

## PEDAGOGICAL THEMES IN THE WORK OF MIRKO JURKIĆ (1886-1965)

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**Abstract:** Mirko Jurkić (Livno, 1886 – Zagreb, 1965) is a Croatian writer (books: *Iz Završja* [From Završje], 1917; *Dubrovačka legenda* [The Legend of Dubrovnik], 1928), and educator. This article deals with his pedagogical attitudes that can be read about above all in his "General Pedagogy" for the Teacher Training School (Zagreb, 1940), and in some articles, for example "Morality and Society" (Sarajevo, 1924). It can be seen how Jurkić determines the boundaries between the concepts of pedagogical education (as the exercise of will, character) and teaching education (as a development of reason), explores and justifies the possibilities and the limits of education as a subject that pedagogy deals with. In this context, a question is being asked that was a topical one when Jurkić was active: is pedagogy a science? The article continues with the presentation of pedagogical theoretical branches. The article also presents the educational thought of several prominent pedagogues of his time, reports on the pedagogical principles, teleology and axiology, and in this context of man's purpose and his ethical values. In his other articles Jurkić deals with the issues of man and morality. Jurkić's pedagogy is adequate for the time in which it was created, with some original features, but even as such, it is inspired by love for man, and in itself generates higher ideals. The article was prompted by the high anniversaries of Jurkić's birth (130) and death (50).

**Key words:** Mirko Jurkić, Pedagogy, Morality.

Mirko Jurkić (Livno, 1886 – Zagreb, 1965) is a realist writer, poet, pedagogue, and translator. He attended the High School of Commerce in his native town of Livno. After obtaining a diploma in teacher education in Sarajevo (1904), he studied pedagogy in Vienna, Leipzig and Jena (1908-1914). He held a teaching position in Prnjavor, Ilidža, Bijeljina, and Sarajevo (1904-1913), in Derventa Teacher Training School, and Women's Preparatory School. He also worked as a school supervisor in Dubrovnik (1919-1931), and finally as a high school professor in Zagreb until 1945. He was a secretary of the Matrix Croatica from

1940 to 1945, an associate of the journal series “Kolo” (1941-1943), and “Savremena knjižnica MH” [Contemporary Library of MC] (1941). After the war, he withdrew from the public life. By looking at his works, one can note that they are primarily a collection of morally-didactic narratives for the young with fairytale, humorous, and educational features of *Prolječno cvijeće* [Spring Flowers] (1907), short stories from his native land *Iz Završja* [From Završje] (1917), a collection of stories *Dubrovačka legenda* [The Legend of Dubrovnik] (1928). There is also an unpublished play *Bujica* [Deluge] (1927), and *Životna škola Hrvatskog Radiše* [The Life School of the Croatian Labourer] with a program and instructions for a healthy and prosperous life as well as general social prosperity. Jurkić wrote poems and texts for several picture books. He participated in newspapers and magazines – a total of 23 editions. He co-translated a few works from English and German (HBL, 2005; Marjanović, 2001, 69).

### **1. Theoretical Foundation According to the Notes from “General Pedagogy”**

In his unpublished notes, Mirko Jurkić systematically presents pedagogy: twenty pages of typed notes dating back from 1940. The notes are entitled “General Pedagogy” and are intended for the fourth grade of the Teachers’ School in Zagreb. The first page also contains a note “X-XII” of an unknown meaning. The key concepts are underlined in order for students to notice them with ease. The text abounds with the author’s corrections of typing errors.

The introductory part of the “General Pedagogy” encompasses the following units: “Development and Growth,” “Growth Factors,” “Opportunities and Boundaries of Education” (Jurkić, 1940a, 1-3). A special chapter deals with a discussion on pedagogy: “Educational Science or Pedagogy,” “Is Pedagogy a Science?”, “Branches of Theoretical Pedagogy,” and [“Older and Newer Pedagogical Systems”] (Jurkić, 1940a, 4-9). The third chapter considers the values: “Pedagogical Teleology,” “Axiology Methods,” “Pedagogical Values,” “Dispositions,” “Immediate Values,” “Altruistic Values,” “Man’s Purpose,” and “Man’s Ethical Value” (Jurkić, 1940a, 10-20). Already from the chapters’ layout, it is apparent that a half of Jurkić’s notes is concerned with axiological topics, wherein he deals in detail with the types and divisions of values, ”and is trying to answer the question of key values” in the pedagogical activity. Let us mention that Jurkić uses the term “raising” for upbringing which suggested the duration, i.e. the understanding of upbringing as a process.

