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# **The importance of a children's newspaper\*\*\***

## **Summary**

Janusz Korczak's insights concerning children are as fresh and valuable today as they were when he promoted them. He believed that by enabling children to run their own journal in a democratic atmosphere through participation it will have a positive effect on them, make them more responsible and increase their self-esteem and social status. From the writings and recordings of the counselors and orphans from Korczak's orphanage in Warsaw and the facilities of the Korczak archives at the Ghetto Fighters' Museum in Israel and Korczakianum in Poland we elicited information pertaining to the subject of the newspaper that was produced at the orphanage and the weekly newspaper *Mały Przegląd* [The Little Review], which was promoted and produced under the wings of Janusz Korczak, Stefania Wilczyńska and Igor Newerly. A critical analysis of the original copies of the content of *Mały Przegląd* has enabled us to make a direct comparison between the subject matters chosen then and now and the whole concept of children's newspapers. Findings show that Korczak outlines the problems that schools may face when they want to produce a school newspaper. He also addresses the issue of relevant subjects that will be of interest to children mainly because the newspaper is produced by children for children, their participation reinforcing the feeling of belonging. In the past few years, youth newspapers at schools have taken a turn due to technological progress and new and modern

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media possibilities. Korczak's promotion of progressive educational techniques included real opportunities for youth empowerment in a democratic set-up.

**Keywords:** Korczak, newspaper, participation, self-esteem, empowerment, children's rights

## Introduction

What is the benefit from a school newspaper? Immense! The newspaper is a link, which binds the class or school. It puts a spotlight on those quiet and thoughtful ones who in solitary silence can express themselves on paper but whose voice is lost in a vocal dispute (Wolins, 1967, p. 506).

The great Polish Jewish pediatrician, author, and pedagogue Janusz Korczak – Henryk Goldszmit, believed in the participation of children as active partners in making an influence in a democratic environment. By so doing, he hoped to have a positive educational effect on them, make them more responsible, increase their self-esteem and have a favorable effect on their social status. Korczak's insights concerning children are as fresh and valuable today as they were when he promoted them. He believed that by enabling pupils to run their own journal in a democratic atmosphere through participation, it would have a positive educational effect on them, make them more responsible and increase their self-esteem and social status.

From the writings and recordings of graduates (counselors and orphans) from Korczak's orphanage in Warsaw and the facilities of the Korczak archives situated at the Ghetto Fighters' Museum in Israel and Korczakianum in Poland we may elicit information pertaining to the subject of the newspaper that was produced at the orphanage and the weekly newspaper, *Mały Przegląd* [The Little Review], which was promoted and produced under the wings of Janusz Korczak, Stefania Wilczyńska and Igor Newerly<sup>1</sup>. Original copies of this newspaper can be found at the archives of "The Ghetto Fighters' Museum" in Israel and Biblioteka Narodowa in Warsaw.

A closer reading of these historical newspapers juxtaposed with articles from youth journals that are printed by and for the youth of today, has enabled us to

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<sup>1</sup> Igor Newerly (1903–1987) was one of Korczak's closest friends and his personal secretary. A non-Jew, he was one of the counselors at the Jewish orphanage and a co-editor of *Mały Przegląd*. In 1930 he took over the editorship from Korczak. The ideas of Korczak that there are children with inventive minds who have interesting observations and comments but do not write as they do not feel strong enough were first taken down in shorthand by I. Newerly. As an editor of *Mały Przegląd*, he recalls that when he typed the Korczak's idea out, he felt the seriousness and sincerity of Korczak. To have a newspaper run by youth and not by professionals was a revolutionary idea and can be regarded as a great success lasting for 13 years, till the outbreak of World War II in 1939.

make a direct comparison between the subject matters chosen then and now. Korczak outlines the problems that schools may face when they want to produce a school newspaper. In a document written in the year 1921 he claims: "The first pitfall into which the young editors stumble, it seems to me, is that they rely not on all classmates but only upon a definite, rather small group" (Wolins, 1967, p. 503). He also addresses the issue of relevant subjects that will be of interest to children mainly because the newspaper is produced by children for children, their participation reinforcing the feeling of belonging.

