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Title: Niepłodność w narracjach małżeństw jako indywidualne i wspólne strategie uczenia się egzystencjalnego/ Infertility in the narrations of married couples as individual and joint strategies of existential learning

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Abstract

The subject of the author's own research presented herein are individual and joint strategies of existential learning worked out by married couples who have experienced infertility. The obtained data reveal how the research participants went through the learning processes during their struggles with this difficult problem.

This work focuses on the effects of informal learning produced by the fact that the respondents experienced the problem of infertility. This is biographical learning which takes place throughout the respondents' lives.

The main theoretical and cognitive aim of this project is to identify the learning strategies associated with the involuntary childlessness. Infertility is an important and controversial issue in the social sphere. It is also a highly sensitive and embarrassing problem for both individuals and married couples, which is hard to define scientifically. The author has implemented qualitative research strategy, within the framework of interpretive paradigm.

The main goal of the research has been achieved by studying the learning strategies adopted by both women and men who were affected by infertility. Previous studies that dealt with pedagogical and sociological perspectives on infertility focused on women only, overlooking the emotional states and social functioning of their infertile partners. In this project the learning process associated with struggles with infertility is discussed with regard to experiences of a woman, man and both partners.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first two chapters present the theoretical background, whereas the third and fourth are of methodological and analytical nature, as they contain the description of implemented research procedure and the analysis and interpretation of research results. Finally, the implications for pedagogical practice are presented.

The first chapter, *Education in life's challenges*, concerns education and learning processes of adults. It shows the importance of reflection in the context of the way in which adults learn. Special attention has been paid to the biographical, transgressive and transformative character of this process. A general overview of the learning theories referring to the practice of life has been presented. Peter Jarvis' theory of existential learning has been chosen as key to the interpretation of research results and is also a starting point for the analysis

of collected research material. This part of work also describes the learning strategies implemented by adults in the course of their informal education.

The second chapter, *Social contexts of the phenomenon of infertility*, presents the issues associated with the importance of fertility from both macro and microsocial perspectives. This part takes into consideration the ongoing changes in the family life which might have an impact on marriage decisions and procreative plans as well as ways of putting them into effect by young Poles. The chapter contains also the analysis of a disease called infertility, which is the other key concept in this work. Possible reactions of people diagnosed with infertility have been presented as well as types of frustrations that they feel while having difficulty in conceiving. Available measures which are intended to overcome infertility and are most frequently adopted by couples have also been described in this part.

The chapter *Methodological basis for the author's own research* contains the detailed premises of research, the research approach, the aim of research, the research issues, the research method and technique, research tools used, the research characteristics and organization, as well as the description of the study group.

The last chapter, *The learning process associated with struggles with infertility from the perspective of the author's own research*, is the most extensive part of this thesis. It presents the analysis of the parts of narration provided by the research participants in order to show the learning processes from the individual and joint perspective. Learning strategies used by individuals and couples have been highlighted. The results of learning processes that took place among infertile individuals and couples have been discussed. Various conditions of this process have been distinguished and implications for pedagogical practice have been formulated.

This study, by focusing on the learning processes of infertile couples, gives an in-depth pedagogical view of the subject matter, yet it does not cover all its aspects. It can be a starting point for posing next research questions. It is worth considering if it is necessary to prepare adolescents for such situations and how to do it; how existential learning can be improved and if it can take less time; what the new roles of pedagogues are as new social needs are appearing. It is not possible to enumerate all questions about the ways in which pedagogy can be used in new and common social situations, but every step towards educational support of people who need it is worth considering and taking.

The main educational message connected with the issue of involuntary childlessness that emerges from this study is that effective pedagogical actions should be taken as regards the knowledge and skills which would develop the procreative potential of young people (e.g. the

extensive social campaigns and educational programmes, individual talks in doctor's surgeries and nurse's offices).

Key words: existential learning, infertility, woman, man, married couple