Jurkić considers the development and improvement of an individual since birth to full maturity as an easy, but also as a constant (physical) improvement of the human race. He

warns of the existence of hereditary factors important for the development of man as a species member, but also emphasizes environment conditions (food, air, light...). Jurkić's "General Pedagogy" also touches upon the development of man's higher powers, which is gradual and reaches the limits "corresponding with mental maturity of an accomplished individual" (Jurkić, 1940a, 1), which is obviously a generally set goal. He defines consciousness as a mediator between man and the environment. It controls man's impulses. He says: "the instincts themselves are blind. Once a man starts to manage his impulses toward a useful purpose, as learnt by experience, he becomes capable of managing himself and being fit for life" (Jurkić, 1940a, 1). If the notion of consciousness is replaced by the notion of will (which is permitted by the context in which the quotation is given), then the claim from Jurkić's "General Pedagogy" becomes much clearer: upbringing in the narrowest of sense presents the influence on man's will (to do or to not do something). Forming of the will is the meaning of the process of upbringing. If upbringing implies the acquisition of objective knowledge (in the broader meaning), then bringing up can also be considered as education. Accordingly, Jurkić is a proclaimed volunteer and, in the context of his time, attributes the essence of upbringing to the upbringing of the will (character) towards a certain moral ideal (specifically: a virtuous man).

All that was said can be supported through an analysis of Jurkić's definitions of upbringing, at least three of which can be found in his "General Pedagogy" (Jurkić, 1940a, 1; 4). The key components are identical, even in regard to their order of appearance, albeit expressed in different ways: upbringing is a conscious (i.e. a thoughtful, intelligent) action (aid) undertaken by an educator (adults, educators/teachers, mature person, the community) with the purpose of influencing an inadequate individual (an underdeveloped man, a man in development) for them to adopt the established values (that is, to develop in accordance with the imagined human model). It is important to notice Jurkić's attitude that upbringing is a biological need, but that the man himself, in his autonomous development, cannot become a useful member of society and the producer of new goods. Therefore, upbringing is a social, moral, and religious need (Jurkić, 1940a, 4). Thus, one should be influenced in a deliberate, meticulous, purposeful, and methodically correct way. In Jurkić's work, we encounter two ways of the educational activity: first, the development and direction of positive dispositions, and, as the second, neglect and suppression of unfavourable disposition of activities in other directions. Jurkić says that this is the normal course of development for every human disposition and that, if appropriate pedagogical tools and methods are applied, each

disposition can be developed in “quantities” determined by one’s individual abilities. The ultimate goal of the positive disposition is to mechanize (Jurkić, 1940a, 15). Jurkić is convinced that the educational influence does not succeed only in rare cases, i.e. in those in which a child’s negative nature is associated with the influence of other unfavourable factors (society, lifestyle, and the like). For these rare cases, Jurkić suggests a re-education in special institutions. Otherwise: “Weak abilities can be also developed to some extent by suitable means, and even a weak mental ability can be strengthened, vicious character tempered, and weak will encouraged toward lively labour” (Jurkić, 1940a, 3).

From the aforementioned, it is justified to refer to upbringing as an external activity with an internal effect of forming one’s personality (Jurkić, 1940a, 1). This activity affects the will of the learner, as well as their mind – automated actions following a sufficient brain development become conscious actions – which means that it is not necessary to explain the subject as to why something is required of them because they cannot (yet) understand it. It is sufficient that the subject does what they are being told, and, if possible, to automatize the actions, while the meaning and the purpose of their education is cared for by a conscious (adult) individual. Thus, from this point of view, Jurkić’s model of upbringing is most similar to training (Jurkić, 1940a, 2). It is worth mentioning that Jurkić, seemingly reluctantly, also states the belief that the educator is the subject of education, an active factor exercising a voluntary influence on the learner, while the latter is an object of education, a passive factor. In his wish to somewhat detach himself from this view, Jurkić adds that there is no passivity in the process of upbringing (Jurkić, 1940a, 2). It is preferable to say the following: “Accordingly, the raiser is the subject of raising, while the one who is being raised is the subject of development, whose activities show the success of the educational work” (Jurkić, 1940a, 3).