### **Newspapers as a Tool for Participation**

The caregiver who frees rather than forces, lifts rather than drags, shapes rather than dictates, asks rather than demands, will experience many inspired moments with a child (Korczak, 2018, p. 70).

Schools can do much more to make a difference for students within their care. Educating comes from the heart and soul of the teacher. It comes from the belief that teaching pupils to take responsibility for their behavior is as much the duty of the educator as is teaching History, Mathematics or English and is more important than simply enforcing rules. It comes from the belief that most pupils do the best they can.

Korczak claims that "one must learn to know the child's character and take care that the school not distort it, not do as it will, not install the child's emotions with the feelings of inferiority" (Cohen, 1994, p. 168). Motivating pupils is vital for effective learning to take place, however, not all can be motivated by the same technique. The concept of motivation in education is based on the teacher's ability to inspire, challenge, and stimulate pupils to take an active role in their learning. As every pupil is unique, so is the key to unlocking their motivation to learn. Participation by the children in activities as well as outside of the classroom strengthens their contact with their residence, their surroundings, the society, their self-esteem, and confidence. A sense of uniqueness in the individual is a starting point for the building of his/her self-esteem. It is the task of the society and the school to empower the youngster toward participation so that their creative potential can be realized more fully.

Korczak called for an understanding of the emotional life of children. A child was not to be regarded as something to be shaped and trained to suit adults, but rather as someone whose soul is rich in perceptions and ideas, who should be observed and listened to within his or her own autonomous domain. He maintained that every child must be dealt with as an individual whose inclinations and ambitions, and the

conditions under which s/he grows up, require understanding. He indicated: "As for emotions, the child feels more strongly, having not yet developed inhibitions. As for intellect, he is at least our equal, wanting nothing but experience" (Arnon, 1977, p. 13). The active participation in running a newspaper by children, for children in any possible, existing format is the major tool that will enable the child to express him/herself and develop in a personal and social way to cater for their rights.

As a medical physician and pedagogue, Korczak believed that the teacher has the ability and the tools to mold the pupil. His insights into children were unclouded by sentimentality but were based on continuous clinical observation and meticulous listing and sifting of data. Korczak stated: "What a fever, a cough, or nausea is for the doctor, so a smile, a tear or a blush should be for a teacher. Medicine is concerned only with curing the sick child, but an educator could nurture the whole child. Teachers could be the sculptors of the child's soul" (Arnon, 1977, p. 51).

In the past few years, children's newspapers have changed immensely. This is mainly due to the technological changes that have brought about less printed newspapers and more digital ones, less content and thought-provoking articles and shorter, to the point information. This has brought about a change in the role of the educator who has become more of a mentor than a teacher. Today, unlike in the time of *Mały Przegląd*, the educator has less possibilities of having an influence on the content of what is being written in the varied media – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tik-Tok, etc. that are always constantly open to all.

The role of the educator today is to guide towards varied possibilities, raising a warning against dangers and a teaching towards correct usage of the open-media systems that may at times be harmful even if it is not done on purpose. Recently, popularization of the social participation of children has become a very visible trend in the world and a basic task in the development of the social reality based on inclusion, partnership, democracy, community, and co-participation (Jarosz, 2018, p. 198). Korczak believed that the participation of children is instrumental to positive self-esteem enabling a greater achievement level of success which can affect their attitude and behavior inside and outside the classroom. Self-esteem is more likely to be fostered when children have opportunities to build self-confidence through effort, persistence, and the natural development of skills. Korczak says: "It must be remembered that a child's success does not depend exclusively on how adults judge him, but equally, and perhaps in greater measure, on the opinion of other children of his own age. They have a different set of rules governing the assessment of merit and the granting of rights to the members of their community" (Arnon, 1977, p. 135).

Many of the traditional frontal teaching methods disempower children and make it more difficult for them to succeed. In heterogeneous classes, the teacher does not and possibly cannot relate to the needs of all the students. Unfortunately,

administrators and school boards promote the method of directed teaching as they are interested in good results with the school's prestige in mind. Some teachers believe that giving the pupils a free hand in participation will lead to discipline problems. They feel the need to be in full control of the lesson from beginning to end taking upon themselves all the responsibilities that could be shared with the pupils to bring about a more meaningful lesson, a lesson in which "real" learning will take place.

