

Reviews

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Miroslaw J. Szymański

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0545-5990>

Maria Grzegorzewska University, Poland

Book review:

Grzegorz Godawa, *Functioning of the family of a child in home hospice care.*

A thanatopedagogical study, Toruń 2016:
Publishing House AKAPIT, pp. 452

Grzegorz Godawa is a well-known author, especially among people interested in Christian pedagogy. His academic work is focused on areas such as pedagogical context of support offered to the family, the issue of students' education and upbringing, preparing teachers for their work, the role of the media in the process of development of children and teenagers, selected aspects of Christian pedagogy. However, the most significant part of his academic work is devoted to thanatological and hospice issues. It is largely based on his long experience in ministry and care in home hospices for terminally ill children.

Grzegorz Godawa is the author of 15 publications in which he discussed the following issues: activity of children's hospices in the context of the needs of a terminally ill child and its family, support offered to the family in hospice conditions, the role of a hospice counsellor, the role of an ill child's father, loneliness of mothers of terminally ill children, protective and educational functions of the family with a terminally ill child in hospice conditions, support offered to healthy siblings of a terminally ill child, pedagogical counterinfluence of grief of a terminally ill child, influence of the child's illness on relationships with

healthy siblings, the feeling of the child's loneliness in the family as a challenge for modern pedagogy, grandparents facing the child's illness and death, selected aspects of family counselling, communication with a seriously ill person facing the end of life.

The book "Functioning of the family of a child in home hospice care. A thanatopedagogical study" is undoubtedly the most important of all the author's publications. It is by far the most extensive one. The book contains 11 chapters complemented by introduction, final comments, bibliography and an appendix. It is easily noticeable that the book is well-structured. Issues raised by the author are logically organized, discussed extensively and systematically divided into chapters.

The author divided his book into a theoretical and an empirical part. In the theoretical part he deals with the issue of thanatopedagogy as a new subdiscipline of pedagogy which is being created, with the individual and social dimension of a terminally ill child's illness and death, with the issue of how the family system reacts to the child's illness and death, with the issue of relationships and functions of a family facing thanatopedagogical challenges and the aspects of pediatric palliative hospice care. The empirical part contains not only essential information about the methodological assumptions of the research conducted by the author, but also a description of the research results and an attempt to understand and interpret them. After presenting more than 20 examples of how families with terminally ill children function on a daily basis, Grzegorz Godawa created a typology of such families and distinguished three categories of them: thanatos-oriented, presence-oriented, and perspective-oriented. In the next chapter he deals with the issue of suffering in a family with an ill child. He provides particular examples which enable him to make an attempt to classify the symptoms and areas of suffering. In another chapter Grzegorz Godawa discusses the process of education of a seriously ill child and its siblings, educational aims and values, specificity of educating a seriously ill child, determinants of this kind of education, its implications for daily life and necessary forms of support of the model approach to education in an ill child's family. This chapter is original in terms of the content. It is also cognitively significant. The next chapter covers the issue of human development in a thanatological situation which is a rarely analysed process. As in the previous chapters, the author highlights the importance of axiological issues and draws attention to changes in the hierarchy of values, attitudes to different areas of life, self-perception and forming positive personality traits.

A separate part of the author's study is devoted to human development in the spiritual and religious sphere and to the issue of self-education. In the final part the author presents implications for thanatopedagogical work which result from theoretical considerations and empirical analyses. They have a significant cognitive meaning. They systematise the current knowledge and provide an inspiration for further research. The author gives valuable guidelines for hospice work and emphasises the need to strengthen some of the activities which are undertaken and implemented. He also recognizes the need to develop the social dimension of thanatoeducation. It needs to be emphasised that from the academic point of view these issues are also difficult. In final conclusions Grzegorz Godawa rightly highlights the need to conduct interdisciplinary research on the issues he discusses and to develop thanatopedagogy.

Both the indirect justification (noticeable in the author's convincing way of presenting ideas) and the direct justification of the need to develop thanatopedagogy as an important discipline of pedagogical sciences are of immense value. The author presented the outline of thanatopedagogy in a theoretical dimension, in his methodological suggestions and in practical experience. In each of these areas he successfully combined the analysis of Polish and foreign literature on thanatology, description of research results and practical experience of other authors with his own academic reflection and experience in home hospice care.

