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**Agnieszka Dragon's doctoral viva: *Mediacja jako przestrzeń doświadczeń życiowych (Mediation as a space of transformation of life experiences)*,
Faculty of Education, University of Lower Silesia,
Wrocław, June 23, 2015**

On 23 June, 2015, the public defence of Agnieszka Dragon's doctoral dissertation titled *Mediacja jako przestrzeń doświadczeń życiowych (Mediation as a space of transformation of life experiences)* took place at the Faculty of Education, University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław. The dissertation had been supervised by Professor Dr hab. Józef Kargul from the University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław. The referees were Professor Dr hab. Wiesław Ambrozik (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań) and Professor Dr hab. Andrzej Ładyżyński (University of Wrocław)

Agnieszka Dragon obtained her MA degree in Education from the University of Wrocław. Having completed a postgraduate course in Negotiation and Mediation at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities and several other courses in mediation and law, she got certification as a mediator and was entered on the list of mediators at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Her research interests lie in social relations, help and social support, social influence in democratic societies, conflict and conflict-resolution strategies. As an expert, she mediates mainly in penal and economic law cases. She is also a university teacher and lectures in interpersonal communication, conflict-resolution procedures and mediation interventions.

In her PhD project, Agnieszka Dragon drew on symbolic interactionism and psychological theories of conflict to analyse mediation as a social situation. She also used counselling knowledge to analyse mediation as related to processes of psychological help and counselling. Her research was driven by the central question of "How does the transformation of life experiences of mediation participants proceed, if it comes to pass at all?" To answer this question, the candidate described the disputing parties' experience of mediation, examined the ways in which they made sense of and attributed relevance to mediation as related to their lives, explored the

emotions they went through and pinpointed changes in their behaviours resulting from the participation in mediation and help-reception.

The dissertation includes five chapters. The first chapter builds on the law, psychological, sociological, pedagogical and counselling literature to outline three accounts of mediation as perceived from the perspectives of, respectively, symbolic interactionism, theory of conflict and counselling studies.

The second chapter presents research on legislation relative to mediation and discusses mediation between the victim and the perpetrator in criminal cases as a way of executing restorative justice. The chapter also covers the basic principles of mediation, its advantages and the mediator's tasks in penal proceedings.

The third chapter is devoted to the methodology of research carried out based on the assumptions of qualitative research.

The fourth chapter presents the candidate's interpretation of interviewees' utterance and identifies the significance and meanings invested in the mediation process by its participants. It also analyses what the respondents said about their experiences in meetings with the mediator in order to determine whether the process of mediation can be regarded as a counselling situation and "a space" of adult learning.

The last chapter outlines the current approaches to mediation as an organised process of interpersonal interactions. It also enumerates practitioners' proposals concerning the methodology of mediation, working styles, intervention tools and instruments as well as their postulates concerning "mediator general and emotional competences."

Agnieszka Dragon's dissertation and her performance in the public defence were highly assessed by the referees and other members of the doctoral panel. The professors emphasised the significance of negotiations skills presented by the candidate and appreciated her unique reflexive attitude. Crucially, as a practitioner-cum-researcher, she was able to combine the strictly codified legal knowledge with the humanistic approach to mediation as connected with pre-understandings, dialogue and change. Taking into consideration all the merits of the dissertation and the course of the defence, the Board of the Faculty of Education, University of Lower Silesia, conferred a PhD degree on Agnieszka Dragon and decided to recommend her outstanding dissertation for publication.

Translated from Polish by Katarzyna Sawicz