

**Interdisciplinary, International and Intercultural Activities  
of the UNESCO/ Janusz Korczak Chair in Interdisciplinary Studies  
on Child Development and Wellbeing  
at the Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education in Warsaw  
(Maria Grzegorzewska University)**

All of the UNESCO / Janusz Korczak Chair's activities are aligned with UNESCO's priorities in relation to the humanities and social sciences and place the issue of research, didactic and organizational activities in an interdisciplinary dimension. We undertake actions which respond to the challenges present in the modern world and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The themes and topics of organized events include: education, cultural diversity, human rights (especially children's and youth's rights), intercultural dialogue and intercultural education, as well as modern psychological, pedagogical and sociological challenges.

The primary objective of the Chair is to maintain and strengthen academic links in the field of interdisciplinary studies on child development and well-being. The UNESCO Chair conducts research programs, participates in conferences, seminars, debates, study visits and since 2006 has organized International Summer Schools.

Website: <http://www.aps.edu.pl/unesco-chair.aspx>

## **Introduction**

The paper summarises the activities realized by the employees and associates of the UNESCO Chair from the founding of the Academy of Special Education in Warsaw to the present day. The first part acquaints the reader with the aims and character of the activities of the UNESCO Chair. The subsequent section presents selected initiatives undertaken in the organizational field, publications, and academic and research activities.

## **UNESCO / Janusz Korczak Chair**

In 1992, the University Twinning and Networking – UNITWIN / UNESCO CHAIRS was created based on the decision of the 26<sup>th</sup> General Conference. The aim of the programme is to support the exchange of knowledge, scientific research, training and international cooperation between universities by creating a network of academic cooperation in UNESCO priority areas of interest, as well as to promote academic solidarity on a global scale.<sup>1</sup>

The UNESCO Janusz Korczak Chair was established in October 2004, under the agreement concluded between the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris and The Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education (Maria Grzegorzewska University in

<sup>1</sup> Based on: <http://www.unesco.pl/edukacja/program-sieci-katedr/>

Warsaw). The founder and curator of the chair is Professor Adam Frączek<sup>2</sup>, PhD. Presently, the Chair's team consists of: Prof. Adam Frączek – the Chair's curator, Urszula Markowska-Manista, PhD – scientific secretary (since 2008), Krystyna Urbańska, M.A. – organization secretary. Initially, the chair bore the name "UNESCO / Janusz Korczak Chair in Social Pedagogy" and carried out activities within the field of social education. The patron of the chair is Janusz Korczak<sup>3</sup>, one of the central characters in emancipatory education directed at the rights and well-being of children, not only in Poland and Europe but also globally.

### **The Chair's Scope of Activity**

The aims of educational, organizational and research activities of the Chair encompass two main fields of science: psychology and pedagogy. Furthermore, they are directed at a broadly defined social development and well-being of a child. By definition, the problems of a child's development and well-being, and thereby man's and his environment, transgress disciplines and require researchers reach beyond fragmentary study perspectives.

The purpose of the Chair is to organize and integrate ongoing studies, both in Poland and internationally, that encourage better understanding of the conditions and psychosocial mechanisms of a child's social development and well-being. The Chair works towards improving the quality of child-centred<sup>4</sup> education (one of the basic postulates of Korczak's pedagogy) and facilitating the realization of children's rights in the complex contemporary world. Another purpose of the Chair is to develop more effective international cooperation in the aforementioned areas of activity, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, and to develop training programmes and curricula for psychologists, educators, teachers, et al. to help them implement contemporary knowledge and take creative approaches to their work with children.

The activity of the Janusz Korczak UNESCO Chair covers a number of fields:

- cooperation with national NGOs engaged in child problems
- participation in local and international conferences concerning child issues
- participation in Polish and European activities, projects, organizations, and associations
- promotion of children's rights, as well as social and cultural integration of various groups, societies, and nations
- organization of Summer Schools for pedagogues, psychologists, and social workers interested in and related to the problem of children's well-being
- special cooperation with the International and Polish Associations of Janusz Korczak<sup>5</sup>.

