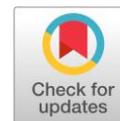


Learning in/of solitude in the context of pedagogical monoseology

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the issue of learning in/of solitude. It is a cognitive category of pedagogical monoseology, the research area which covers two key terms: solitude and learning. Empirical research conducted in Poland on a group of 19 people on the threshold of adulthood (aged 18-25) showed a very wide range of learning in/of solitude, which not only manifests itself as coping with loneliness, but also means getting to know oneself, looking for space for self-realization in a situation of chosen solitude. The reflectiveness of young adults in the period of developmental moratorium deserves attention. Research reveals the relationship between their learning in / of solitude and andragogic theories of adult learning, in particular the theory of existential learning.



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1. Introduction – Pedagogical monoseology and learning in/of solitude

Monoseology (Greek: *monose* – solitude, *logos* – science) - if accepting a broad meaning of the term as suggested by Piotr Domeracki (2006, p.16; 2018, p.86), one could call the science of solitude a part of various academic areas and disciplines. Its origin can be traced back to philosophy. Domeracki (2006, p.16) refers to this philosophical reflection concerning solitude either as philosophy of solitude, or monoseosophy. Monoseosophy is a mandatory foundation for modern humanistic and social deliberations on solitude, comprising reflection. Therefore, research into solitude placed this idea in the context of educational processes (see Dubas, 2007, p. 163; Domeracki, 2018, p. 86). It is a research space that is explored primarily by researchers with respect to education, including pedagogues, andragogues, geragogues, and others. Pedagogical monoseology (previously known as pedagogy of solitude) undiscipline concerning education—refers to research into solitude, including its many varieties, such as loneliness, solitude, isolation, alienation, being alone, silence, etc. Solitude in this understanding (the first and the most important term of pedagogical monoseology) is a parent concept combining all other terms related to this concept.¹ It also refers to a universal phenomenon of human existence (Dubas, 2000) that describes the relationship of being Together (living in a community) and Alone (living alone) (see Dubas, 2007, p. 164), which should co-exist and interpenetrate,

¹ The same broad meaning of the term solitude (in Polish *samotność*) is given by Piotr Domeracki (Domeracki, 2018, p.87; Domeracki, 2022, p.32) and similarly broadly Philip Koch (1994, p.27)

oscillate between each other and never be in dichotomy (Dubas, 2022). A similarly broad meaning is given to education, and even broader one to learning, which is another important term in pedagogical monoseology. Learning, in its most broad understanding, includes formal education (school) and non-formal (institutionalized, the so-called "course" learning), as well as learning performed informally as "part of life" in the context of gaining life experience. Thus, pedagogical monoseology includes in its research the context of solitude, which is institutionalized, e.g., loneliness at school, orphanages, nursing homes, etc., as well as outside of any institution (within a family, social circle, everyday life, difficult existential experiences, etc.). It describes a variety of learning processes/education related to solitude, including being brought up, education, self-education, self-formation, self-creation, self-realization, self-improvement, and the presumed life-long learning, etc. This research includes a person's solitude in all periods of development, from childhood (or even pre-natal period) till old age. It describes solitude in the aspect of conscious knowledge and reveals the entire amount of related tacit knowledge. In studies, various research paradigms and methodological orientations are applied (e.g., quantitative and qualitative), as well as various methods and research techniques. Applying qualitative methods, including a biographical interview and narration, are worth emphasizing, since they broaden the self-awareness and bring out tacit knowledge. Also, a qualitative analysis of a biography and narration is relevant here.

