

Julita Orzelska  
ORCID: 0000-0002-2539-1736  
University of Szczecin

# Pedagogy of Existence in the Face of an Ageing Society

Pedagogika egzystencji w obliczu  
starzejącego się społeczeństwa

## ABSTRACT

The main idea of this article is to highlight the possibility for people to receive important developmental stimuli that are relevant to their existence at every stage of life, not excluding the last phase of life, through the use of knowledge in various areas of the humanities and social sciences. This scattered knowledge should be comprehensively utilized by pedagogy as a science that is particularly sensitive to the developmental impact on all generations of people in every stage of their lives, with special attention to the elderly. Aware of the multidimensionality of human existence, pedagogy should take care to assimilate new stimuli for human development, which are necessary in every phase of human life, not excluding the last one: old age. In view of the multiple existential challenges facing modern society, it is necessary to consider whether pedagogy in its various disciplinary scopes is able to approach a person holistically and understand human life integrally. The responsibility for the quality of human life, both young and old, makes it necessary to draw inspiration and “read” the tropes across all scientific disciplines, while treating the human being holistically and caring for a life lived in a valuable way.

## KEYWORDS

aging society,  
pedagogy of  
existence, existential  
challenges,  
developmental tropes,  
concern for human life

## SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

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## ABSTRAKT

Osią narracji tekstu jest uwypuklenie możliwości uzyskania przez człowieka ważnych impulsów rozwojowych, istotnych dla jego egzystencji na każdym etapie życia, nie wykluczając ostatniej jego fazy, dzięki wykorzystaniu wiedzy rozproszonej w rozmaitych obszarach humanistyki i nauk społecznych. Ta rozproszona wiedza winna być wszechstronnie wykorzystywana przez pedagogikę jako naukę szczególnie wyczerpaną na oddziaływanie rozwojowe wobec kolejnych pokoleń ludzi w każdej fazie ich życia, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem osób w wieku podeszłym. Świadoma wielowymiarowości egzystencji ludzkiej pedagogika winna dbać o przyswajanie i przetwarzanie nowych impulsów rozwojowych, koniecznych w każdej fazie ludzkiego życia, nie wykluczając tej ostatniej, czyli starości. Z powodu wielorakich wyzwań egzystencjalnych, przed jakimi staje dziś współczesne społeczeństwo, niezbędną jest refleksja nad tym, czy pedagogika w jej poszczególnych zakresach dyscyplinarnych potrafi podchodzić do człowieka integralnie i czy integralnie rozumie życie ludzkie. Odpowiedzialność za jakość egzystencji człowieka, zarówno młodego, jak i starego każe czerpać inspiracje i „odczytywać” tropy w poprzek dyscyplin naukowych, traktując człowieka integralnie, dbając o życie przeżyte w sposób wartościowy.

## Introduction – development impulses in the face of human concern

Existential issues are essential in social sciences and humanities research. They are studied for their own sake and with their own methods, which is also true of all pedagogical subdisciplines that deal with existential issues concerning both children and adults. Each of the subdisciplines of pedagogy refers to human existence, but because this knowledge is not always fully used we can say that the achievements of one discipline or subdiscipline are insufficiently used by others. The various achievements of the social sciences and humanities are often considered in general terms, but are not reflected in other fields that can benefit from them, provided they are used appropriately (Orzelska 2012–2013: 107–108).

In this text I emphasise the possibility of obtaining some important developmental impulses<sup>1</sup> that serve existence at every stage of human life, not excluding the last one. This is possible thanks to a wider use of knowledge dispersed among various humanities and social sciences. This dispersed knowledge should be comprehensively used by pedagogy, as a science that is particularly sensitive to the developmental impact towards successive generations of people in every phase of their lives, with a particular focus on late adulthood<sup>2</sup> (Orzelska 2012–2013: 108). Thus, a broader and more insightful (in terms of application) reflection, with sensitivity to the needs of people in each phase of life, turns out to be necessary.