Meaningfulness is the extent to which that which is perceived makes sense or is seen as significant or potentially useful to the student, it is a personal matter. It is affected by one's previous experiences and personal values and a sense of adequacy. Unless the student is able to see some personal relevance or potential usefulness for the information, it is not meaningful, thus not of interest (Frymier, 1985, pp. 13–14).

We believe that learning takes place when a teacher has a shared vision with the pupils, arriving at joint decisions which are acceptable by all concerned. By being part of this partnership process, pupils gain ownership for their input and will be more responsible and caring. It is the duty of the teacher to provide the stimulus that will awaken in each student the required response. For example: In an experiment that we carried out, we enabled the pupils to choose which one out of four teachers they wish to learn with. Leading to this process was preparing the pupils towards the meaningfulness and commitment of their choice. The result of the experiment showed that the learning and the participation of the pupils in the learning process became meaningful and the results were higher in comparison to classes where the teacher was not chosen. At the same time, it made the teacher more committed towards his pupils. This is proof that meaningful learning is not a passive or receptive process. Meaningful learning can be achieved when the learner feels connected to the educator and feels respected. We believe that a positive self-esteem will result when a pupil is happy with the work that s/he is involved in.

Creating a school newspaper in whatever format enables multi-disciplinary interaction. It is a useful tool that can bridge the gaps in heterogeneous classes enabling pupils of varied levels and age groups to succeed in the domain that they feel most competent and confident. By producing such a newspaper as a learning environment, pupils will enjoy the fruit of their outcome that each in his own way contributed to its creation. It can be the vehicle for pupils and teachers to experience meaning and purpose in their school lives and can produce a positive change in the school environment reflecting the values and goals adopted by the school and exemplifying the virtues children learn in the classroom. In an article Korczak wrote for the *Warsaw Courier*, August 26, 1925, a year prior to the first publication of *Mały Przegląd*, he calls for a children's newspaper entitled: *A B C*.

One child – a full and comprehensive world. Two children – three worlds: the world of each individual and that of both together. Lacking in determination, friendship, a quarrel, joy, depression, ... – think of how many worlds are to be found in ten, twenty, thirty kids. Alone, without the assistance of the children you will never get to know these worlds and your educational tasks will never succeed (Korczak, 1978, p. 302).

For pupils with poor academic achievement, the typical classroom is a breeding ground for feelings of incompetence and uselessness. In the past few years, educators have become increasingly aware of the relationship between self-esteem and students' academic performance and social behavior. The best way to counter feelings of incompetence and uselessness is to provide opportunities of participation on a regular basis for pupils to become competent in meeting goals and to become useful. Realistically, providing opportunities for pupils will not miraculously transform them into pupils who excel academically. But it will influence their attitudes about themselves and about their role in school. Producing a school newspaper is another means of benefiting the student in a way that he has the feeling of contributing to the school and the community. Korczak wrote: "If you can diagnose a child's happiness in all its intensity, then you cannot fail to notice that the highest level of joy results from having overcome some obstacle – from a goal attained or a mystery solved. This is the happiness of triumph and the bliss of independence" (Arnon, 1977, p. 38).

Since Korczak truly knew children, he did not idealize them. Korczak knew there are all kinds of children. His deepest belief was that the child, out of a natural tendency to establish an inner balance, tends toward self-improvement when given the chance, freedom, and opportunity to do so. Participation is one of the means to self-improvement. In section 12 of his brochure *The School Newspaper* Korczak wrote:

There are some who find it easy to write. They like and want to write. And there are those who dislike writing. Just as there are people who like to play, some who like to draw, some who excel in learning by heart, solving mathematical problems, to sew, sing, to assist on the farm, care for flowers, to care for young children, or to read books. It is a great joy that not all like the same things (Wolins, 1967, p. 515).