When speaking of the possibilities and limits of upbringing, Jurkić takes a moderate attitude between those who claim that nothing can be achieved by education and others who believe that everything is achievable by education. He is aware of the fact that education is not omnipotent, but also that it is not impotent. The boundaries of education are found in the natural predispositions of an individual, but also in other factors (Jurkić, 1940a, 3). Among the passive (external, blind, unconscious or spatial) *educational factors*, Jurkić includes the child’s nature (hereditary factor) in the first place, which he says is largely externally determined, but that it should be explored. The mistake of the traditional education was the neglect regarding the child’s specific nature. The second educational factor is the environment

(“nature outside of man”): soil and climate, area, objects and everyday occurrences. He continues: “It is a task of a conscious educator to relieve adversities which come from the natural environment, and to enable a versatile effect of those objects and phenomena which can improve development and support the upbringing” (Jurkić, 1940a, 2). In his book *Iz Završja* [*From Završje*], he wonders about the same nature: “Is not one man’s life one world? And this was man’s spirit, which raises forces that lie in the bosom of that merciful nature, to kill, what she raised and brought up...” (Jurkić, 1917, 232). The third factor are the general circumstances in which a person lives: happiness, misfortune, the nature of people surrounding the child and ultimately society. Jurkić unites all those factors under the name of *destiny*. A special group of active educational factors are family and a wider community (people, state, and the church) (Jurkić, 1940a, 2).

When speaking of pedagogy as such, Jurkić defines it in the narrow sense as a theoretical knowledge of educational rules (normative discipline). In the broader sense, it also presents the application of this theoretical knowledge. That is why pedagogical work, along with theoretical knowledge, requires life experience and spiritual maturity. Jurkić wonders if pedagogy is an independent science. He considers the view according to which pedagogical goals are defined by ethics and religion, as well as that in line with which pedagogy does not have its own domain. Jurkić does not take sides, but cites Neumann, a pedagogue who says that the specific area observed by pedagogy is precisely education, and that it looks at all scientific areas precisely in terms of education. Thus, Jurkić is moderate in his views on pedagogy; he does not elevate it above other disciplines, but he does not underestimate it either. He does not consider it to be a part of philosophy, but approaches it as a discipline that deals with the process of upbringing. Further in his text, Jurkić analyses the branches of theoretical pedagogy (pedagogical teleology, pedagogical methodology, and pedology) and provides the views of several well-known pedagogues (Jurkić, 1940a, 6-9).

Jurkić devotes approximately one half of his writings on “General Pedagogy” to *pedagogical teleology*, the values, and ways of determining them. This is understandable to a certain extent given that the values present orientation points toward which the will of the learner should be directed. Among other values, he emphasizes ethical and religious values in particular. According to Jurkić, the highest man's reach is ethics and religiosity, that is, the love for his neighbour and harmony with God. The task of pedagogy is to instil, through the development of emotional abilities, in learners a permanent beneficial activity by building character in line with the ideal ethical and religious personalities and virtuous ideals of self-

consciousness, well-being, fairness, and righteousness (Jurkić, 1940a, 10, 18-20).

Although the impression is that Jurkić sees man as a creature with a developed social sensitivity, empathy, proneness to sacrifice, and even culture and art, he also speaks about man as a being which is also to satisfy its sensory needs. In this sense, he insists on a harmonious development of man following a balanced development of the spiritual and physical values. For example, pedagogues are advised to take care of the hygiene of their work area and keep the learner away from influences detrimental to their health, but also to not exaggerate in them so as to not cause a counter-effect. Jurkić praises physical exercise, but says that it should not be overdone since exaggerated external activity causes absentmindedness, nervousness, and rashness, whereas children need to develop concentration, perception, memory, and direct the imagination. He also considers aesthetic values that are simultaneously pedagogic, since they are the source of higher pleasure and a stimulus for active reproduction and creation (Jurkić, 1940a, 13-16). He speaks further on this topic in his work *Katalog izložbe [The Exhibition Catalogue]* (Jurkić, 1911, 4).

