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*The Value of Memoir Competitions in Pedeutology  
in the Context of Defining New Research Areas on Teachers  
and the Teaching Profession*

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Wartość konkursów pamiętnikarskich w pedeutologii w kontekście wyznaczania nowych obszarów  
badań nad zawodem i osobą nauczyciela

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ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the specificity of memoir competitions in pedeutology. The most important assumptions and ideas of competitions in pedeutology, as well as the use of the biographical method in describing the functioning of teachers in Poland over the last hundred years are described. Six memoir competitions, together with the described and developed scientific categories, were analysed in order to reveal common points of research which makes it possible to portray the teaching profession through the prism of the selected categories, as well as to show the most frequently undertaken studies on the teaching profession. Additionally, some research categories which are undertaken sporadically are presented, as well as categories which are absent but desirable due to the dynamics of changes, are indicated.

**Keywords:** teacher; biography; memoir competitions; pedeutology

INTRODUCTION

In their conceptual assumptions, memoir competitions for teachers refer to research initiated by Florian Znanięcki, who was the first to introduce a method of drawing research data from biographical material, namely memoir competitions,

as well as provided a basis for the use of the biographical method in sociological research (see Znaniecki 2018a, 2018b, pp. 27–28). He explained the purposefulness and potential of using autobiography in order to learn about social groups, and at the same time proved the value of research based on subjective understanding and perception of the world.

Memoir competitions involved teachers already in the interwar period, and continued after World War II. However, they were not developed by educators (or pedeutologists), but by sociologists. Therefore, they rather revealed the social contexts of the teaching profession, just as it was the case of any other profession (because memoir competitions announced by sociologists were addressed at various professional groups). In pedeutology, research initiated by Jadwiga Nowak and her team, which was preceded by a memoir competition and methodological development of materials obtained through the competition, can be considered as a starting point of biographical research on the teaching profession by means of materials obtained through competitions (Łukasik, 2021).

The presented article reviews biographical research in pedeutology by means of materials obtained through competitions in order to highlight dominant, marginal and absent research areas, as well as to show the value of biographical studies for constructing quantitative research.

## THE SPECIFICITY OF MEMOIR COMPETITIONS IN PEDEUTOLOGY

Memoir competitions for teachers were the subject of interest of many researchers, scientific institutions and teachers' organisations (e.g. the Polish Teachers' Union [*Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego*, ZNP], the Polish Pedagogical Society [*Polskie Towarzystwo Pedagogiczne*, PTP]), with particular intensity until the end of the 1950s. Unfortunately, only few of them were published by scientific pedeutologists. After a period of declining interest at the time of communism, with dominant ideology reflected in the quantitative paradigm, the tradition returned to pedeutology in the early 1980s, on the initiative of the Warsaw Branch of the PTP and Prof. Jadwiga Nowak with her research team.

The remainder of the article focuses on diary competitions initiated exclusively by pedeutologists, taking into account two criteria: 1. The competition announcement was disseminated to recipients through all available means (including the trade press) and 2. Scientific data was obtained from biographical material by means of competitions.

Six diary competitions for teachers meet these criteria:

- one competition from 1984, announced on the initiative of Jadwiga Nowak and the Warsaw Branch of the Polish Pedagogical Society;
- three competitions announced on the initiative of Wanda Dróżka: 1. 1992–1993 (“Young Generation Teachers’ Memoirs”), 2. 2002–2004 (“Teacher’s

- Maturity”), 3. 2014–2016 (“Teacher’s Message. Generations of Polish Teachers for the Care of the Future”);
- two competitions announced on the initiative of Joanna M. Łukasik for teachers’ memoir reports (“A Month in a Teacher’s Life”): 1. 2009 and 2. 2014–2015.

There was one more competition in pedeutology, i.e. the 2012 “My experiences as an early childhood education teacher” contest organised by Anetta Soroka-Fedorczuk and Mirosława Nyczaj-Draż from the University of Zielona Góra. However, due to the lack of scientific studies of the research material (Soroka-Fedorczuk, 2015; Soroka-Fedorczuk & Nyczaj-Draż, 2015), the competition will not be included in the presented article.

The 1984 competition, organised by Jadwiga Nowak and the Warsaw Branch of the Polish Pedagogical Society, will be analyzed first, as it marked a point of return to the rich diaristic traditions that had been absent for almost 30 years in teachers’ scientific and social spaces. It is worth adding here that the idea and method of processing data, supplemented with data from surveys, was closer to the school of Ludwik Krzywicki, even though the idea of competitions referred directly to the premises formulated by Znaniecki and his school (form more see: Łukasik, 2021; Skibińska, 2016).