This reflection should be aimed at a better implementation of both the achievements that are already practically present and recognised, as well as those that are lost, forgotten or disregarded by, on the one hand, an overly superficial approach to social progress, the quality of democracy or the macro-social processes of civilisation, and the process of ageing on the other hand. It is because such oversights do not go unnoticed with regard to the micro-phenomena related to people of all ages, their psyche and ability to cope with everyday life, as well as the broader developmental mechanisms of the civil society

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- 1 I understand developmental impulses as inspirations that arise from an alternative “reading” of humanities and social sciences research with a view to the “benefits” for contemporary pedagogy in the context of human beings and their well-being. The inspiration for giving new meanings and the area of reading alternative references to responsible perception of the processes of education and upbringing should include the works of authors (admittedly not included in the canon of pedagogical readings) that contain, as Zbigniew Kwieciński (2007: 119–120) writes, “extensive areas of ‘discrete’ pedagogies can be found, that is, those that can be read indirectly as pedagogies, although their authors did not regard their works as pedagogies themselves.”
  - 2 To denote people over 60, as Zygmunt Wiatrowski (2015: 17) writes, “various names and terms are used: retirement age, third age, senior age, old age, late adulthood, and others, with the term senior age being popularised since the 1990s.” Wiatrowski (2009: 26–27) distinguishes between periods of late adulthood and old age, without treating them identically, indicating successive sub-periods and corresponding age ranges within them. Late adulthood is from 50 to 60–65 years of age (earlier phases of adulthood are (1) early adulthood, from 17–21 to 33 years of age and (2) middle adulthood, from 33 to 50 years of age). Old age (as defined by the World Health Organization) includes (1) old age, from 60 to 75 years of age; (2) senile age, from 75 to 90 years of age and (3) very old age: over 90 years of age.

in which older people should play key roles, and not remain on the margins. In the face of an ageing society and increasing intergenerational distance, it becomes important to define the relationship between various disciplines of knowledge—such as between pedagogy and psychology—and especially to activate the possibility of cross-inspiration with research achievements within individual disciplines of the humanities and social sciences (Orzelska 2012–2013: 108). This must be done with the awareness that traditional relationships and circulating notions of interdisciplinary cooperation are no longer sufficient, and that advanced suggestions for seeing these references and changing interpretative perspectives are needed.

In order for pedagogy to develop a strategy of existence that is sensitive to the well-being of people of all ages, including seniors, it seems particularly important to realise that in the life of both individuals and society as a whole, today we can observe a shortage of non-occupational competences and an overgrowth of formalism that makes it difficult to take care of a person's true well-being.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly true for people who are (no longer) able to take care of themselves and are dependent on the care of others. Old age has different phases and an individual, heterogeneous course, depending on one's previous lifestyle, health status, degree of involvement in work and economic resources, among other things (Straś-Romanowska 2002: 265). However, it can be generally stated that old age is characterised by “a decline in vital functions and a number of morphological changes in individual systems and organs” (Wiatrowski 2009: 26). Thus, the example of elderly people, some of whom are lost, burdened with illnesses or unable to improve the comfort of their lives, can be an invitation to discuss how pedagogy copes with the requirement of preparing a person to experience their own old age.

What is particularly important are manifestations of helplessness in difficult situations, stress, depression and hopelessness, sometimes increasing aggression, an inability to influence one's emotions, to give meaning to one's life or reach for higher forms of self-fulfilment, a readiness for empathy and attitudes open to benevolent cooperation

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3 Helping older people “to make maximum use of psychological reserves and to make old age a satisfying time” (Straś-Romanowska 2002: 264) is a concern for a multigenerational society and, at the same time, the fulfilment of an important social task.

(Orzelska 2012–2013: 108). Societal expectations of pedagogy arise from changes, among which the issue of an ageing society and the complexity of human existence should be a priority in the debate on the most pressing social challenges. I believe that it is necessary today to develop an existentially sensitive pedagogy which should prioritise concern for the quality of human life, whatever stage it may be in. Such a pedagogy would match the challenges brought about by the current changes in the social structure which, at the same time, determine the directions and scopes of the support and assistance required.

