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Axiological issues common to social pedagogy and social work

Abstract

An attempt to find issues common to social pedagogy and social work should include the reference to the basic determinants of these forms of social activity. The fundamental assumptions of both pedagogy and social work are based on values. In the axiological dimension of accompanying a person in their development values related to human dignity, self-fulfillment and social functioning must be taken into account.

It needs to be highlighted that some areas of modern pedagogy still lack the reference to the axiological assumptions. This may result in inappropriate educational attitudes as well as in deficiencies in the social dimension of human life. There seems to be a serious lack of the axiological references in the field of social work. It is particularly noticeable in the case of attempts to counteract domestic violence.

Emphasis given to values which constitute social pedagogy and social work may help to strengthen the relationship between these scientific disciplines and forms of social activity. Defining basic values, presenting ways how to implement them and overcome anticipated difficulties may result in attitudes based on the recognition of human dignity as well as on the multidimensional nature of life. Academic education which prepares students to professionally implement social support is a crucial element of the relationship between pedagogy and social work.

Key words: social pedagogy, social work, values, domestic violence, academic education.

Introduction

An attempt to find issues common to social pedagogy and social work may seem trivial as in the Polish context social pedagogy and social work are closely related to each other. According to H. Radlińska, one of the most important aims of social pedagogy was to prepare well-qualified social workers who are able to achieve certain goals with an individual or with a local community¹. At the same time, social work made significant contributions to pedagogy related to research and the practical aspects of social support, care and life saving.

In a society with a limited predictability and a rapidly changing social situation, the discussion about what forms the basis for its development seems to be fully justified². In an attempt to find the axiological issues common to pedagogy and social work, it is crucial to draw attention to the dimension which not only brings together these forms of social support but also fosters

1 M. Brenk, *Praca socjalna w pedagogice społecznej Heleny Radlińskiej. Zarys tematu*, [in:] *Ad novum fructum. Z okazji jubileuszu poznańskich historyków wychowania*, eds. W. Jamrozek, K. Ratajczak, D. Żołędź-Strzelczyk, Poznań 2007, p. 94.

2 S. Kawula, *Pedagogika społeczna*, [in:] *Encyklopedia Pedagogiczna XXI wieku*, ed. T. Pilch, v. 4, Warszawa 2005, p. 265.

their further development. It needs to be highlighted that some areas of modern pedagogy still lack the reference to the axiological assumptions. This may result in inappropriate educational attitudes and deficiencies in the social dimension of human life. There also seems to be a serious lack of the axiological references in the field of social work.

In order to find the fundamental issues common to social pedagogy and social work, Polish legislation will be mentioned. The case will concern countermeasures against domestic violence. In this context, pedagogical issues related to the education of prospective professional social workers will also be presented.

Values in social work

There are two models of providing social support based on how the notion of help is perceived. In the first of them, support means giving a person something they lack. The other one is based on the assumption that support may develop the individual's ability to help themselves³. The distinction between these models results from different axiological assumptions underlying caregivers' work. However, in both cases providing support is a moral obligation which needs to be performed with responsibility⁴.

If social workers recognize the importance of values, helping others becomes „a social mission of an axiological nature”⁵. Knowledge and skills are essential to provide professional support but at the same time, basic values should also be taken into account⁶. While offering social support, social workers should consider values such as human dignity, the sense of responsibility, love for others, mercy, justice, honesty, truthfulness and conscientiousness. All of them may have an impact on moral standards such as respect, loyalty, kindness, wise decision-making, generosity and solidarity⁷.

If there are no axiological references, a set of rules is established to maintain harmony in the society. However, such laws are based on changeable values. They lack an objective reference and do not improve human welfare. Thus they become an obstacle to human development⁸.

The loss of values while offering support

*The Act on Counteracting Domestic Violence which came into force in 2010 may serve as an example of a defective regulation*⁹. It seems to refer to a few dimensions of axiological importance. Its introduction provoked a good deal of controversy in the society¹⁰ and a lot of people affected by the Act expressed concerns that it would violate the right to respect for private and family life. They also called for respect for human dignity and made a claim against instrumental treatment. The Act was therefore perceived as a threat to the independence of family members¹¹.

3 A. Kuczkowska-Krukowska, *Istota wspomagania społecznego – przegląd wybranych stanowisk*, „Wychowanie na co Dzień” 6 (2006), p. 16.

4 I. Mizdrak, *Odpowiedzialność niesienia pomocy a pomoc odpowiedzialna*, „Prakseologia”, 153 (2012), p. 71.

5 R. Bera, *Aksjologiczne aspekty pracy socjalnej*, [in:] *Przestrzenie działania w pracy socjalnej w wymiarze etyczno-prakseologicznym*, eds. M. Czechowska-Bieluga, A. Kanios, L. Adamowska, Kraków 2010, p. 28.

6 M. Czechowska-Bieluga, *Preferencja wartości a rozwój (wybrane zagadnienia)*, „Praca socjalna” 2 (2007), p. 9.

7 M. Kluz, *O realizacji wartości moralnych w działaniu pracowników socjalnych*, „Praca socjalna” 3 (2012), p. 27.

8 G. Godawa, *Aksjologiczne podstawy wsparcia społecznego*, [in:] *Pedagogiczne konteksty społecznego wsparcia rodziny*, ed. G. Godawa, Kraków 2015, p. 46-47.

