 10.

¹² Cf. J. Korczak, *Prawo dziecka do szacunku*, op. cit., p. 447.

him to look at the child from a different perspective, where the child-orphan took on a different meaning. The overall image of modern Polish childhood was quite different than in the times Korczak lived and worked.

The term “law” means:

a system of rules and norms adopted by the public, defining what is allowed and what is forbidden, which also defines the punishment for the offense caused by the breach of these rules.¹³

However, over the years, there appeared a need for the widening of their scope to adapt to new realities, especially for those who are in more greater need, living in unfavourable conditions, and cannot afford a proper living –

There are stronger and weaker people; for various reasons, they are living in conditions that are more or less favourable. To create proper balance, it is necessary to give the weaker some additional rights (...).¹⁴

Currently, quickly entering the world of technology, young people have a number of new tasks to handle on their own, and too many extra-curricular activities, or on the contrary have too much freedom. In spite of many differences between the times of Janusz Korczak and the modern picture of reality as well as changing views about children and their role in society, we can discern many legitimate similarities in the words of “the Old Doctor.” In my reflections I will refer to Korczak’s thoughts on the child, especially on a few selected children’s rights.

The Right to Life and The Right of the Child to Be What It Is

In one of Korczaks’ books: *How to Love a Child. The Child in the Family (Jak kochać dziecko. Dziecko w Rodzinie)*, he points to three basic rights of the child – to death, to this day, to be

¹³ *Popularny słownik języka polskiego*, ed. B. Dunaj, Warszawa 1999, p. 520.

¹⁴ *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna*, op. cit., p. 159.

what it is.¹⁵ He points out that the knowledge about the child is the primary task for adults. It is very important to notice the advantages and disadvantages of being a child, and the need for accepting the child as it is, without criticism or resentment. In many cases, it is difficult to reconcile with the fact that the child is not always ideal, healthy, beautiful, or does not fulfil the initial expectations of its parents, but it has the right to be itself. The Old Doctor points out that

how is it possible to believe that the child has to be what it is meant to be, (...) like a sickly person can have make-up put on to look well, whilst they still cannot be cured.¹⁶

Individualization allows a better understanding of the behaviour and feelings, not only in respect of children, but every person. It has become one of the basic tasks of modern education and upbringing. In Korczak's book *The Regulations of Life (Prawidła życia)* it is argued that

(...) each person we must know individually and assess separately. And you need to know superficially and thoroughly. It is not only important what a person says, but what he thinks and what he feels, and why it is like this, and not otherwise.¹⁷

In his works Korczak critically brands the perception of the child as a being without rights, a being not entitled to the privileges of adulthood. However the author is opposed to this position, and in one of his journalistic texts – “Reading-room for All” („Czytelnie dla wszystkich”) – he writes: “Children will not simply become, but already are human beings, yes, they are human, they are not dolls.”¹⁸ He points out that the child has the right not to know, to be lost in real life, to failures and tears, it needs proper guidance –

¹⁵ Cf. J. Korczak, *Jak kochać dziecko. Dziecko w rodzinie*, in: *Jak kochać dziecko. Momenty wychowawcze. Prawo dziecka do szacunku*, series: *Dzieła*, vol. 7, Warszawa 1993, p. 43.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 57.

¹⁷ J. Korczak, *Prawidła życia*, in: *Prawidła życia. Publicystyka dziecięca*, series: *Dzieła*, vol. 11, part 1, Warszawa 2003, p. 56.

¹⁸ J. Korczak, *Rozwój idei miłości bliźniego w XIX wieku*, op. cit., p. 226.

