

From Joop Berding

Rotterdam, November 19, 2006

Dear international colleagues,

Unfortunately, I am not able to attend the conference in Slublice, but at the invitation of our three colleagues Gérard Kahn, Bernard Lathuillere and Theo Cappon, I hereby send you my thoughts on their proposals.

I quite agree with the proposals about the future of the Korczak 'movement'. In organizations that are in large part run by volunteers, as is the case with most Korczak Associations and Societies, there is a tendency that people who have time to spend, a.o. people who are retired, are elected on Boards. Of course, they represent a vast amount of life-experience, and – hopefully – much experience with regard to Korczak's 'legacy'. It is important that as long as is physically possible, these traditions are kept alive. We all live within traditions, and where Korczak specifically is concerned this is of prime importance.

To me this 'Korczakian' tradition is perfectly worded in Gérard Kahn's essay. We all work for the promotion and defence of Korczak's pedagogical and anthropological view of children and childhood, education and society, as embodied in his works. Within these works principles such as **respect, justice, communication and dialogue, participation and authenticity**, have a prime place, and it is our duty to keep these principles 'alive and kicking', against the dominating mainstream of accountability, quantitative measurement, and bureaucracy that rule our educational institutional lives. From this point of view, Korczak still functions as a 'counter-practice', and a critical voice against all attempts of political-economical powers to invade the life-world of children and educators.

What has got this to do with Korczak today? It is stated that conferences are organized, books and articles are published, and there are many works of culture. The question is: **to whom** are these activities and events addressed? How attractive, inviting, and challenging are these conferences and books etc for the new generation? Anyone who has ever attended a middle-of-the-road conference, knows how boring and un-challenging this can be.

What we need, are conferences, meetings and seminars, books and leaflets etc that are both interesting and inviting to young people. This demands from writers, publishers, and organizers, that they take the **perspective** of the young.

Activities that invite children and young people to participate, and to voice their own points of view, are likely to be more successful than standard lectures on specialist topics.

It also demands **strategic thinking**, in the sense that one has to select carefully the topics and the audiences one wishes to address. For instance, in my country, The Netherlands, there is an intense debate about the quality of day care (creches) and after school groups. In other countries, the quality of youth care or the juvenile institutions, or projects for street-children and so on might be the primary topics. This may of course differ from place to place. Since what we as a 'movement' do, is (in general) aimed at the betterment of the life-world of children and youngsters, we have to address the societal- political context as well.

So looking at the future, a number of actions seem important.

Inviting children and young people to initiate and participate in activities. Training young people as members of the Boards (a thing we do in Holland, with good results), and as teachers and group leaders in educational institutions. Developing ways to influence institutions by describing 'good practices', and disseminating these in books and brochures, DVD's. Promoting qualitative research by renowned researchers in education, arts and letters, etc. Developing projects for teacher training colleges, and colleges for educators of infants. Creating (more) (international) networks, not only of people who are 'followers' of Korczak, but of everyone who is interested in participative, democratic education and the enhancement of societal conditions for children and youngsters.

As with much questions in today's society, there is not one single answer, but plural actions have to be taken. The International Newsletter and the new International Korczak Website will continue to function as a 'clearing-house' for everybody who is interested, and who is hereby – again – cordially invited to share their activities with the world.

Dr. Joop Berding,  
Teacher in the training college of Rotterdam  
The Netherlands  
E-mail: "jwa.berding ((AT)) wanadoo.nl"  
Website: <http://home.wanadoo.nl/jwa.berding>