Jurkić suggests influencing the learners by alleviating the opposition between the natural tendency to stand out and honour as well as the spirit of sociality and friendship. Due to this, given the individual's self-consciousness and the social consciousness, the educator has a double task: on the one hand, that is "to encourage individual abilities and increase the feeling of one's own strength, i.e. to cultivate individually; and on the other hand to develop understanding and affection for one's neighbour, that is to say, act socially. Hence, the realistic pedagogy, which strives toward ideal goals, requires steady education of both egoistic and altruistic values "by subduing them to the highest values" (Jurkić, 1940a, 17). Educators should have the ability to enter the psyche of their learners, they should have suggestive abilities, a good heart, a lively mood, and wild imagination. Their theoretical knowledge is not enough; they also need to possess practical knowledge which, according to Jurkić, is acquired with training, i.e. with experience (Jurkić, 1940a, 5).

## **2. Pedagogical implementation in *Životna škola Hrvatskog radiše [The Life School of the Croatian Labourer]***

Mirko Jurkić presented personal educational principles in his work *Životna škola Hrvatskog radiše [The Life School of the Croatian Labourer]* (1940). The book is intended for young people (especially high school students) who do not read enough (vocational students), but also for all those who wish to manage themselves and their own destiny and should

somehow adopt a positive attitude towards the community and homeland. A positive attitude implies seriousness in life and work. The text abounds with interesting and dynamic examples from the experiences of people of different backgrounds and property status, as well as from Jurkić's already mature, personal experience. Writing style is simple and comprehensible, with the intention of being translated into life. For example: "The wonderful man pulled up his sleeves, and he breaks and wears himself down from dawn until night... He has gained again, grown again and elevated himself, with his strong will and faith in himself, with his patient and obliging business..." (Jurkić, 1940b, 30-31).

Life presents a constant work and struggle, Jurkić is convinced. It presents work, because life is a constant strain on the muscles and the mind, and a struggle because in life it is necessary "to overcome the disturbances that come from ourselves and outside ourselves: from our bad habits, from laziness, rashness and weak opinion, from other people and opportunities in our environment" (Jurkić, 1940b, 32-33). Therefore, man must be firm, think quickly, work ably, and act wisely. One of the motivational cries is that these times do not allow for weakness. Thus, what should one do and learn so that life never deceives them? Jurkić asks this and answers: Learn from other people's experiences (Jurkić, 1940b, 32-36). One of these forms of learning is the one from history, both from one's own and other peoples' history. Jurkić wrote a brief overview of the Croatian history (Jurkić, 1941, 91). Conversely, the education system (school) offers knowledge, but not the knowledge on how to live. Permanent learning from one's own experience and the experience of others, independent of the teacher and the classroom, according to Jurkić, is a lifelong task of every individual; one's own school in which one should learn the "art of true living" (Jurkić, 1940b, 33-36).

Jurkić starts from the simple fact of man's self-preservation impulse, which results in his reactions to changes happening within himself and the environment. To predict future events and prepare for them is one of the typical reactions. This preparation is most often material in nature. Our author, however, prefers the preparation for future events through the development of will as a personal ability of wanting and striving, alertness, anticipation, and readiness. Jurkić's entire pedagogic effort in the *Croatian Labourer* is focused precisely on the strengthening of the will which must always be awake and ready, and which is an inexhaustible source of energy. In his opinion, this guarantees man's success and enduring happiness (Jurkić, 1940b, 9-10, 74). "You do not know the power of your nerves and your will, nor how far you can develop your abilities: both are limitless. You do not know what

reliefs, but also what disadvantages and unfavourable surprises may come about in your living space; you will be able to foresee them only to a certain extent. In order to turn them into your benefit and good intent, you are going to need the school of life” (Jurkić, 1940b, 10; cf. 154-160).