The competition announced by Nowak and her team aimed at obtaining material “which would enrich knowledge about the teaching profession, as well as characterise its ethos and transformation, documenting the role and rank of teachers in the education of the nation” (Nowak, 1991, p. 8). Due to the fact that the competition was a significant research project which had not been practiced in pedagogy/pedeutology for several decades, in order to obtain the most comprehensive material showing various aspects of teachers’ professional work, the organisers decided not to narrow the scope of its content. In this way, the announcement of the competition contained general slogans, such as “choice of profession, professional adaptation, working and living conditions, professional aspirations and development, professional successes and failures, teachers’ social activity, value system and ethos of the profession, an ideal teacher, teachers and their pupils or breakthrough moments in their social and professional life” (Nowak, 1991, p. 8).

One hundred and forty diaries were submitted, 3 of which were not subject to evaluation as they were not signed by their authors. Seventy-eight diaries were written by female teachers and 59 by male teachers. The findings were posthumously published in the monograph *Przemiany zawodu nauczycielskiego* [*Transformations of the Teaching Profession*] (1991). Most likely, the death of the organiser of the competition (Nowak, 1991; more see: Łukasik, 2021) stopped all future re-editions of the competition.

Further competitions in pedeutology were announced on the initiative of Prof. Wanda Dróżka. The scientist was a continuator of the methodological school

of Znaniecki and Józef Chałasiński, which is confirmed by her cooperation with Bronisław Gołębiowski and joint implementation of competition initiatives, along with her approach to the idea of competitions and the biographical method in scientific studies. She organised three teacher-memoir competitions. Their goal was to learn about teachers' professional and personal experiences, about their aspirations, activities, and future prospects in the context of social, political, economic and cultural changes, as well as to recognise generational differences among this professional group (the differences were determined by social changes experienced by generation after generation of teachers). It is worth emphasising that Dróżka consistently carried out her research projects with particular emphasis on generations (the first generation of young teachers at whom the competition was addressed in 1992–1993 took part in the next competition as a middle-aged generation in 2002–2004 and as a retiring generation in 2014–2016), which made it possible for the researchers to capture changes in the generation of witnesses, participants and creators of the social and cultural change after the collapse of communism.

She organised the First National Memoir Competition for the Young Generation of Teachers (1992–1993) at the Institute of Pedagogy of the Higher Pedagogical School in Kielce in cooperation with the Department of Philosophy and Sociology of Politics at the University of Warsaw and the Society of Polish Memoirs. In order to obtain spontaneous, personal statements, the competition was not focused on a single slogan. However, it was addressed at a specific age group indicated in the name of the competition (20–35 years of age). It lasted from November 1992 until the end of April 1993. One hundred and twenty teachers took part in its first edition, and 111 autobiographies were analysed, 20 of which were published in the collection *Moja twarz jest niepowtarzalna* [*My Face Is Unique*] (1993a). Subsequently, the analyses and scientific studies were published as: *Pokolenie nauczycieli* [*A Generation of Teachers*] (1993b) and *Młode pokolenie nauczycieli* [*A Young Generation of Teachers*] (1996) (see Dróżka, 1993a, 1993b, 1996).

Dróżka organised the Second National Memoir Competition for Teachers under the slogan “Teacher’s Maturity” under the auspices of the Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology of the Świętokrzyska University in Kielce and in cooperation with the Sociopolitical Memoir Workshop of the University of Warsaw and the Society of Friends of Memoirs. Similarly to the first edition, the name of the competition pointed to a desired age group of 35–55, i.e. middle-aged teachers. It was announced in the autumn of 2002 with the original deadline for December 2003, i.e. exactly 10 years after the announcement of the first edition. However, due to the great interest in the competition, at teachers’ request, the deadline was postponed until May 2004.

Over 160 texts were submitted, nearly 20 of which were written by teachers who had participated in the first edition of the competition. Dróżka calls the authors

of the memoirs a “borderland generation”, “in which the old and new worlds clash, i.e. tradition with modernity, socialism with market economy, vocation, ethos and wisdom with the so-called professional proficiency, and finally difficult youth with the overwhelming, yet inevitable, passage of time” (Dróżka, 2008, p. 15). The researcher described the effects of the second competition in numerous articles and book publications, the most important of which are: *Nauczycielska dojrzałość: pamiętniki średniego pokolenia nauczycieli 2004* [*Teacher’s Maturity: Memoirs of Middle-Aged Teachers 2004*] (2005), *Generacja wielkiej zmiany* [*Generation of the Great Change*] (2008) (Dróżka, 2005, 2008).