A child is a foreigner, who does not understand the language, does not know the direction of the street, does not know the laws and customs. Sometimes, it wants to look for itself and when it is difficult, it asks for a hint and advice. A guide is necessary, someone who will politely answer the question. Respect their ignorance.¹⁹

Currently, this right is included in the Article 16 § 1 of the Convention.²⁰

The Convention on the Rights of the Child at the beginning indicates that: "States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to live."²¹ Despite the fact that this law is basic and undeniable it is still often broken and neglected. The toil of life falls on the child the day it comes into the world, it is left at the mercy of other people. In the introduction to *the Report of the Association "Help for Orphans" from 1927 (Wstęp do sprawozdania Towarzystwa „Pomoc dla Sierot” na rok 1927)*, we read that "(...) growth is difficult; it is the work and the first duty and the law of the child. All the rest should be subordinated to his holy work (...)."²² Growth requires proper care from the part of another person. Any negligence from parents' ends up leaves deep marks and will eventually grow. The realities of the modern world require from people constant development and the acquisition of new skills. This situation affects to the youngest members of society the most since they require more skills and abilities than their natural conditions for development allow. Striving for perfection, which Korczak also notes:

This is a fleeting fashion, a mistake, a fault of reason, that everything that is not outstandingly perfect, seems to us meaningless and worthless. We obsessively seek immortality,²³

¹⁹ J. Korczak, *Prawo dziecka do szacunku*, op. cit., p. 451.

²⁰ Cf. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, art.16 § 1, <<http://sithi.org/admin/upload/law/Convention%20on%20the%20Rights%20of%20the%20Child.ENG.pdf>> (access: 20.12.2013).

²¹ Ibidem, art.6 § 1.

²² J. Korczak, *Wstęp do sprawozdania Towarzystwa „Pomoc dla Sierot” na rok 1927*, in: *Pisma rozproszone. Listy (1913-1939)*, series: *Dzieła*, vol. 14, Warszawa 2008, p. 127.

²³ J. Korczak, *Jak kochać dziecko*, op. cit., p. 59.

makes adults often feel disappointed because of the imperfections of their offspring, they look for all possible solutions to this situation. The Convention points out that:

States Parties recognize the right of every child to the standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.²⁴

This suggests that adults should afford the child proper development, without limiting its nature, giving it a choice, without pressure from the environment. In the introduction to *Educational Institution "Our Home" Maria Rogowska-Falska* (wstęp do książki Marii Rogowskiej-Falskiej *Zakład Wychowawczy „Nasz Dom”*) it is stated that

The child – now is a resident, citizen and already a human. Not that it will be, but it already is. The child already has a past and a future. Memories and memorabilia. The childhood years are real life, not the announcement of what is to come.²⁵

Korczak reproaches adults: “They examine the child not as a different, but lower, weaker, poorer mental system. – as if meaning: all adults were learned professors.”²⁶ Currently the interest in a child's development from the prenatal perspective is more than significant. The child has been placed in the center of interest of many areas of knowledge – humanities and natural sciences. The reality has changed and with easier access to information, and economic growth the perception of the child has evolved into a wider and deeper state. Korczak tried to look at the child from a different perspective – with eyes full of admiration and by becoming involved in its activities. The child has the right to be what it is, without anyone intervening in its spontaneity –

The child is not stupid; there are no more fools among them as there are among adults. Rules can lack reason, criticism and

²⁴ The Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 27 § 1, <<http://sithi.org/admin/upload/law/Convention%20on%20the%20Rights%20of%20the%20Child.ENG.pdf>> (access: 20.12.2013).

²⁵ J. Korczak, *Wstęp do książki Marii Rogowskiej-Falskiej Zakład Wychowawczy „Nasz Dom”*, in: *Pisma rozproszone. Listy (1913-1939)*, series: *Dzieła*, vol. 14, Warszawa, 2008, p. 204.

²⁶ J. Korczak, *Prawo dziecka do szacunku*, op. cit., p. 461.

plausibility if blindly followed by adults. A rational child sometimes becomes amazed by an aged, stubborn stupidity.²⁷

A baby does not have a different nature, on the contrary, it is an integral and inseparable part of the society.