9 *Ustawa z dnia 10 czerwca 2010 r. o zmianie ustawy o przeciwdziałaniu przemocy w rodzinie oraz niektórych innych ustaw* (Dz. U. 13.07. 2010).

10 *Rodzina pod ochroną, czy pod ostrzałem?*, [in:] <http://rodzice.net/news/ustawa-o-przemocy-w-rodzynie/>, (16.04.2016).

11 A. Cieślak, A. Banasiak, M. Krawiec, *Nie idźmy szwedzką drogą. Komentarz do ustawy o przeciwdziałaniu przemocy w rodzinie*, „Sosnowieckie Studia Teologiczne” 10 (2011), p. 27-28.

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The second dimension is related to the findings of the report of the Supreme Audit Office on the functioning of the Act on Counteracting Domestic Violence. The findings revealed that the Act did not improve the situation of the victims of domestic violence and in many cases it made it even worse¹². The main goal was to prepare and implement the program for counteracting domestic violence and protecting victims. Unfortunately, due to the excessive bureaucracy it was not attained. According to the report, „the changes have considerably worsened the situation of people affected by domestic violence and resulted in a fall in the number of incidents of domestic violence that are revealed, which is even more disturbing because only a small number of them is disclosed”¹³. The solutions led to excessively bureaucratic structures, too much documentation and lengthy procedures which prevent social workers from giving support to the victims of violence¹⁴. As a result, the formal aspects of the legal regulation seem to be more critical than the welfare of a person.

The findings of the report showed that the passivity of social workers may have resulted from imposing additional duties on them¹⁵. In this way, the significant assumptions about support offered to others have been marginalized and the crucial role of social workers has been blurred. A social worker is supposed to represent the institution which advocates social equality, justice and the sense of responsibility and duty towards the citizens of a democratic state. Social workers' activity also consists in cooperation with people who are weak, helpless, poor, ill or lonely. Thus the fulfillment of these duties assumes the need for respect for human dignity, freedom and self-determination. Unfortunately, these values have been undermined¹⁶.

The fourth dimension which has the axiological reference relates to the role and condition of a child affected by domestic violence. The Ombudsman for Children addressed this issue during his speech in the Polish parliament, drawing attention to the fact that “a child who is a victim of violence has not become the main subject of social support and solutions resulting from the Act”¹⁷. His statement proves that the Act undermined the importance of the child's actual condition. The lack of any axiological justification may imply that the child being the main victim of domestic violence does not get enough attention and adequate support. The Act was deprived of the paidocentric reference and, consequently, the need to implement the legal assumptions has become much more significant than the welfare of the child.

A short analysis of one of the current social issues proved that the axiological dimension of social work is of crucial importance as it specifies the principles of providing support, facilitates the process of implementing support and contributes to human and social development.

Values and their educational message

The social dimension of the process of upbringing assumes that a young person is preparing to function in the world and in the society. Giving young people exposure to values may facilitate the process¹⁸. Hence, it may be assumed that “the process of upbringing seems to be a value in

12 Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, *Przeciwdziałanie przemocy w rodzinie przez administrację publiczną. Informacja o wynikach kontroli*, [in:] <https://www.nik.gov.pl/plik/id,5094,vp,6609.pdf>, (16.04.2016).

13 Ibid., p. 6.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., p. 34.

16 M. Łuczyńska, *O odpowiedzialności etycznej pracownika socjalnego*, [in:] *Wprowadzenie do pomocy społecznej*, eds. T. Kaźmierczak, M. Łuczyńska, Katowice 1998, p. 97.

17 Rzecznik Praw Dziecka, *Tekst wystąpienia Rzecznika Praw Dziecka w Sejmie Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (2.03.2012 r.) w sprawie skutków obowiązywania ustawy z dnia 10 czerwca 2010 roku o zmianie ustawy o przeciwdziałaniu przemocy w rodzinie oraz niektórych innych ustaw*, [in:] *Dzieci ofiary przemocy w rodzinie raport rzecznika praw dziecka funkcjonowanie znowelizowanej ustawy o przeciwdziałaniu przemocy w rodzinie*, eds. E. Jarosz, A. Nowak, Warszawa 2012, p. 11.

18 B. Połec, *Wychowanie osoby do życia w społeczeństwie – zarys problematyki*, [in:] *Aksjologiczne wymiary wychowania*, ed. J. Siewiora, Tarnów 2012, p. 16.

itself. At the same time, it should foster values which will allow young people to understand themselves, others and the world more"¹⁹. Moreover, it contributes to the acceptance of dignity and equality of other people who belong to the human community²⁰. It seems that the axiological reference is inextricable from the process of upbringing.

More and more often, teachers and carers have to face the consequences of undermining the importance of values in education, which results from ignoring the axiological dimension of social life. Therefore, a question arises about the future of the young generation which is subject to social changes²¹.