In various fields of humanities research, in the scientific examination of human development and in the promotion of this development, there has long been a search for methods that can be inscribed in the scientific practice of the humanities. On the other hand, it has also been understood that this “scientific” practice must be sensitive in a humanistic manner, in a special meaning of this word. On the one hand, this has resulted in the emergence and development of various versions of sociology in different disciplines (e.g. with a so-called “humanistic factor” in Florian Znaniecki’s texts), also those dealing with “human affairs”, as in the title of Jan Szczepański’s book or, in recent decades, in Zygmunt Bauman’s considerations on the human condition in “postmodernity” or “liquid modernity”, which have become very successful and popular in recent decades (Bauman 2008, 2010; Witkowski 2007b: 273–280; Jaworska-Witkowska 2008: 213–242).

In the field of psychology, a broad current of psychoanalysis has emerged, as have its complementary elements in the form of humanistic psychology and psychotherapy. It is worth recalling that in the 1930s, Charlotte Bühler—the author of one of the most important psychological inspirations for Polish pedagogy of the time—postulated a vision of embracing the “course of life” and noted that “the psychology of spiritual attitudes, interests and initiative has not yet found its creator” (Bühler 1933: 325). I take this as a signal that the category of “human attitudes” demanded the development of research methods that were intended to yield important insights into the complexity of human life and the “phase” approach to development, crowned by Erik H. Erikson’s life course model. There was also the prospect of understanding the situation of a human being

in each phase of life, not excluding the last one, entangled in developmental and situational challenges for which one must be able to prepare oneself or with which one must struggle as obstacles, but also as thresholds, in spiritual or psychological development (Orzelska 2012–2013: 109–110).

It is also worth noting that—given the pedagogical search for a valuable and useful psychological concept for pedagogy—elements present in Gestalt psychology (reconstructed by Lech Witkowski; see Witkowski 2014) can be distinguished in approaches such as that of Helena Radlińska. On the other hand, attempts at a humanistic reflection on existence, which include Paul Tillich’s reflections (Tillich 1951, 1952, 1957, 1963), are complemented by “depth psychology” or, as the researcher calls it, “analytical psychology”, which is particularly related to Carl Gustav Jung’s concept underlying those references. We should also emphasise Teresa Borowska’s (1998) important use of the analyses of Victor Frankl (1948, 1950, 1963, 1988), for whom the cognitive sensitivity of pedagogy concerns the interface with the therapeutic reference to the limitations of human existence, which one must be able to recognise and overcome. The importance of inscribing in pedagogy (through Frankl’s inspiration) a concern for the “meaning of life” in the face of existential difficulties (e.g. the suffering and worries of the elderly, but not only) is indicated in the work of Jarosław Tomasz Michalski (2011). Pedagogy can, and even should, engage in the process of assimilating and processing such new impulses, especially concerning the complexity of human existence subject to deep reflection by various disciplines of human sciences. This is all the more important because, for a long time now, the category of “difficult life” or life dominated by “difficult situations”—in the sense of developmental barriers, obstacles and adaptation difficulties in the face of rapidly progressing social changes—including various experiences of deprivation, exclusion, stigmatisation or humiliation—has become extremely important for pedagogy (Orzelska 2012–2013: 110). This becomes important if we refer to the needs of a person of senior age, weaker in health and not always able to cope efficiently in a given social situation. A changing reality, which brings about new challenges, confronts people—especially older people—with difficult tasks arising from a rapidly changing world. Then it often turns out that we need to make

a comprehensive effort that encompasses various aspects of human identity in order to reach out, establish contact, obtain consent to intervene (if only by being present), be sympathetic, understand or mitigate resistance to our support and assistance.