Although rarely considered, one of the significant research areas of pedagogical monoseology is *learning in/of solitude*. Learning in/of solitude in a sense similar to that of Julian Stern: "how we learn to be alone, in good and bad ways – whether in families, communities, workplaces, care homes or, of course, in schools and higher education" (Stern, 2022, p.8). It is a broad scientific category that covers several areas. This category has been revealed in previous studies conducted on adults, who presented a clear *relationship between loneliness and participating in adult education* understood as institution. Such participation in adult education institutions was considered to be a factor that strongly eliminates loneliness and it showed adult education institutions as the least burdensome element of loneliness, compared to others, including family (Dubas, 2000). Moreover, the importance of self-education was emphasized since it favors the development of interests and broadens horizons, leading to efficient elimination of loneliness (Dubas, 2000; 2022). Another area of learning in/of solitude is *learning in solitude*. This implies educational processes (conscious processes) that are triggered primarily as a result of a feeling of loneliness, their outcomes in the form of new knowledge and skills, and the changes in attitudes to life, as a result of which a person becomes better at managing loneliness in everyday life. Another important area of learning solitude is *learning of solitude*, which is understood as broadening knowledge (consciousness) with respect to solitude as a human existential experience (Dubas, 2022), positively impacting a person and creates its inner world. Learning in/of solitude means reflection and re-interpretation of a difficult life experience, mainly related to being alone, which is a consequence of autobiographical reflection. It is a manifestation of how to deal with loneliness and an attempt to leave it. It means taming loneliness and discovering a chance for development (Dubas, 2022). It also means searching for solitude as an area of self-development, self-creation and becoming a single self. It is an example of transforming the experience of being alone into positive solitude, i.e., transforming loneliness into solitude. "It is an attempt to reconcile [...] two principal values: Alone and Together². Thus, it is an example of social and emotional education (Illeris, 2006), learning from one's own biography (Dubas, 2017) and existential learning as a means of dealing with" (Dubas, 2022). Learning how to be alone can be best described by applying precisely this definition of existential learning following Peter Jarvis (1987, p.111), according to whom "learning is a combination of processes during which people construct situational experience and transform it into knowledge, skills, attitudes, convictions, values, emotions, senses and meaning, they integrate them within their own biography." There is one condition: "to be in the situation", creating an individual life experience and incorporating it into one's own biography (ibid, p. 101, p. 104). "Both experience and biography have a life-

²The term proposed by Małgorzata Wałęjko (2016). Elżbieta Dubas sees Alone and Together in the category of oscillation rather than antonymy, dichotomy and irreconcilable opposites (Dubas, 2022).

long dimension. This means that [such] learning [introduced by] may be treated as an existential process” (*ibid*, p. 101). “Learning in/of solitude is at the same time learning to live” (Dubas, 2022, p. 275), which also emphasizes its existential dimension.

2. Research method

Below mentioned are the results of research conducted from andragogical perspective, including pedagogical monoseology area, which, to a great extent, serve as means to reveal knowledge commonly tacit with respect to learning how to be alone. The researcher wishes to examine the extent to which the studied group of people combine the experience of their being alone with learning, and what this learning manifests itself in.

The research was conducted between May and June 2021 by the students of pedagogy at the University of Lodz (Polen), who were prepared to it through their participation in didactic classes: A person in the situation of solitude – interdisciplinary approach, in the summer term in the academic year of 2020/2021. Individual case studies were used and qualitative interviews were taken with the elements of narration and biography. The tool applied in the research was elaborated by the author of this work.

Empirical data presented below are regarding the threshold of adulthood. All study participants were between 18 and 25 years of age. The research sample included 11 females and 8 males. Majority of them live in a big city (13) and are single (13), whereby only four females declared being in an informal relationship. They hold either high-school education (9) or post-secondary education (6), and several of them are still studying (6, including 4 males). Most of them do not have any profession (12). 10 of study participants work, most of whom are females (7). Their health situation is assessed as good (8) and very good (8) and was found to be slightly worse in men. Their financial status is mostly good (13), slightly better in women. Non-believers prevail in the group (13). All of them declare a few interests. All of them use modern technologies (such as computer, internet, etc.) All study participants declare that they experienced loneliness in the past; however, currently, it is not their concern (11). The following elements were found to be causing loneliness in the group: difficulties in the family (7), limitations and lack of contact with the family and friends (6), difficulties in establishing relationships with peers (5), coronavirus pandemic (5), lack of understanding (4), living abroad (3), moving house (3), and the death of the close ones (2). Loneliness in the past was mostly related to the period of growing up and the time of junior high-school education (9), the period between junior high-school and high-school or a change of school (3). Additionally, experiences from childhood were also a factor of loneliness encountered by a few of the participants (3). Current experiences with loneliness primarily concern the following: no close people around (6) and the situation of coronavirus pandemic (6).

