RECENZJE/REVIEWS

Farber K., Armaline W. (2009). *Democracy, improvisation and schooling reform*. "Zarządzanie Publiczne", 4 (4): 43–51.

Reviewed by: Adriana Bożek-Ociepa

The article analyses and discusses these issues in the specific context of public school reform and restructuring. The main issue is the concept of interdependence as one key goal in reform efforts that are employing collaborative and democratic practices with school, university, and community partners.

First of all, it is worth noticing that the article is organized very interestingly, describing this social issue with examples from music, dance, writing, and economics – all divided into separate chapters. Each of them contains a separate topic which, in the final paragraph, is explained within the social context. In the introduction the author presents the main purpose of the article which is very broad because it refers to many aspects – the social, political, and cultural. In addition, Farber explains why she took up the subject. The author focuses primarily on the concept of democracy which is often misunderstood and narrowed in the modern world. In fact, this is a finger pointed at public education today.

This article contains analyses of public discourse which tends to ignore conflicting cultures, interests, and values in diverse groups, and constructing public education in its own image. In contemporary times, people seek consensus and agreement in everything, but, for this author, that is not the most important thing. Farber points out that cooperation, interdependence, communication, and integration are more needed. She points out that differences between people should not be removed; instead, people should work together despite their differences. Farber believes that developing and deepening human awareness of interdependence can be a guiding force in helping people live democratically, in and out of school. School reform is not a new phenomenon in the USA; people have been working for over two decades for democratic school reform.

As for the thesis, it is insufficiently explained in the subsequent chapters. However, the author initially carries out an analysis of interdependence, integration, and communication on the basis of musical instruments and players as an example. Farber indicates

that each of them follows particular patterns and formulas. Despite spontaneity, everything has a specific structure and form. After a thorough explanation of how an entire concert looks from the inside, the author transfers this to the interpersonal communication sphere. She shows that players rely upon each other and have confidence in the ensemble's mastery of a multiplicity of musical skills.

The next chapter describes contact improvisation in dance. Farber shows that interaction is the most important thing in the dance. Dancers have to dance, abandoning self-control in favor of mutual trust and interaction. The important elements are also improvisation and support, which cannot be learned as dance steps. The author suggests that these features in dance reflect a spontaneous way of life. In both dance and jazz, people can find metaphors for collective, collaborative behaviors that are quite different from the forms of democratic behaviors typically invoked in the theory and practice of collaborative educational endeavors.

Last but not least, the author points to the idea of writing together. For Farber the power of group writing comes from the fact that everyone can improvise and describe his or her own experiences collectively, while keeping individuality inviolable. Due to the fact that the problem described by the author is presented with reference to the sphere of art, the average reader may have problems understanding the main thesis. The subject of cooperation, interaction, spontaneity, etc. is very important and contemporary, but it is described very fragmentarily. The author focuses more on instruments, names and dates than on the subject of the article. Nevertheless, the very idea of using these examples is very interesting and develops the reader's imagination. Application of this method allowed Farber to describe cultural and social reality in detail. These methods and examples are appropriate and adequate to the task. From the sociological point of view, the most interesting chapter describes the development of the economy across the entire USA. That development was shaped through a joint venture, wedded to social improvement and educational opportunities.

By and large, the author managed to get to the relevant data. Each example was based on the right category, time, and interesting story. The data are presented very clearly and accurately. However, the examples are often too long and somewhat incomprehensible. It can be claimed that the author provided too much numerical information. In addition, the text lacks images which could better illustrate it. The main advantage is the fact that each "research topic" has been described separately: consequently, the reader has no problem keeping various pieces of information straight. The results of these studies are interesting and raise the reader's level of knowledge with regards to this article's subject matter.

Overall, this is a very well organized and well-written article. It is worth mentioning that the text is not only addressed to social workers, but contains some important concepts that can just as easily enrich the knowledge of people who are simply interested in culture, policy or, generally speaking, social life. The subject of cooperation, interaction, and interdependence is very timely and important for society. The whole article is original. However, I must admit that at times it did become boring. The reason for this incoherence can be connected to the fact that certain threads utilized by the author were unnecessary or difficult to understand. Nevertheless, I read it gladly and would recommend it to others.