The Right to Property

It is undeniable that a human being who is only a few years old would start exploring the surrounding reality and everything would be new to him. Children are able to marvel at the smallest thing, which takes on great significance for them – it is a secret and a treasure. Korczak indicates that “A beggar is free to spend him alms at whim; the child does not have anything of its own, it must give an account of each item or possession in its use.”²⁸ The child has the right to property, to possession of personal items, things which it considers relevant and important, but which in the eyes of adults may seem to be useless, therefore often these priceless objects are thrown away or disposed of Korczak wrote:

With respect to the child’s property and budget it perceives the goods in possession of its family, feels deficiencies, and compares its own poverty with the abundance of their peers (...). The property of the child is not junk, but beggar’s goods and tools, hopes and souvenirs.²⁹

The adult world is ruled by material goods, which are often a priority and purpose of life – the pursuit of prosperity. For a child this reality is incomprehensible and for the youngest the family is the most important, items are complementary to the environment. Children “do not know that there are expensive things, which are bought once, and should serve for many years.”³⁰ It is unlawful to dispossess children of their belongings. Nowadays the problem of the right to property is publicized, and the matters points special attention to material goods, however items, which

²⁷ J. Korczak, *Prawo dziecka do szacunku*, op. cit., p. 448.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 431.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 452.

³⁰ J. Korczak, *Prawidła życia*, op. cit., p. 16-17.

belong to children are viewed from the perspective of adults. Inaccuracy occurs in the case of things that are worthless in the eyes of the law, but for the child are priceless.

If an adult has been unlawfully deprived of personal belongings I would advise them to take the case to the court. I have no right to give such advice to a child in relation to his teacher's actions, although since the child is weak it should find help when someone deprives them of their property all the more.³¹

In The Convention on the Rights of the Child there are marked economic laws directed at children, highlighting that the child cannot be a victim of economic exploitation by not giving children the right to property.

The Right to Their Own Opinion

The media has raised the problem of children's rights many times, talking about children that have been removed from family homes or are struggling with diseases, but at the same time who have been deprived of their own voice. A child rarely speaks on television, it does not talk about where it would like to live, but it is left to the mercy of adults and it surrenders, despite the rights granted to him by The Convention: "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child (...)." ³² The youngest are excellent observers who are punished for their skills. They can see the adults' defects and inconsistency in their actions. Korczak in his observations noted:

We hide our own faults and misdeeds. Children cannot criticize, cannot point out our vices, habits and peculiarities. (...) Only the child can be exposed shamelessly and put up for public criticism.³³

³¹ J. Korczak, *Własność dziecka*, in: *Prawidła życia. Publicystyka dziecięca*, series: *Dzieła*, vol. 11, part 2, Warszawa 2007, p. 173.

³² The Convention on the Rights of the Child, art.12 § 1, <<http://sithi.org/admin/upload/law/Convention%20on%20the%20Rights%20of%20the%20Child.ENG.pdf>> (access: 20.12.2013).

³³ J. Korczak, *Prawo dziecka do szacunku*, op. cit., p. 445.

The Old Doctor enabled children to express their own opinion, by introducing in his institutions “internal governments,” the Peer Court, postal pronouncements and a children’s magazine. In *How to Love a Child. The Child in the Family* we can read that “the first non-confrontational right is the child’s right to speak his mind, and active participation in our considerations and judgments.”³⁴

The Right to Play and Free Time

Childhood is mostly associated with being carefree and having fun. It is so much more; it is a period of exploration and new experiences, it is also a time full of joy and freedom. As the Doctor noticed “A child needs movement, the air, the light – the harmony, but also something else. Space, the feeling of freedom – the open window.”³⁵ Today the spontaneous actions of the child and a harmonious and comprehensive development of his personality is highlighted. Independence is accompanied by creative and innovative thinking, which favors the development of intelligence. Reason does not limit the youngest, allowing them to freely explore the surrounding world,. Korczak calls it “the open window.” But adults, forgetting about the welfare of the child, often enforce upon it classes, extra work, tutoring, which are focused on specific areas. This way they become deprived of creativity. In the text *The Pickpocket (Złodziejaszek)* Korczak notes that “I am only responsible for the present day of my ward, I was not given the right to influence and interfere in the future of his fate.”³⁶ The child has the right to decide about and organize his own space and time, the educator is only an observer and adviser. Today, despite the vast amount of information on the rules of education, adults sometimes forget about what is good for the child and only focus on its educational development. Inscribing the rules, the organized world of adults in the fabric of their nature, creates their schedules built not only out of obligatory classes in the nursery or pre-school, but adds to that a number

³⁴ J. Korczak, *Jak kochać dziecko*, op. cit., p. 43.