3. The connection between solitude and learning: The analysis of empirical material

The empirical material presented in this text is selective in comparison to the issue studied and concerns solely the connection between solitude and learning. Only one question in the research tool (number 13) directly concerned this issue. However, several other questions referred to the issue of learning solitude in a more contextualized manner, which allowed to reveal relevant aspects of this phenomenon. The contexts for this question were applied in the description of exemplification of learning solitude.

Two-thirds of the study participants (12), mainly women (9), see the connection between solitude and learning. Most frequently, it is learning *in the situation of being alone* rather than learning *about being alone*. There is also ample information from the studied group on what learning meant to them while being alone. This can be listed in several main categories:

getting to know oneself (8)³

the ability to open to others (6)

3 In the parentheses there is the number of indications.

- the ability to be alone with oneself (5)
- balancing the relationship of I – Others, Alone and Together (3)
- the ability to cope with difficulties (6)
- changes regarding the philosophy of life (6)
- changes regarding understanding the phenomenon of solitude (2).

Getting to know oneself is reflected as ‘learning oneself’: *I was learning myself, who I am* (F,21)⁴, finding oneself (F,25), the increase in self-acceptance, finding and becoming the power for oneself, leaving the circle of egocentrism, understanding that *I’m not the center of the universe* (F,21), recognizing one’s needs and feelings and recognizing one’s aloneness. The outcome of this learning is expanded self-awareness.

Opening up to others is related to establishing and sustaining contacts with other people, appreciating their presence in our life (F,19), as well as seeking help and support from others (F,22), and learning reciprocity when it comes to relationships with other people (F,25). This is a significant type of education, which shows a connection between Alone and Together. *I learnt to deal with smaller problems alone and at the same time, whenever I couldn’t—I learnt to ask for help. This is a very big change which I learnt when being alone and which is useful in my current life* (F,22).

The ability to be alone with oneself means being able to use the time for oneself and spend free time with oneself: *I can also have quality time with myself* (F,19), *I learnt to be alone with my thoughts, with myself* (F,21). This is an important skill, particularly when there are no real-life companions.

Balancing the relationship of Alone and Together is a type of a golden means between opening to others and the ability to be with oneself.

I know that despite so much learning I had to do [during my final exams at school], I couldn’t neglect my relationship with my family and girlfriend (M,22).

Undoubtedly, this time is necessary. It is then that I think about my life, I meditate, sometimes I even do a summary of what I’ve done recently. I think of what to do for my life to be better. This is also the time to calm down and regenerate internally. So, being alone means a lot to me, but so does contact with another person, which I cannot forget about (F,25).

Coping with difficulties that appear when we are alone prepares us to face and handle similar situations in a better manner. Living independently, as an expression of one of the development tasks typical for this period of life, forces us to deal with everyday activities.

Being alone taught me to be independent because there are no other people around me who would, for example, make dinner for me or clean up, so I have to do it alone. Also, I live alone, which is a challenge for me as well as a novelty—I live within the four walls with no one else. [It has taught me] to live, such simple activities, but thanks to living alone, I learnt how to deal with smaller problems myself (F,25).

Being “condemned” to being alone/independent is another situation that forces us to deal with a difficult existential situation, such as loneliness. This can, however, on the basis of transferring experience, equip a person with the ability to handle other difficult existential situations:

I would find myself in my own problems and I learnt to handle them myself (M,20).

I am much better at dealing with the adversities of life now (M,22).

Experiencing solitude deepens **understanding solitude**. Solitude becomes positive, since it is necessary for reflection. Solitude may also be chosen by a person while deciding on its meaning:

4 Indication of the code used, e.g. (F, 25): F-female, M-male, age.

I learnt it alone that everyone needs aloneness in their life in order to reflect, to stop and think your own behavior through. I learnt that solitude is good and that it is me who decides whether this solitude that takes place sometimes is going to influence my life positively or negatively. It is me who makes choices. It also taught me that I'm not the center of the universe, that I'm not the most important person in the world (F,21).