According to K. Chałas, the rejection of "the role model of values" poses the biggest problem for education: "A person who rejects «the role model of values» is no longer respected and, above all, undermines their own value"²². The society in which values are not objective may become unable to contribute to the development of the young generation. In this context, it is critical to draw attention to the role of pedagogy in the process of forming attitudes of people who will perform social functions in the future. These are people who will make the law, enforce it or who will be involved in various forms of social support. The attitudes of people engaged in social work will considerably influence the model of social support which should be able to meet a lot of challenges, e.g. how to help immigrants²³.

A constructive approach to education

One of the particularly significant areas in this context is the education of students of social work. A constructive approach to academic teaching puts more emphasis on learning than on teaching, which helps to boost the cognitive independence of a prospective social worker. Thanks to this approach, „an individual can acquire knowledge which includes the meaning of concepts and ideas about phenomena, processes and events. Creating the meaning of concepts, phenomena and processes is a constant and dynamic process related to the initial knowledge"²⁴. In a constructive approach to teaching emphasis is put on the conscious process of acquiring knowledge. It is not the outcome which matters most but the conscious way of reaching it.

A constructive approach to education changes the role of the academic teacher who does not only pass on the knowledge, but "becomes the organizer of educational situations which provide students with the opportunities of authentic cognitive and axiological activity"²⁵. Both theoretical and vocational education are focused on gaining qualifications and competences enabling students to offer professional support in their future job. A constructive approach to the issue of educating prospective social workers gives them a chance to gain knowledge, skills and competences which will have the axiological reference. The opportunity to independently discover the meaning of values results in the internalization of values.

Students need to become conscious of human dignity which forms the basis for social functioning. The recognition of human dignity initiates action when help is needed and forms the attitude of tolerance which embraces "openness to other people, accepting their values, experiencing humanity in encounters with others and an attempt to find the objective good (the good of the person, the good of the community, common good). In such an understanding of

19 J. Mastalski, *Samotność globalnego nastolatka*, Kraków 2007, p. 290.

20 P. Kroczek, *Wychowanie. Optyka prawa polskiego i prawa kanonicznego*, Kraków 2013, p. 48.

21 Ł. Ryszka, *Istota przemian ustrojowo-społecznych dokonujących się w Polsce. Perspektywa pedagogiczna*, [in:] *Pedagogiczne konteksty społecznego wsparcia rodziny*, ed. G. Godawa, Kraków 2015, p. 11-12.

22 K. Chałas, *Wychowanie ku wartościom. Elementy teorii i praktyki*, v. 1, Lublin-Kielce 2003, p. 98.

23 A. Włoch, *Społeczny wymiar edukacji europejskiej*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Małopolskiej Wyższej Szkoły Ekonomicznej w Tarnowie”, 1 (2011), p. 234.

24 M. Kozielska, *Konstruktywizm a proces studiowania z wykorzystaniem technologii informacyjnych*, „Chowanna” 2 (2007), p. 89.

25 K. Denek, *Kształcenie akademickie nauczycieli*, „Nowa Szkoła” 1 (2013), p. 13.

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tolerance, one's behavior is not always approved of. However, the value of human dignity is always of utmost importance"²⁶.

In order to recognize human dignity, students have to make an effort to discover the truth about human existence. In this way, they may become reflective theoreticians and skillful practitioners able to reflect on the reality. Students who receive academic education which has the axiological reference can learn how to live and help with dignity and how not to humiliate the person who receives support.

In order to successfully implement the educational process based on the constructive assumptions, the role of academic teachers needs to be highlighted. Efforts should be made to ensure that "academic teachers encourage the subjects of education to build good relationships and to make students active, creative, innovative and responsible for their educational development"²⁷. The teacher can perform his role successfully on condition that he is open and has a strong personal conviction about the importance of the content of education.

Despite the fact that in a pluralistic and open society it is possible to build a concept of education taking no account of universal values, it is worth emphasizing that such an approach would be a considerable loss. Values should form the basis for academic education. The importance of them should also be considered in curriculum planning²⁸.

Conclusion

Social work and pedagogy are so closely related to each other that separating them would disturb their internal structures. Although social changes create a need for adapting to the constantly changing conditions of work with other people, some elements remain the same. Values which are permanent may become a significant reference for support offered to others.

The analysis shows that in social work the welfare of a person is not always of utmost importance, which results in the decreased efficiency of social action, discouragement and social frustration. In order to prevent these consequences, pedagogical action must be taken. If it is not deprived of the axiological references, it may improve the condition of the society. This does not imply that social pedagogy is always able to protect the society from ineffective legislation or bureaucracy. Social pedagogy may, however, support prospective social workers, enabling them to receive education based on dynamic knowledge acquisition and to reflect on the very essence of help. The dynamic attitude of social workers may boost the opportunity to implement assumptions about human dignity.

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26 K. Chałas, *Wychowanie...*, op. cit., p. 204.

27 K. Denek, *Teoretyczne i aplikacyjne aspekty jakości kształcenia akademickiego*, „Neodidagmata” 33/34 (2011-2012), p. 53.

28 H. Kwiatkowska, *Pedeutologia*, Warszawa 2008, s. 63.

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