In 2009, the name of the chair was changed to "UNESCO Janusz Korczak Chair in Interdisciplinary Studies on Child Development and Well-being". The new name better represents the nature of the research and activities undertaken by the Chair.

Among the tasks of the Chair which, with regard to its patron, also deals with and

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<sup>2</sup> Chair The Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education.

<sup>3</sup> Janusz Korczak was an insightful researcher of the world of children, a pioneer in the sphere of educational diagnosis and a precursor of activities for children's rights. An author of publications known worldwide and translated into numerous languages.

<sup>4</sup> More: J.Korczak, *Selected Works of Janusz Korczak*. Edited by Martin Wollins. Published for the National Science Foundation, Washington D.C., by the Scientific Publications Foreign Cooperation Center of the Central Institute for Scientific, Technical and and Economic Information, Warsaw, Poland 1967.

<sup>5</sup> More: UNESCO Janusz Korczak Chair, Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education, Warsaw, Poland: Activity report for the years 2007/2008 for the IKA meeting during 7<sup>th</sup> Janusz Korczak International Conference, November 2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Ghetto Fighters' Museum/Western Galilee Academic College, Israel.

participates in problematic aspects of Korczak's work, is a presentation of Janusz Korczak, not only as a recognized character, but first of all as the creator of an important branch of emancipatory pedagogy and key figure in understanding children's rights. The Chair gives special attention to Korczak's literary output. Another important field of activity of the Chair is its cooperation with the Polish and International Janusz Korczak Associations and their centres in particular countries – especially those in Israel and Germany.

Every year the UNESCO Janusz Korczak Chair conducts research programmes, participates in conferences, seminars, debates, study visits and, since 2006, organizes International Summer Schools. Among the activities undertaken between 13 October 2004 and 30 June 2007 in UNESCO Janusz Korczak Chair in Social Pedagogy were educational, research, publishing and conference initiatives.<sup>6</sup>

What draws attention within the sphere of academic activities are activities in Social Pedagogy realized in the form of lectures on master's and bachelor's degree studies, International Educational Research in the form of lectures on bachelor's degree studies, as well as lectures entitled: Theory of Social Work. A new specialty module was prepared and in the academic year 2007/2008 a new specialty – "Care Taking and Social Pedagogy" was introduced (the curriculum includes problems of a child and family, children's rights, the tradition of "children care taking" – Korczak's ideas as considered in the past and present. In the years 2004-2007 the Chair, as managed by Prof. Barbara Smolińska-Theiss, also provided students with optional activities and trainings such as social dimensions of childhood, Children's rights, Polish – German Korczak meetings, and a course on Korczak (in cooperation with the University of Warsaw).

### **Selected Example of Activities since 2008<sup>7</sup>**

In the years 2008-2009 the Chair initiated study exchanges of Polish and Israeli students, organizing full participation in the area of Korczak's educational ideas oriented toward cognition, dialogue and breaking various social barriers in the view of rights and respect for children and every individual.

In 2010 and 2011, the primary objective of the Chair was to maintain and strengthen academic links in the field of interdisciplinary studies on child development and well-being. Thus, the UNESCO Chair held conferences and seminars in cooperation with a number of other chairs: the Chair of Basic Education, Chair of Social Pedagogy, Chair of Special Pedagogy, the UNESCO Chair on Women, Society and Development (University of Warsaw); the Institute of Pedagogical Therapy; and agencies and NGOs (the International and Polish Janusz Korczak Associations, Association for Civic Society Development "Prohumanum"). The UNESCO Chair is also a co-initiator in awarding honorary doctorate degrees to Thomas Hammarberg (2008), Prof. Ewa Łętowska (2009), Prof. Shevah Weiss (2012).