It is important to consider the extent to which pedagogy in its various disciplinary scopes is able to approach the human being integrally, bearing in mind first and foremost the prevailing existential challenges, whether it is itself an integral discipline (i.e. whether it understands life and the care of life integrally) and whether it draws on the achievements of other fields of the humanities. Many prominent figures in the pedagogical tradition have long emphasised the need for such integrity. In Poland, Bogdan Suchodolski (1959, 1967, 1968) and Irena Wojnar (1964, 2000, 2016) were leaders in such an approach, although we also find it in the new generation of researchers or in various disciplines, including the concern for integrity or the integration of different didactic approaches found in contemporary pedagogy (Orzelska 2012–2013: 112).

Existential challenges, due to their complexity and importance at every stage of human life, always prompt pedagogical reflection. This is particularly true of reflection on old age, which, in the face of the problem of an ageing population, seems to be an existential challenge in itself. It seems that, when faced with a concern for human life, we make insufficient use of the achievements of various disciplines and, above all, can perhaps be too optimistically content with their narrow and one-sided approaches. Perhaps those one-sided approaches are proving to be of little use in perceiving the full subjectivity of the addressees of our interventions at different stages of their lives, particularly in old age. Perhaps, with a concern for the depth of impact and responsibility for the quality of society's existence, it is worth interacting and drawing on each other's inspiration, "reading the tropes" as it were, across various disciplines, keeping in mind not only the "restorative" intervention, but, above all, the need to treat a human being in an integral way.

Such a perspective makes it possible to highlight the theoretical connections and the importance between perspectives that are formally non-contiguous and disconnected in the biographies of individual researchers, yet may be related to each other against the narrowness of their inscription in particular disciplinary frameworks.

It is clear to me that the existential aspects of education do not allow themselves to be placed within a single pedagogical discipline, but require a whole range of theoretical contexts operating across the formal divisions of various disciplines. They should certainly be taken into account more widely in pedagogy and used in individual areas of concern for the fate of seniors.

In contemporary pedagogical discourse, there is an increasing emphasis on the need for interventions or developmental support addressed to the “frail human being” facing “difficult situations”. This is pedagogy’s response to the existential challenges of the elderly, which constitute a barrier for them looking after their well-being. Weaknesses can be exposed by the magnitude of the challenge, which—situated, for example, in the human experience as bearing an “identity crisis”—even requires a state of “re-birth”, as echoed in Erikson’s rhetoric, if one uses a perspective that highlights the drama of dealing with existentially difficult situations (Orzelska 2012–2013: 113–114). Non-trivial emphases are present in literature (both fiction and specialist books) in terms of challenges to pedagogy, which of course have a variety of narrative forms; the concern for the pedagogical shaping of human existence requires a broader view of the processes that determine the developmental profiles of identity, recognised by tracing the phenomena that make up the phase structure of the life cycle.

### The dramaturgy of older people’s existence as a pedagogical challenge

A key premise for a new perspective on the tasks of pedagogy seems to be the growing “paradigmatic fracture”, which consists in moving away from what I would call a classical attitude, based on ideas of harmony and harmonisation, or perfection and improvement, or at least comprehensiveness, and an ideal project equipped with ready-made hierarchies of values and unambiguous criteria for the good of virtues and the evil of transgressions. Meanwhile, the modern world is dominated by a new type of problem that people, especially older people, have with themselves, with their own lives, that is, answering questions about its meaning, its value and its



orientation. In the face of a civilisation-wide identity crisis, life itself does not become a sufficient excuse for it to last and for people to feel responsible for it. Thanks to Margaret Mead and other contemporary anthropology and sociology researchers, in the face of an ageing society we are aware of a change in the direction and scale of intergenerational distances towards a variant in which it is the elderly who cannot keep up with the world to which the young adapt most easily. This destroys intergenerational ties and deepens distance, even rifts, especially for an older generation unable to keep up with a rapidly changing world. From the young generation, being without civilisation complexes and without the ballast of outdated encumbrances or rigid identifications, it is necessary to learn how to overcome psychological barriers resulting from new technologies and cultural/civilisational equipment, not only in the form of gadgets but also in the form of completely new procedures and devices populating a world increasingly alien to the older generations. Meanwhile, without becoming familiar with this new instrumentation, there can be no question of settling into the social world, and a sense of alienation may even be born. For contemporary pedagogy, the triad of types of these distances has even become canonical, as Margaret Mead writes about in her book *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap* (1970), where the sequence is marked by categories modelling intergenerational relations in terms of post-figurativeness (stability in the long-term dominance of the past), co-figurativeness (removal of the past beyond the acquiescence of the intergenerational compromise of dominant adults in their relation to the younger generation) and pre-figurativeness (the older generation's orientation towards the dominant power of the younger generation's adaptation to the changing conditions). Not surprisingly, modern psychoanalysis makes us sensitive to (as Erikson says) the fact that, having many problems in the world (with choosing to be right or understanding otherness in a dynamic lifestyle), older people increasingly have a problem with themselves, failing to cope with the challenges of their own lives and to give them meaning, value and an identity based on a sense of coherence, distinctiveness and stability.