## The Newspaper

In the orphanage run by Korczak and Stefa, children and educators gathered on Saturday mornings to read out loud from the newspaper of the orphanage. Korczak regarded the children's newspaper as a window into the child's life enabling us to look at events the child experiences, their problems, thoughts, and feelings. In

1921, five years before the founding of the children's newspaper *Mały Przegląd*, Korczak published his ideas in a pamphlet titled *The School Newspaper*, in which he wrote:

I deeply believe that there is a need for children's newspapers, but these must be periodicals written by themselves. Newspapers which deal with subjects which they find important and interesting, rather than periodicals which contain nothing but stories and poems. And what are the things which children and adolescents find important – they must say this themselves in their newspapers (Wolins, 1967, pp. 503–510).

Korczak gave specific advice regarding each stage of the paper's production: from choosing the chief editor and the editorial staff, to running the editorial meetings, collecting materials, suggesting writing topics, and even awarding prizes to encourage writers. He states that:

In an educational institution without a newspaper the staff seem to me uncoordinated and desperate, pottering and grumbling, going around in circles, leaving the children without orientation and control, proceeding ad-hoc and at random, without tradition, without memories, without a development path to the future. A newspaper links firmly one week to another. It binds the children, the professional staff, and the service staff into an integral whole. Every change, improvement, reform, every short coming and complaint find their reflection in it (Wolins, 1967, pp. 403–404).

Predicting that, in the future, teacher colleges would offer courses in educational journalism, Korczak launched the orphanage newspaper, which he called the *Alphabet of Life* because it linked one week to another and bound the children together. Korczak declared that "With a paper, we'll be able to know everything that's happening. It doesn't matter that we begin with a small handwritten one. Someday we'll type it, maybe even print it" (Lifton, 1988, p. 72). For the teacher who is anxious to understand the child and himself, the newspaper is an excellent regulator of words and actions. It is a vivid chronicle of his work, efforts, blunders, the difficulties which have had to be coped with. It is a certificate of his achievements, a testimony to his activity, a defense against possible charges. It is a priceless research material (Wolins, 1967, pp. 403–404).

One of Korczak's innovations in child-care was a weekly newspaper produced by the children themselves. At the orphanage of which he was the director, the orphans kept a small fact sheet which was read to all the children every Saturday after breakfast in the dining hall of the orphanage where the children were gathered – thus ensuring that everyone was informed. It normally consisted of a main article written by Korczak, articles written by the orphans and counselors, the outcome of the trials, requests, and other information. (Arnon, 1971, p. 43–44). The written

texts were deposited in a specially designated mailbox, and it was the responsibility of the counselors to copy the notes into a notebook.

Korczak felt that institutional newspapers were not sufficient. He wanted to see the publication of a newspaper for all the children, a journal that would answer all their questions and give them a feeling of independence and importance (Cohen, 1978, pp. 72–74). Reaching out beyond these institutions, Korczak founded *Mały Przegląd* as a weekly supplement to the Polish-language Jewish daily *Nasz Przegląd* ('Our Journal') in 1926. The children weekly appeared each Friday for 13 years, initially two pages in length but soon after it expanded to a four-page supplement. The readers of the paper were both Polish and Jewish children and its uniqueness was in the fact that it was produced almost entirely by children. At the outset (1926) the sub-title of the newspaper was *Pismo dla Dzieci i Młodzieży* ('Magazine for Children and Youth') and was changed at the end of March 1929 to *Dzieci i Młodzież* ('Children and Youth'). The Polish word "DLA" meaning "for" was omitted so instead of "A Newspaper for the Children" the new sub-title read *The Children and Youngsters Newspaper* (Poznanski-Hagari, 1978, pp. 347–348)<sup>2</sup>.

There was no set model for *Mały Przegląd*'s editions. Most of the articles were written by the kids, some of the articles on the main page were written by Korczak himself. He did not want to have short stories or poetry in the newspaper, and he explains this to the contributors in the 11th edition, December 1926. "The Little Review deals with general topics that all the readers will find interesting. There is not enough room for special articles about exceptional classes therefor, there is a need for school journals. We don't print poetry or short stories as they have a place in the school journal" (Korczak, 1926, p. 1).