The Third National Memoir Competition under the slogan “Teachers’ message. Generations of Polish teachers caring for the future”, was organised by Dróżka, together with the Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology of the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, at the Department of Pedeutology, Work Pedagogy and Continuing Education (Dróżka, 2016, 2008, p. 380). It was especially addressed at older teachers (retired or just about to retire), because its idea was to capture the specificity of the functioning of the generation of teachers on whom she had began her research in the early 1990s and was also a culmination of their professional work (teachers classified by the researcher as the Great Change Generation). The competition was announced in November 2014, i.e. exactly 10 years after the second edition and over 20 years after first, with the deadline for November 2016.

The author analysed the specific functioning of the Great Change Generation teachers over a period of 30 years. Thanks to this temporal perspective, the researcher was able to capture changes, tendencies, attitudes and values in teachers from the first generation that had experienced changes after 1989. Ninety-eight memoirs were submitted, most of which were written by female teachers over 55 years of age (Dróżka, 2019a, p. 17). The findings were presented in numerous articles and book publications, such as: *Nauczycielskie przesłanie – w trosce o przyszłość. Pamiętniki starszego pokolenia nauczycieli 2016* [*Teachers’ Message – for the Sake of the Future. Memoirs of the Older Generation of Teachers 2016*] (2019b) and *Wychowanie do człowieczeństwa – jako przesłanie starszego pokolenia nauczycieli w świetle pamiętników 2016* [*Education for Humanity – as a Message of the Older Generation of Teachers, as Reflected in Their Memoirs 2016*] (2019c) (Dróżka, 2019c, pp. 13–35).

The publication *Ewolucja etosu i roli społecznej nauczycieli z lat 1992–1993, 2002–2004 i 2014–2016* [*Evolution of Teachers’ Ethos and Social Role Based on Their Memoirs and Autobiographies from 1992–1993, 2002–2004 and 2014–2016*] (2019a) (Dróżka, 2019a), which analyses the generation of teachers of the Great Change, was a culmination of all three editions organized by Dróżka (Łukasik, 2021).

Memoir competitions organised by Łukasik were inspired by the achievements of both Znaniecki and the scientific involvement of Dróżka. Two nationwide memoir,

diary and reportage competitions were organised. The first competition, “A Month in a Teacher’s Life”, was announced on April 15, 2009, with the submission deadline set for December 31, 2009, and publication of results set for March 25, 2010.

On the initiative of the researcher, the Department of General Pedagogy and Educational Research Methodology of the Pedagogical Faculty at the Pedagogical University of Kraków became its direct organiser. Forty-one teachers took part in the competition, including 3 male teachers. The second competition was announced on June 15, 2014 and concluded on May 23, 2015. Its results were announced on July 15, 2015. Again, the Department of General Pedagogy and Educational Research Methodology at the Pedagogical Faculty of the Pedagogical University of Kraków became its organiser. Fifty-two teachers participated, including 1 male teacher (retired teacher). Influenced by the theory of everyday-life sociology, the researcher indicated her interest in the categories of everyday life, i.e. what is ordinary, mundane or festive in a course of a single month of teachers’ professional and non-professional experiences.

In the wake of the competitions, numerous analyses of some selected categories of everyday life were published in scientific articles and monographs, including: *Z codzienności nauczyciela* [*From Teachers’ Everyday Life*] (2011), *Doświadczenie życia codziennego – narracje nauczycielek na przełomie życia* [*Experiencing Everyday Life. Narratives of Teachers at the Turn of Life*] (2013), *Wyzwania szkolnej codzienności* [*Challenges of Everyday School Life*] (2015), *Codziennosc w narracjach nauczycielek w okresie wczesnej dorosłości* [*Everyday Life in the Narratives of Young Adult Teachers*, vol. 1] (2016a), *Codziennosc w narracjach nauczycielek w okresie sredniej dorosłości* [*Everyday Life in the Narratives of Middle-Age Teachers*, vol. 2] (2016b), *Konkursy pamietnikarskie w pedeutologii. Tradycje – Tendencje – Perspektywy badan* [*Memoir Competitions in Pedeutology. Traditions – Trends – Research Perspectives*] (2021) (Łukasik, 2011, 2013, 2016a, 2016b, 2021; Łukasik & Stańkowski, 2015).