³⁵ J. Korczak, *Otwarte okno*, in: *Pisma wybrane*, vol. 2, Warszawa 1984, p. 141.

³⁶ J. Korczak, *Złodziejaszek*, in: *Pisma wybrane*, vol. 2, Warszawa 1984, p. 138.

of extra-curricular activities. A child deprived of choice remains helpless in the face of everyday life. This problem was also noticeable during activities of Korczak, as the author writes:

It cannot be that the child of wealthy parents is to become a mere craftsman. Let it rather become a miserable and demoralized human being. Not a child of love, but of parents' selfishness (...).³⁷

On the other hand there is the image of a child subject to over-protection. A force which is supposed to defend him from all evil. Depriving children of knowledge about how to learn to make choices and letting them into the world of contemporary temporal control mechanisms, can make them helpless when faced with common standards in the future. The Convention on the Rights of the Child only mentions the right to rest and leisure, and participation in cultural life,³⁸ but it does not address the issue of the freedom of choice and the freedom to decide on how to "pass the present day," as the Old Doctor says.

Conclusion

Allowing children to fully self-guide their lives is also against the law. Equality is not synonymous to the freedom of existence. We cannot protect children against adults' domination or their leadership, when actions should be based on a relationship of love and trust. This is perfectly exemplified by Janusz Korczak who became the protector of children's rights. He became an authority for educators, parents and children, with great dedication to working for and with children. After working with them across various areas he concluded that "years of work make it even more obvious that children deserve respect, trust and kindness (...)."³⁹

A child brought up in dissonance looks for its own solutions to problems. Often devoid of a proper childhood, it enters the world

³⁷ J. Korczak, *Jak kochać dziecko*, op. cit., p. 17.

³⁸ Cf. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 31 § 1, <<http://sithi.org/admin/upload/law/Convention%20on%20the%20Rights%20of%20the%20Child.ENG.pdf>> (access: 20.12.2013).

³⁹ J. Korczak, *Prawo dziecka do szacunku*, op. cit., p. 442.

of adults too quickly. On the other hand the image of modern childhood is associated with Neverland, and remaining a child forever. The task of an educator is to accompany the child in its development and exploration – “The doctor tore the child from death’s grasp as the task of educators it is to give him a life, and present to him the right to be a child.”⁴⁰ Modernity requires from children that they face increasingly difficult situations and new challenges. On this ground two faces of the contemporary family clash with each other: the overprotective and the neutral. Overprotection makes the child lose the possibility of a free upbringing and crossing new barriers, and because of that some aspects of development associated with a certain age are elongated. Children do not have the opportunity to become who they would like to be, often embedded in an excessive amount of additional extra-curricular activities, they miss contact with their peers, and dwell in helplessness in which it appears the world is perfect.

(...) parental perfectionism, excessive demands of the child, the so-called success rate, depriving the child of versatility development and joy of childhood.⁴¹

From the other perspective, indifference from adults makes the immature human beings enter the adult world too quickly without any restrictions.

Janusz Korczak also appeals for respect and dignity of the child. Respect for their ignorance, efforts of exploration, for failures and tears, for property, respect for the mysteries and fluctuations in the growth of hard work, respect for the present time.⁴² The modern image of the child is too elusive, its contours and framework difficult to define, but it is important to remember Korczak’s words that the child needs to be able to “respect each separate moment, because it will die and will never happen again, and in its severity, it will bleed if injured and haunt the memory if murdered.”⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 461.

⁴¹ J. Gromska, *Raport o przestępczości wobec dzieci, w tym seksualnej (na podstawie analizy 410 orzeczeń sądowo-psychiatrycznych i seksuologicznych)*, in: *Prawa dziecka deklaracje i rzeczywistość*, ed. J. Bińczycka, Kraków 1999, p. 166.

⁴² Cf. J. Korczak, *Prawo dziecka do szacunku*, op. cit., p. 451-453.

⁴³ J. Korczak, *Prawo dziecka do szacunku*, op. cit., p. 453.

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