The young writers wrote about themselves, raised complaints, asked for advice and help, wrote about problems they faced with their parents and teachers and forwarded ideas and new subjects for the newspaper. Sometimes there appeared an article about a public problem and how it was solved. There were editions on special subjects and at times competitions were announced. There was an attempt to correspond with children from the Land of Israel especially with children from

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<sup>2</sup> Ada Poznanski-Hagari (1909–1999) worked in the orphanage as a training clinical psychologist (counselor) from 1931. She left Warsaw in August 1939, less than a week before the outbreak of the war and prior to completing her PhD titled: "The imagination of children and youth." On re-reading *Mały Przegląd*, Ada's first interest was Korczak's educational approach to all the children. She found that he desired to expand the knowledge of the child through his/her own expressions. The Bulletin board was always filled with current affairs and plans for various projects which drew the attention of the children. She mentions the graphs that Korczak displayed (a count of skirmishes etc.) and the weekly newspaper read by Korczak every Saturday morning to the children.

Kibbutz Ein Harod where Korczak and Stefa Wilczyńska spent time on their visits to Palestine. Unlike other Jewish youth newspapers, Korczak's newspaper was not connected to any educational stream, and he did not call on teachers for help. He explained:

We did not wish to become obligated and wanted to prove that we could manage the newspaper ourselves. We wanted to be masters in our own home. The teacher has his own newspaper. It is likely that the children will see the participation of their elders as a confrontation with their one and only open means of expression, causing a shortly lived newspaper (Korczak, 1978, pp. 61–62).

The 244 issues of *Mały Przegląd* provide a rich source of material on social, cultural, psychological, educational, and national mode of the Jews of Poland during the inter-war period, and especially on the problems they faced. They also illuminate Korczak's progressive and humanistic approach to education. His attitude to the child was imbued with love and respect in equal measure. Igor Newerly, Korczak's closest friend and the man who took over the editorship of *Mały Przegląd* in 1930 writes in his book *Żywe wiązanie* (Newerly, 1966, pp. 315–324) that in Korczak's opinion, youngsters need a newspaper which is produced by themselves. Observing the practice of upbringing, Korczak concluded that adults cherish a myth which maintains that they know best what the child needs most of all. They enjoy the right to manipulate the child for his own good, without asking his opinion. The awkwardness of this situation is experienced by the hero of the novel *When I am small again* who complains: "If only adults would ask us, we could give them some good advice. After all, we know best what we need, we know ourselves better, and spend more time together ... We are experts on our life and our issues" (Korczak, 1958, p. 279).

The estimated child gets self-confidence, especially by creative work, by engagement in social activities and by contributing to a better life by using his creativity. Korczak observed and used the creativity of children to solve problems. Self-organized social systems of an enormous human potential, which is only possible by using very democratic principles, especially the principle of respect of the other person (Edlinger, 1997, p. 169). Korczak reserved an important place for creative learning and creative work at school. He encouraged educators to provide children with possibilities of expressing themselves dramatically, and poetically, through creative writing and in movement. He demanded that the school direct its attention to the child's character, personality, traits, and life rather than to information and academic knowledge alone (Cohen, 1994, p. 167).

In an atmosphere of joint responsibility and self-government, children cared a lot about the opinions of their comrades and staff concerning tasks carried

out, progress in studies or other matters, constituting the life of the group or its individual members. Therefore, much attention was paid to various forms of exchange of views. These included newsheets, meetings of inmates and goodwill plebiscites. The above examples of his main ideas are enough to reveal Korczak's profoundly human attitude, the attitude of an educator creating his own program with mind and heart. Korczak advised teachers to develop and use the class/school bulletin board as he believed that the power of the written word was manifold. "I advise a bulletin board even in cases where the bulk of the children cannot read. Not knowing the letters, they will learn to distinguish their names, develop an appetite for words, feel their dependence on children who can read" (Wolins, 1967, p. 385). Korczak claimed that the bulletin board provided the orphan with an effortless routine answer to questions.

The board opens initiatives for both the teacher and the children. The calendar, the thermometer reading, headlines from the daily paper, a picture, a crossword puzzle. Something of a shopwindow, a child will stop by it whenever he has the time and inclination – just to have a look. Why not put up a list of principal cities, the population of a given city, food prices. Anything may make a hit (Wolins, 1967, p. 385).