As I understand it, it is not the task of the pedagogy of existence to give answers to the questions of how to live, what to believe or what is right and what is wrong. It primarily should develop the cognitively

and morally difficult capacity to cope and to help others cope with the complexities of life inscribed in various situational dilemmas or challenges of everyday life. Raising awareness of structural complexities which make it difficult to make clear choices, which are instead entangled in aporia or ambivalence, is a task linked to the concern for a creative approach to existential tasks—seen not only as inscribed in the challenges of the successive stages of human life, but linearly, looking at life as a whole. Existentially relevant pedagogy draws on a diversity of impulses and inquiries, rarely put together or treated as different sides of the same coin, which is used to price the value of concern for the quality of our being in the world and coping with life, diagnosing the difficulties, complexities or dangers of human beings, both young and old. It seems that too many of the effects of cognitive endeavours have so far been treated in isolation, not sufficiently seen not only in the interdisciplinary but even in integral manner, especially if they concern the same phenomena and challenges. We are obliged to think first and foremost of the fullest possible promotion of human development and its potential to shape a world that does not primarily carry the threat of collective annihilation or individual degradation. At the same time, it is a matter of reaffirming the hope that reference will be made to the noble ideals of respect for human dignity, freedom, the right to personal happiness of every human being—including the elderly, in the last phase of life—and to the absorption and multiplication of the cultural heritage of humanity to which everyone has the right to feel heir.

### Existential tasks in the face of an ageing society – inspirations from Erik H. Erikson

Concern for the human being at any age, and especially old age, requires a sensitive pedagogy that understands the existential tasks found in each phase of life, in which successful solutions to various crises are a response to existential challenges that often require reorganisation and support of vital forces with new qualities. From a pedagogical point of view, the developmental process seen in this context requires the learning of new adaptations and the assimilation and taming of new psychological forces and social conditions that

appear in the situations that an individual has to experience according to their age and, even more so, to a given developmental phase.

It is therefore worth taking a closer look at the possibility of programming an existentially relevant pedagogy from the perspective of the existential tasks of different phases of the life cycle in Erikson's (1998) terms, whilst simultaneously treating this task as a clarification of how the problem of residualness looks, based on the example of an individual's identity profile.

According to Erikson, each of the eight phases of the life cycle is characterised not only by a different vital energy, representing the derived residual potential that comprises the full vertical profile of the individual's identity. Erikson characterises these phases by describing their guiding energies through eight pairs of structural tension, which requires a constant balancing of phase dominants. The problem of distinguishing and relating the types of vital energy of the phases is what is particularly interesting, as it draws our attention (in a different way than usual) to a series of pedagogical tasks that complete, as Erikson expressed it, the set of existential tasks that the individual gradually faces in the life cycle, not excluding the last phase of old age. Even in old age, in the face of death, it is necessary to be able to re-learn something, to maintain the vital energy of this phase, understood in its final version as "life wisdom", which balances our ability to value life against the reasons for despair in relation to the realities of one's own existence.