The review of the content of the author's study shows his broad, complex and multidimensional approach to issues related to family functioning in a critical situation which have not been fully acknowledged and described in our literature, e.g. a child's terminal illness, its suffering and trauma which all family members experience in fear of its imminent death. Reading the book shows that Grzegorz Godawa shares his deep knowledge of the subject based on his own experience in hospice work and on a thorough study of Polish and foreign literature on the subject. It is easily noticeable that the author frequently refers to issues which he has raised in his papers and reports on research. A comparison between these texts and particular chapters of the study indicates a significant increase in the author's academic competencies. In comparison with the author's previous publications, in the reviewed study he presents deeper and better developed analyses. What is more, the author draws conclusions which are better justified and documented. The book "Functioning of the family of a child in home hospice care. A thanatopedagogical study" undoubtedly provides valuable insights into the process of creating thanatopedagogy

as an important academic subdiscipline which concerns a significant sphere of human life in which the pedagogical idea and experience may contribute to a deeper understanding of reality and what is equally important, to a better understanding of activities based on personalistic and humanistic assumptions. They may surely be more rational and effective than those which result from purely intuitive assumptions.

In view of a reviewer's task to find weaker points in a very good study which is well-prepared both in theoretical and empirical terms, I can notice them in some conceptual categories. I am concerned about the use of the word "system" with regard to family, in particular to modern family. It may be a misuse in terms of terminology. The word "system", adopted from natural and technical sciences and used in social sciences, was actively promoted in the time when positivists and neopositivists wanted to apply natural and technical science research patterns to social sciences. However, the word "system" is hardly adequate to the reality of social life. If education is nowadays perceived as a lifelong activity and takes place not only in formal structures, but also in informal and non-formal situations and circumstances, it is difficult to consider its character in structural terms. A system is an organized whole whose elements cooperate with each other, complement each other in functional terms, are harmonious and efficiently work for the sake of the whole.

However, modern family is not a monolith. It is full of tension and conflicts related to non-family duties, different kinds of activity and various preferences of family members. It often has difficulties performing its basic functions. Young couples who struggle with them live together because they do not have basic conditions to set up a family (a flat, permanent work and a stable financial situation, being able to provide care for children during work time, etc.). A widely accepted Family 500+ programme proves that a significant number of families consider such a benefit (as it is not the effect of their work) an important contribution to maintaining the financial stability of the family. People whose standard of life is higher also find this kind of support helpful. Politicians hope that thanks to the programme they will boost the procreative function of the family and – which is not explicitly stated – to influence people's values, attitudes and voting preferences in a way which suits them best. Modern family is usually not a system, which is also reflected in the fact that the family is no longer such a permanent institution which it used to be. When a family encounters severe difficulties such as giving birth to a disabled or a seriously ill child, its family members do not always come closer together or feel stronger. Such a situation

frequently leads to the breakdown of the family, which means that single mothers have to deal with more difficulties.

However, these kinds of polemics are of academic nature. The review of all academic achievements of Grzegorz Godawa, including a lot of his earlier publications, indicates the permanent nature of his academic interests regarding the family issues, pedagogical axiology, the issue of care and upbringing of seriously ill children and disabled youth as well as the issue of families experiencing suffering caused by the child's terminal illness. In his publications, conference talks and particularly in the book "Functioning of the family of a child in home hospice care. A thanatopedagogical study", the author conducts consequent and quite complementary analyses of issues relevant to the subdiscipline which is being created and which he calls thanatopedagogy. A combined approach proposed by the author, his attempts to complement existing analyses, to classify the issues and phenomena on his own and to systematise them are of special significance. Complementing the classification by categories which are not frequently analysed in pedagogy, such as suffering, pain, fear, the attitude to death, particularly to a shocking death of a child, is also worth recognizing. In the book the author shows his erudition and shares knowledge which he has gained during many years of academic work. What is important, he also shares his practical experience in care as well as in therapeutical and educational activities aimed at terminally ill children and their families. I recommend this book not only to people involved in various forms of hospice support offered to terminally ill children and their families, but also to all who care for the wellbeing of people in difficult life situations and to those who are sensitive to the issue of supporting people who need our help most.