Korczak was one of the main personae to actively deal with the idea of nurturing democratic aspects in education. He worked towards having a just community whose young citizens would run their own parliament, court of peers, and newspaper. In the process of working together, they would learn consideration and fair play, and develop a sense of responsibility toward others. In helping his orphans to respect others, a first step toward gaining self-respect, Korczak was a pioneer in moral education. In all his work with children, Korczak strove to serve more as facilitator and guide, relying on the natural abilities of the young to carry the burden of action. He strove to instill in his charges the ideas that the responsibility for their actions lay with them by participation, that placed in situations that challenged their behavior children would be able to cope, and that the best way to prepare children for life was to have them experience situations that were real. For Korczak a newspaper was the conscience of the community. It was one of the means of communication for rational thinking that gave an even balance between the staff and the kids.

Korczak gives a list of topics he feels that pupils will be interested in. These are sample topics and not core subjects. His list juxtaposed with the titles of the headlines found in *Mały Przegląd* (December 1926; December 1936) and *Israeli School Journals* (December 2005) shows an extremely close correlation, indicating how his ideas and the subjects that the pupils chose and choose to write about

have not changed. The only additional area worthy to be mentioned is the field of computers (Tsur, 2005, p.154, see: Appendix 1).

## Conclusion

In the past few years, youth newspapers at Israeli schools have taken a turn due to technological progress and new and modern media possibilities. Likewise, Korczak's promotion of progressive educational techniques included real opportunities for youth empowerment in a democratic set-up. Korczak deals with the reform of almost the whole system of caring for, bringing up and educating children. All his activities and work had deep philosophical, ideological, and ethical sources. He went very far in his views, intentions, plans and activities. Throughout human history, children have suffered injustice. Their life was not important. Their voice was unheard. The Convention on Children's Rights adopted by the UN in 1989 created a commitment of 196 States to care for the rights of the children (Articles 12; 13; 17; 28; 29; 31). However, the emancipation of children is still a challenge to us.

School leaders can create a school culture conducive to learning by shaping the instructional climate and using activities and symbols to communicate goals. School restructuring that creates a positive psychological environment also influences student motivation. School leaders can create this environment by establishing policies and programs that: stress goal-setting and self-regulation, offer student choice, reward personal bests, foster teamwork, and teach time management skills. A school's organizational structure is another influence, which can offer intrinsic rewards and enhance student autonomy. School leadership can also promote motivation by demonstrating a school value system that creates consensus around goals related to motivation and achievement. Much can be learnt from non-educational settings which can be applied to education.

Let the child get to know the world s/he lives in, the country s/he inhabits, the people with whom s/he is bound in life, let her/him get to know every facet of life. The obligations it places upon us all, let her/him interpret it with her/his heart – and s/he will truly be a human being (Korczak, 2018, p. 89).

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### Appendix 1. Comparing the contents of *Mały Przegląd* (December 1926; 1936) and *Israeli School Journals* (December 2005)

In the research conducted by Avi Tsur (2005) one section was the listing and comparing of “topics” that of *Mały Przegląd* juxtaposed to a list from *Israeli School Journals*. As can be seen there is a close correlation between the two.

Mały Przegląd	Israeli School Journals
A story from Korczak	
Letters to the editor	Letters to the editor
Requests / answers	Requests
Picture contest	Contest
Advertisement	Advertisement
Announcement	Announcement
Hannuka – the Festival of Light	Hannuka – the Festival of Light
Library of Jerusalem, Palestine	

<b>Mały Przegląd</b>	<b>Israeli School Journals</b>
Adults corner	
Things from the past	This month 35 years ago
Interview	Interview
Local News (different towns)	News
Sport	Sport
My dreams	My dreams
Famous people	Famous people
Letters from abroad	
Other opinions	My opinion
Criticism	Criticism
Quiz / puzzles	Quiz / puzzles
Trips	Trips
My life	My life / Who and what
Music	The annual hit-parade
Editors corner	Editors corner
New year greetings	Congratulations / thank you notes
Important matters	The story of my immigration
Sex education	Sex education
Politics	9 years to the assassination of Rabin
	Drug education
	Computer news
	Recipe
	Scandal