According to Erikson's description of the life cycle, in the process of human development there is a displacement of the developmental dominance of individual phases; thus, age is not a sufficient marker of advancement in development. Alongside this process, a new existential task arises each time, related to the discovery of a new vital energy—the main one in a given phase, but also one that is indispensable for the entire life cycle. A pedagogical task therefore arises, and sometimes—because of the scale of the challenge, in view of the lateness of intervention or the weakness of developmental support—already a therapeutic one, perhaps even one requiring clinical practice and special medical assistance (e.g. in the face of suicide attempts). In such a situation, the task of the pedagogy of existence is to intervene in a process that does not yet require stronger measures such as pharmacological intervention, hospitalisation or serious therapy, when

a real threat to life comes to the fore (e.g. in depression, dementia or other illnesses that may occur in old age). It should also be noted that disruptions to human vitality, which make up deficits of energy that can dynamise or stabilise the functioning of the individual, can also be expressed in excesses that make it difficult, in a given phase, to balance the structurally inevitable tensions.

It appears necessary to recognise various components (residues) of vitality, which can determine energy levels of life-giving impulses or new potentials of vitality, as energy for life or life activity, or at least its potential. Without this, one may lack the will to live, lose the sense of meaning in life or experience a sense of hopelessness, anxiety, despair or inner chaos. Complementing the eight phases, seen from the perspective of eight pairs of developmental dominant tensions, we have eight vital energies that allow us to recognise eight existential tasks and eight areas of intellectual (theoretical) and practical concern in the field of pedagogy. These tasks do not coincide with traditional divisions into pedagogical (sub)disciplines, but run across them and require drawing on each other's output. The point is that the vitalities present in the different phases are permanent and inalienable components of human equipment, even though their location in the identity constellation of the individual changes.

With these categories in mind, the following lines of reflection can be distinguished: (1) the pedagogy of hope, (2) the pedagogy of will, (3) the pedagogy of imagination, (4) the pedagogy of expertise, (5) the pedagogy of fidelity, (6) the pedagogy of care, (7) the pedagogy of creativity and (8) the pedagogy of life wisdom. Of course, the names could be different, but the point is to indicate the focus of pedagogical reflection. From each phase of the life cycle, residual (i.e. essential as components of the whole process) answers to questions about what a person creates or what makes up their identity, are brought into the identity profile. The above reconstruction shows that each of us is constituted by (1) what/who is the source of my hope, (2) what I am able to want and what I am able to claim, (3) what/who I am able to imagine, (4) what I am able to be professional at (at the highest possible level), (5) what/who I am able to identify with, deeming them worthy of my faithfulness, (6) what/who I want to care for by withdrawing from other relationships and forms of commitment, (7) what I want to leave from myself as important for

others, also for the next generations and (8) what/who allows me to value life with its limitations (illness or death), fears and even despair.

I treat the above remarks as indicative only, and due to the needs of the text, in the following part I only refer to the last line of pedagogical reflection. In suggesting the adoption of such names for residual pedagogies, I follow Lech Witkowski's juxtaposition of Erikson's identity residues that emerge from particular life phases (Witkowski 2007a: 342–344; 2009). Thus, Erikson's life cycle model makes it possible to profile the identity of pedagogy in terms of indicating the scopes for which responsibility is determined, in turn, by particular spheres of pedagogical thinking.

The vital energies indicated in different phases of life can, at the same time, define important categories of existential pedagogy which are aspects of pedagogical concern towards the condition of every human being, whether child, adult or older person. Below, I take a closer look at the residue relating to the last phase of life in the human identity profile.

The pedagogy of life wisdom seems perhaps the most paradoxical in this set, but it is the one that is most necessary in the face of an ageing society. Its importance also stems from the fact that the importance of life wisdom here is based on the need to balance the “need for integrity” understood as the ability to value life itself integrally in the face of the coming death. In the context of caring for the elderly, the need for this kind of pedagogy becomes obvious, if only because of their gradual psychophysical deterioration, increasing anxiety and even despair. It is also about a paradoxical affirmation of life in the face of death, and therefore a kind of rehabilitation of death as an immanent stage of human life, or at least taming it in a way that not only does not require dreaming of immortality, but—as John Paul II amazingly highlighted in his testament—allows one to open up to the hope that “death will be useful”, i.e. it will be good to those who, in the time of mourning after the loss of their loved ones, are able to make a deep reflection on the meaning of their own lives. The pedagogy of life wisdom requires the existence of a philosophy of death that supports the care of the experience of mourning understood as an effort to “work through lack”, which thanks to Freud's psychoanalysis is recognised as an extremely difficult experience and, in terms of ritualising mourning, even impossible to carry out. Specialists in