Experiencing solitude also favors recognizing one's own loneliness: *I was learning in which situations I feel lonely (F,21).*

Solitude specifies **the philosophy of life** of a lonely person. Many novel thoughts appear during the hours and days spent alone. Being alone makes a person realize several things and provides a different perspective on the world. It helps people to become aware of the fact that *it is worth trying new things (F,25), we should appreciate what we have (M,20), it is worth being a good person (M,20), and we shouldn't be bothered by petty things (M,22)*. Being alone is also a good lesson of humility (M,20; M,22). *Life is beautiful, so we should live beautifully (M,20)*. This is a profound notion that emerges from meditation over the experienced aloneness. A lesson from aloneness also evolves further, which is understandable with respect to young people on the threshold of adulthood, whose identity is still crystallizing and maturing. One of the studied subjects notices the following: *I don't know whether I learnt anything from being alone. [After a while, he adds] From this situation from three years ago, I learnt that we shouldn't expose our feelings too much. I now think that it is wrong. But I used to think it's best to bottle everything up (M,23)*. This statement also depicts that lessons from aloneness are dynamic and depend on subsequent life experiences as well as on our reflections. Knowledge concerning aloneness is modified in both being alone and through it.

The statements of the respondents also allow to see the connection between being alone and formal education—a change of school, transfer from junior high-school to high-school, studying for the final exams (M13, aged 22), studying to become an IT specialist: *For five terms I had been studying IT where I actually never met any new people. IT geeks are not usually very sociable (M,22), and online learning: the problem got worse actually, due to on-line learning, but at that time everyone had problems, I guess (M22)*. The system of formal education itself and in its many dimensions demonstrate the difficulty behind being alone, which confirms previous research. Moreover, the source of loneliness was online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was very commonly perceived as a predicament.

Other **significant threads** of reflection over learning in/about being alone that are worth emphasizing describe the character of such learning, since learning while being alone helps in learning from all life experiences subconsciously:

Every experience teaches you something (F,23).

This was subconscious learning (F, 21).

Therefore, it is an example of informal learning during the course of life by experiencing it. It also depicts a transformative character as it points to the change in current perception of reality: *This is a new situation which teaches us new things. Suddenly, we take on a different perspective and begin to see things differently, not in a way we have always seen them (F, 25).*

3.1. Selected examples of situations of learning solitude (individual case studies)

1) *Solitude teaches a beautiful life: The multifaceted relationship between solitude and learning.*

Central statement: *Life is beautiful, so you've got to live beautifully! (M,20).*

A statement that is the most multifaceted with respect to the relationship between aloneness and learning could be as follows:

The relationship between aloneness and learning lies in learning about oneself. I learnt that there will not always be someone next to me. This was a lesson of independence and humility. I would find myself in my own problems and learnt how to handle them. Also, another lesson was appreciating what I had. I learnt that it is worth being a good person and to give your utmost. Life is beautiful, so you've got to live beautifully! (M,20).

It was stated by a 20-year-old IT specialist, a single man, currently a student and non-believer. Almost all of the categories which describe a connection between aloneness and learning can be found in this statement. Another element worth emphasizing is the axiological thread of learning alone, which is included in the internalized value of being good and humble. Another significant issue is the one of affirmation of life and the resulting injunction to live beautifully. This is an optimistic lesson coming from a young person, who, despite the hardships of life and the loneliness he had experienced earlier due to his parents' divorce, moving house and the death of his mother, manages to see the beauty of life.

2) *Solitude teaches a reflexivity: The positive and chosen solitude*

Central statement: *I'm not the center of the universe* (F, 21).

This viewpoint is well represented through the statement of a 21-year-old woman:

My aloneness allowed me to understand that the moments of loneliness in which I am alone are also good. I used to think that such moments are bad and each time I had no people around me or when my parents with whom I used to live, wanted to take a break from me and would not talk to me, I felt upset. I was learning this in solitude that it's necessary to be alone in order to reflect, to stop and think our behaviour through. [...] It gives me time to think (F,21).

A young person (living in a big city, single, currently a student of the second year of nursing, Jehovah witness), basing on her current experience with being alone (difficulties in relationship with friends between junior high-school and high-school, who experienced her 9 year senior sister moving out in order to start her own family and whose parents paid more attention to her sister back then), states: *I was 15 at the time and I needed my parents to notice me [...] I thought my family weren't paying attention to me.* Her relationship with her sister weakened; there was rivalry during dance classes. She felt lonely, when someone *who was better than [her] came along.* Eventually, she came to the conclusion concerning the universal character of being alone and its positive meaning—formative, theological and sensory function: *Thanks to this aloneness we can get to know ourselves and what our purpose of life is, because everyone should know the meaning of their own life.* It is noteworthy to understand that a person decides for themselves the kind of loneliness they experience—a person may choose between loneliness or aloneness by reaching out to people instead of waiting for them to make the first move.

