

"Quality education for children's best interests, children as teachers"

Jonathan Levy – Responsible of the pedagogical commission of the French Janusz Korczak Association

"We dance around a ring and suppose the truth sits in the middle" (Robert Frost)

International Seminar

The Polish Jewish Pioneer on Children's Human Rights, Janusz Korczak (1878-1942)

and the right of the child to ensure his best interest according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

1 & 2 June 2012

In the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Poland to the United Nations, Geneva

In contributing ideas in bringing Korczak's inspiring work into the 21st Century. I have looked at Identity forming and the respect and dignity of the individual, as opposed to constant labelling. Looking at a pedagogical approach to the teaching of children's rights, and taking that one step further looking at the role of Children as teachers of children's rights. Today I wish to discuss the role of education in relation to article 3 of the convention. In other words what is the best interest for the child in education? This leads us to go beyond the access and availability of schooling and look more closely at the quality of education. Dealing with the quality of education and the necessary reforms is a difficult, complex and a somewhat painful task with much resistance. Those who are involved with this endeavour are up against many obstacles and critics, and must be strong. It reminds me of the famous line of the W.B. Yeats poem: *"Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams"*

In 1991 Federico Mayer the then general director of UNESCO requested Jacques Delors, to create a working group in order to recommend quality education for the 21st century. In 1993 was the first formal commission meeting made up of 15 world experts. In 1996 UNESCO published the final report of the commission entitled: *Learning: The Treasure within*.

This inspiring and ambitious document is based on solid recommendations, one of which is the 4 pillars of learning, with a 5th one added after publication, I believe these pillars are very much in harmony with Korczak's thinking:

- 1. Learning to know**, By combining a sufficiently broad general knowledge with the opportunity to work in depth on a small number

of subjects. This also means learning to learn, so as to benefit from the opportunities education provides throughout life, and going beyond "what to learn"

The area of "*Entertainment Education*" can be introduced as one of the many stimuli of this pillar. The positive effects of the media in learning (Simply Maria-Peru). Entertainment education can be described as the use of entertainment as a communicative practice crafted to strategically communicate about development issues in a manner and a purpose that can range from the more narrowly defined to macro societal problems. Solutions are sought by strengthening children's ability to identify the problems in everyday life and their ability to act collectively as well as individually:- This leads to social transformation. Many series and soap operas can work like this, providing well thought out debriefing techniques are used. The Simpsons is an interesting example of looking at values, beliefs, community, sociology, culture literacy, sex education, parity...It is t the use of standard media and making connections to the individual, using critical analysis.

- 2. Learning to do,** In order to acquire not only an occupational skill but also, more broadly, the competence to deal with many situations and work in teams. It also means learning to do in the context of young peoples' various social and work experiences which may be informal, as a result of the local or national context, or formal, involving courses, alternating study and work. Schooling is not just a preparation for vocational needs, but as the pedagogue Janusz Korczak has frequently demonstrates that learning through physical experiences and experimentation are as important as the mental ones in order to develop the whole being.
- 3. Learning to live together,** By developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence – carrying out joint projects and learning to manage conflicts –in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding and peace. Here again many of the experiences of Korczak's pedagogy are centred on the acquisition of key social skills
- 4. Learning to be,** so as better to develop one's personality and be able to act with ever greater autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility. In that connection, education must not disregard any aspect of a person's potential: memory, reasoning, aesthetic sense, physical capacities and communication skills. Dealing with the all important question: "*Who am I*"
- 5. Learning to transform oneself and society** adding this fifth pillar leads and links children and youth to active participation for sustainable development in terms of being global citizens. Developing both critical thinking and the active rights of expression,

opinions and decision making, within a framework of participative democracy. This pillar also analyses what and why things work in society and being able to work towards making positive changes. On an interpersonal level it studies what can be described as a *Positive deviance Mindset*: It is an approach to social change that enables communities to discover the wisdom they already have and then to act on it. However sometimes our conditioning/ training gets in the way, and we get locked into conformity. We need to ask the following questions when learning :

- *What is it we see?*
- *What is it we don't see?*
- *What do you do here?*
- *What do we do?*

Here is a story of Nasreddin to illustrate this point particularly the question of what is it we see?:

Smuggling

Nasreddin Hodja used to take his donkey across a frontier every day, with the panniers loaded with straw. Since he admitted to being a smuggler when he trudged home every night, the frontier guards searched him again and again. They searched his person, sifted the straw, steeped it in water, even burned it from time to time. Meanwhile he was visibly more and more prosperous.

Then he retired and went to live in another country. Here one of the customs officers met him, years later.

-You can tell me now, Hodja, he said. Whatever was it that you were smuggling, when we could never catch you out?

- Donkeys, said Hodja. Donkeys and just only donkeys.

Positive deviance is about ordinary people who have found extraordinary solutions to existing problems without access to extra resources

Where does knowledge reside? --- With ordinary people the beneficiaries.

What is the role of the teacher? See the wisdom within the group, he/she listens & sees, asks questions

Maybe a **6th pillar** could be **learning to be a teacher** understanding the process of teaching and learning to demystify the act. This deals with important issue of **empowerment**. Learning the skills to design and deliver knowledge and skills is something which interests children and would contribute to their development, enhancing their rights. For this purpose the UNESCO project I am working on is based on the UN decade on Education & sustainable development. The project being: ***Children & youth as educators: Pedagogy for the child as global citizen***

The purpose of this project is to provide, teacher trainers, teachers, educators, youth leaders and other professionals with a programme which allows the possibility for children and youth to learn, teach and promote children's rights, global citizenship and key concepts in sustainable development. It proposes a series of workshops which can be implemented for groups of children (9 -14 years) in schools, youth and community groups. It is designed to be flexible and can be adapted in length and format to different structures within diverse cultural settings. It is clear that the vital and global issues involved in the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005 – 2014 can be achieved only through active commitment by all key actors of civil society. Indeed sustainable development contains the main elements for living in a peaceful world with human security. Children and youth have an important and active role in the construction of a peaceful world; their voice needs to be heard.

The respect of Human rights and in particular in this case the rights of the child is an essential basis for sustainable peace. There can be little or no peace without the ongoing understanding and application of human rights. For the authentic education of the rights of the child children and youth need not only to be knowledgeable but also the legitimate vectors of the essential messages.

It is based on 3 main stages in all providing 16 workshops:

- **1st stage** Learning Children's rights using experiential activities based on developing enquiry (Situation/problems)
- **2nd stage** learning pedagogy for children understanding teaching & learning strategies inspired from child to child methods
- **3rd stage** Creating the teaching project : instructional design & project management & development

Joanthan Lévy (AFJK)