The six pedeutology competitions organised by three researchers between 1984 and 2016 have constituted a basis for numerous scientific studies and new research projects, as well as an inspiration for further research. The subsequent part of the article will focus on the leading categories identified in the course of the research, including the dominant, common, divergent and absent categories in the content of teachers’ memoirs. Therefore, a method referred to as desk research or *desk data* analysis was used. According to the researchers, this method involves “re-analysing raw, found and previously archived data and data collected by other authors as part of their primary research projects” (Borowska-Beszta et al., 2017, p. 6). The choice of method was motivated by the fact that secondary analysis enables the generation of new conceptual perspectives and the discovery of meanings contained in the results of diverse primary research (Borowska-Beszta et al., 2017, pp. 9–10).



## POST-COMPETITION RESEARCH EFFECTS: THE DOMINANT, MARGINAL AND ABSENT CATEGORIES

When analysing the content of memoirs (autobiographies), it is important to adopt a key assumption that human beings, understood as conscious and autonomous agents, play a central role in biographical research. As Danuta Lalak notes, conducting biographical research determines researchers' way of thinking and acting, i.e.

- a comprehensive (holistic) approach to the researched areas along with self-inclusion into a research area, which then becomes a process of communication on a common path;
- contextuality and processuality;
- research is perceived as “familiarisation with life” and its reformation within cooperation between researchers and other co-subjects (Lalak, 2010, p. 264).

Following Barbara Smolińska-Theiss and Wiesław Theiss, it is worth adding that research that is based on biography and situated in the field of qualitative methodology “creates a social *praxis* which can fulfill at least the following three functions:

1. Studying, discovering and unmasking hidden meanings and interpretations.
2. Supporting social changes and building socio-cultural conditions to rationalise educational processes and improve the quality of life.
3. Defending the rights and dignity of individuals as well as socially marginalised, stigmatised and excluded groups” (Smolińska-Theiss & Theiss, 2010, p. 90).

Projects involving teacher-memoir competitions are carried out in Polish pedeutology have invaluable scientific, social and practical value. They facilitate exploration of knowledge about teachers' professional, non-professional and personal lives (with content that is significant for teachers in various spheres of their lives, in various phases and at various stages of their professional and social development, in the perspective of various relationships, as well as in social, cultural, economic or historical conditions), all by means of their own interpretation, in the perspective of their own reflected experiences and the corresponding meanings.

In the course of after-competition analyses, the three researchers identified a series of categories and research areas in order to describe them in numerous scientific publications, which are presented below in chronological order.

The 1984 competition, run by Nowak and her team, made it possible to separate and scientifically explore the following categories and areas: choice of the teaching profession (motives); education for the teaching profession; teachers' life course (profession changes and life paths in terms of macro- and micro-worlds); changes in professional functions; teachers' socioeconomic status; prestige of the profession (through the prism of professional biographies);

professional self-awareness (professional self-definition, self-portrait of the environment, attitudes and behaviour, sources of alienation and powerlessness); sense of agency; professional ethos (profession, responsibility, socio-ideological identification).

The first edition (1992–1993) of Drózka’s competitions, which was addressed at young teachers, made it possible to identify the following categories: vision (perception of teachers’ professional roles); changes in social roles; values; aspirations and lifestyle; awareness of social roles; preparation for professional work (assessment of education/vocational training, pedagogical competences, place of study and academic teachers, changes in education); professional start and adaptation to the profession. The second edition (2002–2004), addressed at middle-aged teachers, highlighted the following categories in subsequent temporal analysis: past: childhood, upbringing, school, motives for choosing the profession, professional start and adaptation to the profession; present: axiological situation (internal split – values and modernity, axiological anxiety about young people’s future, decline of authority, teachers’ morale), upbringing and values, socio-educational inequalities, teachers’ economic situation and socio-professional status, teachers’ personal, family and health problems, education reform in 1999; future: important values, work style, professional achievements, activity project, education and professional development, assessment and proposals for changes individually diagnosed by teachers. The third edition (2014–2016), addressed at older teachers at retirement and pre-retirement age, distinguished the following categories: childhood and youth; realities of professional work; concern for the state of humanity (message to young people).

Content analyses of memoirs submitted in 2009 and 2014–2015 made it possible for Łukasik to visualise the following categories: teachers’ everyday life; situations of care, relaxation and mystical (religious); self-image (personal characteristics, life plans and dreams, successes and achievements, memories); identity, professional identity; personal and professional development; work and professional career; difficulties in professional work; moral space and “teacher’s room” community (relationships between teachers); reflexivity of retired teachers.