And I learnt that it was positive and that it is me who decides whether this loneliness that I'm bound to experience sometimes, will influence my life positively or negatively. And it is me who chooses.

Another noteworthy element is that it was her own attitude that impacted how she experienced being alone. The unmet need to be liked, noticed, and to be the best would create loneliness. *Alone, I had to digest the fact that I overreacted a little...* This directed attention to others, thanks to which it was possible to stop concentrating solely on oneself. *I started to take interest in others [...] I talked to them [...]* This provided an important lesson that allowed to conclude: *It taught me [being alone – ED] that I'm not the center of the universe; I'm not the most important in the world.* Learning in a situation of being alone, as was the case in this studied woman, is a very accurate example of the area of pedagogical monoseology.

3) *Solitude teaches independence and appreciation of dear ones: Coping with being alone.*

Central statement: *No situation is without a way out [...] My closest ones were the cure to everything, really* (F,25).

Being alone taught me independent life because there is not a single person around me who, for example, will make dinner for me or clean, so I have to do everything myself, I also live alone, which is a novelty to me and a challenge—I live within four walls, with no-one else. [It taught me] to live, actually, such simple activities, but thanks to it I improved my flat by myself, I learnt to deal with smaller problems by myself. I think it's worth thinking before making decisions such as living alone, whether we can face this emptiness. Some people just can't live alone. We should remember that there is no situation without a way out and there is always a solution to be found (F,25).

The direct reason of experiencing loneliness by the narrator (a 25-year-old woman, graduate of English Language Department, currently working at a corporation, living in a big city, single and non-believer) is moving to a new place and beginning her independent life, away from her family. The decision to move house proved to be a challenge, although it had been made independently and fully consciously.

I decided to become independent and said to myself that I would make it. I know that this situation [...] may be slightly overwhelming for me, but I'm slowly learning to live with myself and focus on my needs so as not to feel this loneliness internally.

In a new place, there is lack of friends and people who are close. However, life must be handled. Difficulties additionally *pile[d] up because of the coronavirus because it is hard to become friends with someone in a way that is not a digital one [...] the smartphone era and the virus makes interpersonal contacts very difficult.*

Dealing with loneliness is harder due to no good contact with oneself and no objective perspective, which the narrator is fully aware of.

I feel lonely because I don't have a good contact with myself. I find it hard to trust myself in difficult situations because I feel that I'm not being objective with myself and with what I'm thinking about. I'm trying to handle that somehow but so far hasn't had much luck with that.

People close to us are helpful when dealing with being alone, particularly family and friends, but other people and professionals can also help. Another preventive measure in handling loneliness is a conversation and counselling.

The close ones were the cure for everything, really [...] I dealt with loneliness through a conversation with the closest ones and through seeking their advice on how to manage a particular life situation... There is always someone close who can help you and if there isn't any such person, then sometimes a conversation with a stranger or a therapist can turn out to be an even better solution.

Previous experiences with being alone (when changing school from junior high-school to high-school) and current experience felt *every day, to a degree (loneliness) became a part of my life* in a situation of independent life in a new place. It hardens a young woman who assumes that in the future, *[she] will know better how to handle it because once you get out of something, it was great loneliness. It becomes easier to deal with it or simply accept such state of affairs.*

The key category that the narrator used here was “managing”. There is a certain range of tools helping to learn aloneness. Dealing with it was like simultaneously dealing with life itself. It is important to connect the fact of being alone with human existence in this situation. Certain life situations and lack of the closest people trigger loneliness. Thus, dealing with being alone means undertaking activities which make us more independent as well as making use of the support coming from other people, including those particularly close to us, through a conversation and counselling.

4) *Solitude teaches life in a difficult reality and appreciation for the family: Being away from homeland and family, education abroad, the pandemic situation.*

Central statement: *I was left alone in Poland (M,23).*

The study participant is Ukrainian student in Poland, who has been living in the country for two years. His loneliness is determined by the lack of family left in Ukraine, and his contacts were much harder to maintain due to pandemic. The coronavirus pandemic is seen in the statements coming from several of the studied subjects who converse about their loneliness. However, this 23-year-old man (M18, coming from a small city, single and non-believer), is concerned by the pandemic in a more poignant way.