Ameri F., Vazifeshenas N., Haghparast A. (2017). *The impact of audio book on the elderly mental health*. "Basic and Clinical Neuroscience", 8 (5): 361–370.

Reviewed by: Izabela Glińska

One of the symptoms of aging is deterioration of mental health. People are particularly vulnerable to intellectual and psychological problems after retirement because the social relations of elderly people decrease and emotional complications increase. The use of bibliotherapy can be a solution to improve the mental condition of the aged. Reading books is one of the tools that assuages various disorders which may arise. However, some elderly are unable to read alone due to various reasons, including reduced memory, poor eyesight or illiteracy. In these cases, bibliotherapy is still possible thanks to the use of technology. Audiobooks are useful for people who lack the ability to read or if this ability is disturbed. The study presented in the article aims to investigate the effects of audiobooks on the mental health of the elderly.

The goal of this article is to give an account of precisely such effects at a Retirement Center found at the Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences in Iran. This study examines whether audiobooks have a positive influence on various psychological aspects such as interpersonal sensitivity, somatization, obsessive-compulsiveness, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation and psychosis. The question is whether listening to a book can consequently improve the mental health of the retired elderly. The research population comprised all the retired people at the abovementioned center in 2016. The sample consisted of 30 elderly volunteers in the experimental group and 30 elderly volunteers in the control group. The subjects were selected using a simple random sampling method. The criteria for participating in the study were as follows:
  – Age ranging from 65 to 80 years;
  – Sufficient interest in participating in the study;
  – Having adequate literacy;
  – Having the ability and patience to sit through an audiobook course; and
  – Participation in at least 5 sessions.
The audiobook course was conducted for 1 month, 2 days per week, in 8 one-hour sessions. The research was preceded by a questionnaire checking the psychological condition of the participants. As for the book selection, researchers tried to choose the most optimal material, based upon the interest of the subjects. A specific topic was chosen in all 8 sessions so that – in addition to being informative – it would also arouse curiosity and the continued interest of the participants.

After completing the sessions, the research subjects were reexamined by means of a questionnaire. The gathered data were then analyzed and compared with pretest results. The findings were collected and presented in tables and diagrams; subsequently, statistical data analysis was used to summarize the outcomes. As the results revealed,

participation in audiobook workshops reduces the dimensions of mental disability in the elderly. The improvement of the intellectual and especially psychological health status of these older people was presented in percentages. Partaking in audiobook workshops has the greatest positive impact on depression relief and the lowest impact on the somatic complaints of the elderly.

In the physical and biological sciences, the use of either quantitative or qualitative methods is generally accepted; each of these two types is used as appropriate. In the social sciences – particularly in sociology, social anthropology, and psychology – the use of one or the other type of method can be a matter of controversy. The research presented in the article intersects medical studies, sociology, and psychology. While the statistical analysis is related to medical science, it is surprising that the influence of literature on psychological health can be examined by means of statistical calculation. From my point of view, this is both a strong and a weak point in the studies described herein.

On the one hand, we can learn about new research perspectives and the use of other analytical techniques. On the other hand, in this specific case, I am more interested in individual human experiences which cannot be portrayed in tables, medians, and columns of numbers. The characteristics of the study subjects are non-exhaustive and include only such rudimentary information as gender, marital status, age, and education level (although the research does also display participant reading preferences. Besides this problem, we do not receive data which would supplement our image of older people living in Iran. We do not acquire any information on the specific problems they face, how the environment influences them, and in what social context they live.

As the authors duly noted, along with the growing elderly populations, the health problems of the aged – especially mental health problems – become more significant. This general statement equally concerns all developed countries but does not confirm if older people are particularly susceptible to the occurrence of psychological disorders. The authors of this research project do not look for the underlying causes of mental illness among the elderly in Iran. They only note that this is one of the problems accompanying the phenomenon of an ageing population; they only comment that suitable social policies should be developed.

A previously reviewed article – Bibliotherapy: Reading for wellbeing in old age by Susan Mc Laine (published in Issues in Social Work, 2017) concerned the same subject: the impact of bibliotherapy on the mental health of the elderly. Both articles describe research conducted on a group of people who participated in a series of therapeutic meetings. In the first case, it was bibliotherapy via reading out loud accompanied by conversation; in the present case, there were several therapeutic sessions employing audiobooks.