Jurkić wonders about the possibility of a unique upbringing. He bases his doubt on the direct experience on human diversity, both in regard to the outward appearance as well as to the character and interests. He believes that, despite numerous differences, upbringing should contain unique principles on one’s attitude toward work, sense of order, goal, purpose, utilitarianism toward the society and oneself. He does not neglect the biological heritage, most often determined by the environment in which the individual grew up as well as by individual differences, but he nevertheless alludes to self-consciousness of an individual, self-control: “if you are witnessing a moral trouble in your direct environment, it is above all teaching and obligating you to take after virtue, and to stay away from the vice” (Jurkić, 1940b, 8). Thus, the greater person is the one whose work quality and quantity, and morality can elevate them from an unfavourable environment.

While addressing the young readers, Jurkić says that they will always be under the supervision of the elders, but the main thing, their internal progress will be under their supervision, because they should fight against faults even on their own, not only while being supervised. Jurkić draws attention to a few undesirable characters of young people: those who seek fun without controlling themselves, those who boast on words and forget to work, and those who mock and overlook human pain and suffering (Jurkić, 1940b, 46-54). The same mood is transmitted to the entire nation: “if he is not free and if during liberty he was educated under the rule of law, under the instilled external state authority, he can be held within the bounds of the necessary social order, while deprived of external authority he falls into barbarism, marked by crude wanton, injustice, revengefulness, and cruelty” (Jurkić, 1924, 28). The questions of public morality are discussed in the books *Iz Završja* [*From Završje*] and *Dubrovačka legenda* [*The Legend of Dubrovnik*].

Pedagogical activity in *The Life School of the Croatian Labourer* focuses on five areas: psychological (will), moral (patriotism), practical (success), methodical (self-education), and finally, life (action). The trainee needs to succeed in the following tasks over the course of three years: 1) Manage things with strength, readiness, and gentleness. 2) Pay attention to the living and working environment, neatness, and hygiene. 3) Cultivate the culture of eating: eat without rashness and gluttony, accompanied by light talk or resting of thoughts. 4) Take care



of physiology and body structure, proper breathing, sleep (Jurkić, 1940b, 99-155). In particular, it is important to take care of one's physical health because only a strong (and, according to Jurkić, a well-fed) organism can resist challenges. He advocates movement and exercise, walking, staying in fresh air, but it is the physical work that he considers to be the best and most strengthening exercise. He condones sport but without it becoming a blind passion, because it forces man to be careful, fast, and decisive. It develops collegiality. He encourages swimming. Jurkić describes the course of several exercises which can be performed, as he says, in a ventilated room or outside in fresh air (Jurkić, 1940b, 131-145). The trainee should note down all of his successes, even the smallest ones, in a notebook titled "The Diary of My Successes." Jurkić meticulously describes the appearance of the diary which should contain all the details of one's life, work, appearance, and the like (Jurkić, 1940b, 46-59).

The program of the spiritual rejuvenation of the Croatian youth can be found in Jurkić's *The Prayer of the Young Croatian Labourer* (Jurkić, 1940b, 61-64). The first part of the prayer (for family and home) highlights positive character traits (enlightenment, strength, rejuvenation ...); it mentions the body, love of one's homeland, fidelity, obedience toward the elders. It condemns the unrighteous and spenders, the newcomers who are becoming rich on the treasures of the Croatian land, poisoning the souls of youth and taking away their bodies. He seeks the blessing for innocent victims, consolation for the afflicted, and love for the righteous. All with the goal of restoring, regulating, empowering, and preserving Croatia. The second part (blessing the mother of the country and her children) calls for the rebuilding of agriculture and knowledge. The third part (for the Croatian labourers) demands the liberation of character flaws (vice, wasting time, laziness, spending, greed, envy ...), blessing for collectives, the young, and homeland.

### **3. Pedagogy in Prose in the Collection of Stories *Proljetno cvijeće* [*Spring Flowers*]**

As a concretization of Jurkić's educational principles, we are giving several explanations from his earlier collection of stories *Proljetno cvijeće* (1907). In these stories we find descriptions of some toys and games (Jurkić, 1907, 17), children's eating habits (Jurkić, 1907, 36), as well as detailed descriptions of work done at home, and in the field or during hunting.