I come from Ukraine, and I left my nearest and dearest ones there. I came to Poland all by myself. I have felt lonely practically since that very moment. But even more so recently, since the beginning of pandemic. [...] It's hard, sometimes I feel like crying.

Experiencing loneliness is related to the lack of everyday presence of family, everyday family contacts, rituals and common celebrations. The value of family is appreciated by the narrator.

The worst comes in the evening, when I used to hear 'good night' from my parents, and now I fall asleep alone. I often miss family dinners with my parents and siblings. [...] When I was in Ukraine it wasn't so bad, sometimes I'd fall out with my parents and then I'd feel bad about it, but I truly appreciated it all when I started to be alone in Poland. [...] Loneliness was the strongest during Easter and Christmas.

Pandemic was the root of everything, because *then [he] couldn't go back to Ukraine. It was the first Christmas [he'd] ever spent alone.* Being away from family is felt very strongly, even though the narrator does receive support from other people: *I have very nice friends in Ł. who support me, but they are not as close as family. I also have cool friends from university, but I do miss a person I could trust and confide in.* He appreciates close relationships, which can be seen in his words: *When you find a close person, give them your attention and cherish them.*

Although the narrator does not believe that they have learnt anything while being alone, they do reveal how they handle loneliness:

I try to focus on my tasks and do them as best I can. I spend a lot of time learning. I try to talk with my family on the Internet and visit them whenever I can. I also don't go on holidays so that I can spend them with my family.

The narrator does notice changes in their perception of loneliness:

It made me realize how important family is and helped me appreciate the presence of my closest ones in my life. It gave me strength and empowered me to be independent and face reality.

The narrator is also convinced that in the future, they will handle it better than the first time.

The narrator's experience points to accumulation of difficult situations which provoke loneliness. A great attachment to an absent family only intensifies this loneliness.

5) Loneliness teaches behavior in the future: School education, pandemic, on-line learning, modern technologies

Central statement: *Aloneness lets you draw conclusions, after all (M,22).*

The idea of formal education appeared in several statements provided by the studied subjects. Experiences of a 22-year-old man (M,22, a citizen of a big city, currently a student, single and non-believer) may be a particular example of context of learning aloneness. His most profound experience of being alone took place during his preparations for the final exams at high school. This was related to learning overload and a great extent to which his relationships with other people were limited.

Loneliness that touched me most profoundly took place just before my final exams at high school, when I wanted to get into Medical University, I had to study a lot and the people closest to me didn't appreciate my efforts.

Pandemic situation greatly limited relationships with the closest people and peers. It also emerged at the time of preparation for the exams:

I feel really lonely before exams. Before pandemic, when they were about to take place, we would get together with my friends in order to study. Now the time prior to exams is spent in front of the computer, with no support from my friends. [...] During pandemic and lockdown, I feel lonely and alone much more often. When I don't have "live" contact with other people, I don't feel their support, motivation and closeness.

Using modern IT technologies makes direct interpersonal contacts more difficult, as it brings out the feeling of being misunderstood and the necessity to deal with learning completely on one's own, which also increases the feeling of loneliness.

I feel lonely because I'm misunderstood by my family, who say that sitting in front of the computer is not such a difficult job. I also feel lonely when I spend all days in front of the computer with my girlfriend, even though the small flat is small, it still feels separate and not together.

Although loneliness is a difficult experience for the narrator, while reflecting, they see its “educational” character related to the development of reflexivity over one’s life, relationships with other people and future actions.

Loneliness, in my life when it lasts, is always sad. Looking back, it always brings something. This something is oftentimes a reflection over life, a lesson learnt from a given situation or simply knowledge about what you can do and with whom. [...] Loneliness lets you draw conclusions which teach you how to behave in the future. I know that despite a great amount of studying to do, I cannot neglect the time with my family and my girlfriend.