Based on research analyses of the submitted biographies, it was possible to determine some common areas and research categories, such as: reasons for choosing the teaching profession; changes in the teaching profession; training for the teaching profession and difficulties experienced at work; economic situation; professional identity; social relations in the workplace; teachers’ personal characteristics; professional roles; various aspects of teachers’ professional ethos; employment, professional start, professional adaptation and professional advancement; professional development. When analysing common categories, Łukasik attempted to capture changes in the teaching profession over the last 100 years (see Łukasik, 2021, pp. 129–150) (because the common categories in the



course of participants' lives made it possible to analyse changes in the perspective of teachers' subjective experiences), showing the ongoing changes, turning points, emerging trends and differentiating experiences of particular generations of teachers.

Among research categories selected in the course of analyses conducted by the initiators of the competitions, there are also those highlighted by researchers of a given edition. These include: in Nowak's research: the prestige of the profession, the course of a teacher's life; in Drózka's research: vision of the profession, aspirations and lifestyle, professional start, pre-professional experiences and work in the profession, teachers' childhood, childhood experiences and motives and life choices as well as attitudes towards pupils, axiological concern for the upbringing of young people in times of change, trauma of change; in the Łukasik's research: situations of care, relaxation and mystical situations in teachers' lives, work and professional development in the perspective of teachers' career stages and professional experience, teachers' reflectivity, teachers' personal lives; selection and recruitment for the profession. The vast majority of these categories are also sporadically undertaken by pedeutologists in research projects in a quantitative or mixed strategy.

Just like the common categories that dominate in the analyses of the content of memoirs, the marginal ones (single, sporadic) require deepening in projects in a quantitative or mixed strategy, and updating, because such categories as, for example, adaptation to a profession have their own studies. There is a need to interpret this process while taking into account social, cultural and technological changes, vocational training, predispositions and personal characteristics, as well as pedagogical competences together with factors which determine them.

Among categories absent in the content of the memoirs, the following areas of teachers' lives seem to be the most urgent: loneliness in the workplace, abandoning the teaching profession, personal and professional projects for the future (including the possibility of retraining), social and psychological support, strategies for coping with stress, coping with the interpenetration of professional and family roles, crisis and traumatic situations, or updating methodological workshops, understanding social changes and modern pupils' needs, as well as building relationships with them. The absent categories are also sporadic in research projects, which is confirmed by their absence in publications in the field of pedeutology.

While it is obvious for the changing world to ignite new research areas that require exploration, detailed diagnoses, practical solutions and applications in teachers' professional workshops, total absence of the most crucial areas in pedeutological discourse, such as abandonment of the profession, loneliness or stress/fear of change, etc., means that the deficiencies deepen the already difficult professional situation of teachers, and disservice potential corrective initiatives in favour of teachers' well-being and improved quality of their working practices.

## CONCLUSIONS

Research which makes use of memoir materials obtained by means of competitions is important for the development of pedeutology as a subdiscipline of scientific pedagogy for several reasons: it develops the subdiscipline and provides a basis for research projects in various strategies; it is a source of information about teachers and their self-perception, profession, world or social changes, which translates into the quality and effectiveness of their work and life; it identifies the specificity of professional functioning within groups of teachers with particular reflection and extensive biographical competences; it inspires to undertake innovative practical actions in relation to education, training, development of teachers, as well as support in the implementation of everyday tasks and professional duties. Although qualitative research, including biographical studies obtained by means of competitions, does not allow for generalisation of findings, the significant categories which emerge from their content, along with their subcategories and detailed descriptions, constitute an excellent starting point for designing research tools and conducting quantitative research on selected groups of teachers in order to confirm certain tendencies (or uniqueness) in experiencing, understanding and interpreting the educational and social reality in the world experienced by teachers.

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## ABSTRAKT

W artykule skoncentrowano się na specyfice konkursów pamietnikarskich w pedeutologii. Omówiono najważniejsze załozenia i idee konkursów w pedeutologii oraz zastosowanie metody biograficznej do opisu funkcjonowania nauczyciela w Polsce na przestrzeni ostatnich stu lat. Analizie poddano sześć konkursów pamietnikarskich oraz opisanych i opracowanych kategorii naukowych w celu ukazania punktów wspólnych badan pozwalających na sportretowanie zawodu nauczyciela przez pryzmat wyłonionych kategorii, a także najczęściej podejmowanych badan nad zawodem nauczyciela. Dodatkowo zaprezentowano kategorie badawcze nad zawodem nauczyciela podejmowane sporadycznie oraz wskazano kategorie nieobecne, a požądane w badaniach ze względu na dynamikę zmian zarówno w specyfice zawodu nauczyciela, jak i osób wykonujących ten zawód.

**Słowa kluczowe:** nauczyciel; biografia; konkursy pamietnikarskie; pedeutologia