pedagogical approaches to death are much needed here. It is also necessary to create a pedagogical approach to preparing people (including volunteers) to work in hospices or to make mature decisions, e.g. to include children in family funeral ceremonies, as well as to help them to experience mourning that directly affects them, e.g. after the loss of a favourite pet or in the face of a death that they cannot be spared from experiencing. Existentially lived religious faith can help in such situations, taking the form of a communal religious experience, it can also be psychotherapeutic or logotherapeutic due to its emphasis on the meaning of human suffering and protecting the value of life with its painful experiences and even traumas. Inscribing this kind of experience in a perspective of meaning can serve to work through emotions, liberating people from the danger of removing value from their own lives.

## Conclusion

In the brief reference to various forms of existentially oriented pedagogy, approaches that emphasise fundamental tropes in different ways should not be neglected in the concern for both education for old age and for a meaningful, satisfying life for older people. Some of the identified tropes focus on the importance of a meaningful life; others emphasise the need to grapple with existential destiny. Meanwhile, it seems reasonable to postulate the creation of such a pedagogy which looks at existential challenges from the perspective of tasks characteristic of individual developmental phases, though they also permeate all links of the life cycle, causing the situation—inconvenient from the point of view of traditional disciplinary divisions—that one should be a specialist in universal problems, and not only in those phenomena linked to a given phase of life. In such a view, for example, andragogy, in its approach to adults, cannot fail to take into account problems that involve other phases. Similarly, care and educational pedagogy cannot fail to take into account more broadly the needs of children, treated as challenges that influence the quality of human functioning in subsequent life phases. Recognising vitality deficits requires reference to a broader palette of possible life-cycle disruptions, but this cannot be achieved with a narrow perspective,

dissected from the general mechanisms present in the structure of lifelong experience.

Acknowledging a range of references that do not belong only to the canon of pedagogical readings, but are inscribed in the significant output of other disciplines and narrative types, is essential to further inspire pedagogy in its search for an “optimum experience” (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) consistent with the highest standards of concern for human “being” (freedom and development). This is possible if one takes into account the pedagogical ideas that are, in various ways, hidden, fake or dispersed beyond the author’s intentionality, but inscribed in the texts themselves, which will allow one to understand, for example, the types of discourses cited by Zbigniew Kwieciński and Monika Jaworska-Witkowska (2011). The guiding idea for change in pedagogy should be a concern for human vitality in the form of an integral valuing of life, or more precisely the meaning of one’s actions and situation in the context of one’s whole life, in each phase of life. Pedagogy, if it is to be valuable, in all its forms faces the task of caring for the existential aspects of the human condition. Above all, it is not about a narrow focus, but about opening up a broader horizon of understanding of man and his world in a changing and ageing society. Fortunately, the humanities are full of impulses that can greatly contribute to the formula of existentially relevant interactions towards the human being in every phase of life, including old age, according to the ideas of upbringing to old age, upbringing in old age and upbringing through old age (Janke 2000: 171–176). Pedagogy’s emphasis on the value of human existence, which should also be reflected in its curricular implementations in education, is not merely academic, but refers to civil society and its ability to transmit to the next generation the impulse to undertake communal and individualised concern for man and the future of civilisation—with a view to the fate of every human being, young and old. As pedagogues, we must not expose ourselves to the statement in the title of Milan Kundera’s famous novel that *Life is Elsewhere*. Life is where there is human community, where there is concern for every human being, including those at the end of their lives.

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ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE:

Julita Orzelska  
University of Szczecin  
Institute of Pedagogy  
e-mail: jorzelska@wp.pl