### **International Summer Schools (ISS)**

The UNESCO summer schools, to which young academics and scientists: pedagogues, and sociologists from Poland and abroad are invited, are an important element of the international activities of the UNESCO / Janusz Korczak Chair. The international schools, organized in Warsaw at

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<sup>6</sup> Source: Poland, UNITWIN / UNESCO Chairs Programme Progress report, Period of activity: October 13th 2004 – June 30th 2007, UNESCO/Janusz Korczak Chair in Social Pedagogy Report established by: Prof. Adam Frączek, Ph.D., Prof. B. Smolińska-Theiss, Ph.D., Academy of Special Education in Warsaw,

[http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/UNITWIN/pdf/poland/poland%20666\\_06.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/UNITWIN/pdf/poland/poland%20666_06.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> More: <http://www.aps.edu.pl/unesco-chair.aspx>

the Academy of Special Education, combine traditional lectures with workshops and study visits to a variety of organizations and institutions (dependent upon the subject). The list of participants and lecturers includes researchers, students, and NGO employees from: Belarus, Bulgaria, Iran, Israel, Kazakhstan, Poland, Russia, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Georgia, Romania, Croatia, and the USA. Foreign participants are usually granted scholarships by the Polish National Committee for UNESCO and the CEEPUS Programme, Bureau for Academic Recognition and International Exchange.

2006, 1<sup>st</sup> ISS "The Theory and Practice of Educating People with Intellectual Disabilities" (with the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (PFRON) and the Pedagogical Therapy Institute at the Academy of Special Education)

2008, 2<sup>nd</sup> ISS "Korczak's Ideas and Contemporary Children's and Youths Problems"

2009, 3<sup>rd</sup> ISS "Students with Specific Learning Difficulties: Various Theoretical Perspectives and Practical Solutions" (with the Institute of Pedagogical Therapy)

2010, 4<sup>th</sup> ISS "The problems of rehabilitation of maladjusted adolescents" with the Institute of Resocialization ASE

2011, 5<sup>th</sup> ISS "On Individual Educational-therapeutic Programs in Teaching Students with Special Needs"

2012, 6<sup>th</sup> ISS "Children's Rights: Current Approaches and Solutions in Light of Korczak's Pedagogical Theories" (with the Polish National Commission for UNESCO, the International Janusz Korczak Association (IKA), and the Polish Janusz Korczak Association)

2013, 7<sup>th</sup> ISS "Psychological and Educational Support for Pupils/Students with Diverse Needs"

2014, 8<sup>th</sup> ISS "Problem Behaviors in Adolescence – Forms, Conditions, Prevention" (with the Polish National Commission for UNESCO, the CEEPUS Programme's Bureau for Academic Recognition and International Exchange)

2015, 9<sup>th</sup> ISS "Re-adaptation and Reintegration as Problems of Refugee Children" (with the Polish National Commission for UNESCO, the CEEPUS Programme's Bureau for Academic Recognition and International Exchange)

### **The UNESCO Chair in the Year of Janusz Korczak (2012)**

2012 was an exceptional year for researchers, pedagogues and teachers as it commemorated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of Janusz Korczak's orphanage, the House of Orphans, which was located in Krochmalna street in Warsaw. On 6 August 2012, 70 years had passed since his death and the death of his foster children in the Treblinka extermination camp. The Polish parliament had declared 2012 the official year of Janusz Korczak. 2012 became the perfect opportunity to remind students, teachers, researchers – anyone who might be interested, of one of the most remarkable Poles, an exceptional character, seen through his multiple roles and his legacy. The UNESCO Chair actively joined the celebrations in the sphere of the Academy's activities and participated in a number of projects proposed by Ombudsman for Children and cooperating bodies. This included numerous publications, presentations, and

participation in discussions, meetings, seminars and conferences, as well as an honorary patronage of the direction of the Korczak Musical prepared by the Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic at the European Arts Centre in Białystok.

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The UNESCO / Janusz Korczak Chair participates in national and international conferences devoted to the everyday problems of children, children's rights and well-being. It prepares scientific publications and publications for teachers concentrated on pedagogical and psychological problems of child and youth development and functioning (including migrants and refugees). International cooperation has been undertaken with the Institute of Global Responsibility (IGO) within the international project "Teachers: Agents of Change: A Strategic Approach to Anchoring Development Education in Czech and Polish Formal Education Systems" financed by the European Union within the program EuropeAid 2013-2015, and the International Janusz Korczak Association

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