The attitude outlined here is a fair reflection of a young man in a Muratorian period, when he devotes all his time to a very demanding process of learning. This burden is intensified by the pandemic situation and the necessity to limit all direct contacts with other people. Additionally, using IT as form of a lifestyle and the necessity to undergo the process of education during the times of pandemic also leads to increase in loneliness. In these circumstances, it is comforting to see the high level of awareness of loneliness and perceiving it as a lesson leading to a better understanding of oneself and the world, depicting a high level of reflexivity in a young adult.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Loneliness of the studied adults on the threshold of adulthood and people relatively well-educated is mostly seen as a difficult and painful experience, and is conditioned by several reasons. One can talk about a multi-cause of loneliness, which is experienced on the threshold of adulthood. In this Muratorian period, “a mass attack” of numerous situations on young psyche can be observed (including external factors), which may constitute a serious threat to development as well as to shaping of a mature and balanced identity.

Oftentimes, young people present profound reflexivity, observing an important life lesson in their feeling lonely. They also perceive positive sides of loneliness (solitude) and are aware of the possibility of making their own choices in the way they experience loneliness; thus, to a certain degree, they are aware of the fact that loneliness is shaped by a person.

Experiences of the study participants point to a relevant connection between being alone and learning. Most of the time it is learning in the situation of loneliness (feeling lonely), less frequently – learning about being alone. In learning how to be alone, one can see many areas related to informal learning, but also a few factors from the field of formal education, which result from the studied subjects and a vivid memory of such experiences. There are fruitful trajectories in learning how to be alone, with a particular emphasis placed on reflexivity. According to Peter Jarvis, “An individual learns through reflective contemplation. Its basis may be in the content of an individual experience” (Jarvis, 2004, following: Malewski, 2010, p. 104). Another notion observed was the one of transformation of an attitude, knowledge, etc., which points to the transformative character of learning in the situation of being alone (Mezirow, 1991, following: Malewski, 1998, p. 106–115).

What also draws attention in many of the study participants is their awareness of the broad semantic context of the conceptual category of “learning”. These subjects were able to combine loneliness with informal learning quite effortlessly, often with an existential notion. This existential notion seems to be most the most significant in their learning. This allows to interpret empirical material from the perspective of joining an existential thought with a pedagogical one. An accurate reference is made by Jarosław Gara in form of four primary categories of existential philosophy: individuality, choice, being in a situation and becoming (Gara, 2021, p. 50). All of them are confirmed when juxtaposed with learning about being alone, since this is an individual, subjective experience, as it is hard to encounter two similar experiences. This involves the possibility to choose a subject, as a result of which a picture of aloneness is painted, which may either be positive or negative. This is caused by “being in a situation” of aloneness, which means experiencing it and the memory of this experience. Finally, learning how to be alone is an example of “becoming” more mature, aware and understanding oneself and life better. This also confirms the notion that being

alone is a universal phenomenon of human existence (Dubas, 2000). Therefore, it triggers existential learning (Jarvis, 2004, following: Malewski, 2010, p. 100–105).

Finally, the importance of educational practice is worth emphasizing, which enhances reflective thinking that implies “thinking which is aware of its own assumptions and implications, as well as reasons and evidence supporting this or the other conclusion” (Lipman, 2021, p. 48). Reflective thinking appears to be very useful in dealing with difficult existential situations. This skill develops mostly throughout life, through life experiences and the so-called natural education. Schools should support young people in this area, should anticipate learning from experiences and their own biography, thus preparing them better for “life”. It must be noted that being alone is an extremely complex phenomenon of human existence and it cannot be limited to solely its negative form, i.e., loneliness. Schools should teach not only how to overcome being alone, but also how to notice and extract positive layers of developmental aloneness, which enables a person to become free, creative, independent in thinking, resilient and internally strong. This aspect of education is aimed at aloneness (and the conscious choice of being alone) and is particularly neglected, as noticed by Marek Rembierz. “Including loneliness and aloneness in education should allow to shape such a person that would not be ‘always outside of themselves’ and live ‘solely in the opinion of other people’, [...] the analysis of loneliness and aloneness in educational process and intellectual self-education will result in [...] shaping attitude of cognitive independence of all participants of educational activities, including pedagogues” (Rembierz, 2013, p. 73). Bringing back the multifaceted understanding of the phenomenon of being alone may be the key for modern education that should support people in difficult times of unpredictable changes, such as pandemics and wars, which increase loneliness and in which the importance of being alone increases further, thus favoring nurturing a mature inner world.

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