The virtue that distinguishes the majority of children characters in these stories (17 of them) is obedience toward their parents. To be obedient means to always follow parental

instructions, and most often they are as follows: be quiet and obedient, do not argue nor fight with your siblings, spend time in your own backyard (Jurkić, 1907, 5-6, 17). If children fail to fulfil parental orders, they usually suffer the consequences in a certain way. Zatica and Janko, despite their mother's prohibition, went deep into the woods and were caught by an evil witch (Jurkić, 1907, 8), while Jure, who disobeyed and thus saddened his father, contracted a serious illness (Jurkić, 1907, 57). However, good children also need to be careful. For instance, they should not be playing with fire and matches (Jurkić, 1907, 19), and they should stay away from bad people (Jurkić, 1907, 13). Bad children are those who do not listen to parents and do harm to other children and beings: "There was one very naughty boy who loved to throw rocks after swallows, trying to kill them" (Jurkić, 1907, 10). However, all those who are evil are punished, sooner or later (Jurkić, 1907, 52).

Jurkić strives to encourage love for nature and natural phenomena in his young readers. He provides a lot of information on the Earth, the Moon, the Sun, forests, and tree differentiation (Jurkić, 1907, 37), good behaviour, hygiene, healing, and so on. He mentions the sea many times, and in one of the stories he describes the sea, the islands, and the waves in detail (Jurkić, 1907, 52-55). In the description of a father rejoicing over his son's success, we can discern Jurkić's excitement: "The father rejoiced when his son beautifully remembered what he had learned at school, and he still asked him, and his son responded well" (Jurkić, 1907, 46).

Jurkić is very empathetic toward animals, especially toward birds (Jurkić, 1907, 18-22). He provides illustrative descriptions on their development, life, and nest building (Jurkić, 1907, 29-30). Throughout these stories he also speaks of freedom: "We are taught to be free, to fly wherever we want: under the heavens and into the woods" (Jurkić, 1907, 21). He likes swallows. They are useful: "Milan knew how many damaging and nasty animals are eaten by a swallow, thus he loved it and said to other child not to touch it" (Jurkić, 1907, 10). In the fable he mediates educational messages: a dog and a cat are arguing and thereby showing their own faults and weaknesses. Their owners heard them and said: "Our dog is fighting the cat. If they continue to spite and fight each other, we will give the dog to a knacker and let him cut off his skin, and throw the cat in the stream" (Jurkić, 1907, 12). The dog and the cat stopped arguing, and perhaps so did the children who read this story. Therefore, another characteristic of good children is that they are good to animals (Jurkić, 1907, 30-32).

The next dimension which Jurkić draws attention to is the social one: children who are merciful and goodhearted, who help the poor and do not mock them, will be rewarded by God

(Jurkić, 1907, 25). Good children have a guardian angel who guides them and keeps them safe. An angel, like an experienced educator, is patient and fulfils the child's wish for knowledge, understands their tiredness and the feeling of being overwhelmed, their straying on the way toward the goal. Yet, he never leaves them (Jurkić, 1907, 14-17).

### **Conclusion**

This paper presents the pedagogical principles of Mirko Jurkić, a realistic narrator, poet, pedagogue, and translator. In his opinion, upbringing primarily denotes the education of the will (character), which is also thought by other pedagogues from the beginning of the previous century, according to a moral ideal. That educational influence is external, deliberate, and features a predetermined, ethical and religious goal pursued by adult individuals. Jurkić advocates appropriate, meticulous, and methodically correct education which is to strive toward the development of positive dispositions, respect the innate abilities, and the particular condition of each individual learner. Such upbringing requires educators who possess not only theoretical knowledge, but also the practical ability to enter the learner's psyche, suggestive abilities, a good heart, lively mood and wild imagination.

Jurkić wants to educate a man endowed with social sensitivity, empathy, proneness to sacrifice, a certain culture, and art. However, he does not ignore the fact that man is a being who needs to satisfy his sensory impulses; that the upbringing is also a biological, not just a social need. Therefore, he insists on a balanced development of both the spiritual and physical values. Ultimately, individuals who undergo upbringing following Jurkić's instructions should be able to manage themselves and their destiny, have a responsible attitude toward life and work, and a utilitarian one toward their community and homeland.

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