However, the two papers represent completely different methodological approaches to the problem. The earlier instance constituted typical qualitative research with such techniques as focus group interviews, case studies, participant observation, and the

most common method used to generate data in qualitative research – an interview. This time we are dealing with quantitative research on the basis of a random sample, structured survey, and statistical analysis. Rather than focusing on how it works, the authors of the current study are more interested in getting an answer to the question of does bibliotherapy work?

The differences in the approach of the researchers in both cases may result from different socio-family and demographic situations in the respective countries. Australia, represented by Susan McLain's article, struggles with a high level of ageing and must provide institutional care for many pensioners. This leads to individualization and severance of family ties among the elderly population. Meanwhile, in Iran, probably due to the principles of religion, family is still of great importance in society and stands as a fundamental protector of the elderly. The article also stresses the importance of religion when it comes to the wellbeing of older people in society. It has been emphasized that reading the Quran can bring significant effects in bibliotherapy. One of the studies quoted in the latter article reported a compelling relationship between Quran recitation and mental health; this holy scripture was introduced as the most effective predictor regarding the psychological condition of the elderly.

Both the first and second reviewed articles focus on problems of old people. However, the two articles are embedded in two different social contexts. The previous paper presents bibliotherapy as a way of dealing with loneliness and isolation in social assistance homes. The present case suggests that bibliotherapy (reading programs created by authorities and agencies) can gradually create a culture of reverence for the elderly in their families, build intimacy in public, and promote a reading culture, especially among family members. According to the researchers, reading books can promote ethical principles that everyone should follow from an early age, throughout the school years and through puberty, into adulthood. The promotion of such values can contribute to improvement in the social protection of the elderly; it can also have a significant impact on their psychological and intellectual condition as well as their functioning in society.

The primary research hypothesis here was that the mental health status of elderly persons did change significantly after participating in audiobook workshops, and this was confirmed by the posttest scores of mental health in the experimental group. Yet from the above tests we can only prove that bibliotherapy works, but do not know the people who stand behind the numbers and statistics. That is why it is so important to use qualitative methods to understand the meaning of the conclusions produced by quantitative methods. The two articles complement one another, however, for me as a social worker, qualitative research carries a much more important message.

In conclusion, according to the text at hand (quoting the opinion of many psychiatric health researchers), bibliotherapy is one of the best choices in order to improve the quality of elderly life. It is also a good way to protect the mental health of older people and to restore their effective functioning in society. The purpose of bibliotherapy includes giving individual tips in the areas of disease prevention, treatment, problem solving, and

personality development. Furthermore, thanks to the introduction of technological innovations in the lives of the elderly populace, we can counteract its isolation and distrust of an ever-changing world. Confirmed by this article, bibliotherapy can be particularly valuable for those people who, despite serious and chronic conditions, refuse to visit a doctor. I think that these are too far-reaching conclusions. In psychiatry and clinical psychology, bibliotherapy is known as an adjunct to individual treatment and cannot replace a thorough therapy based on a medical diagnosis.

Healy K. (2014). *Social Work Theories in Context. Creating Frameworks for Practice*. 2ⁿᵈ ed. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

Reviewed by: Marta Kamińska

The problems of social work's clients are mainly shaped by social and political structures. This is a fundamental claim in the book chapter "Modern Critical Social Work: From Radical to Anti-Oppressive Practice." The author, Karen Healy, is an Australian university professor in social work and, in this article, she points out the circumstances and challenges which social work faces nowadays.

A clear overview is given in the introduction about the main content and structure of the chapter. The author states what modern critical social work is concerning and what can be derived for social work practice. A crucial message in the introduction is that the causes of injustice are "differences in power and access to material resources" (Healy 2014: 184). Various directions of critical social work – such as "Marxist social work, radical social work, structural social work, feminist social work, anti-racist social work and anti-oppressive social work" (p. 185) – are briefly mentioned, but Healy does focus on the basic principles underlying all of these. Indeed, critical social workers have to be aware of the fact that social structures are mainly formed by dominant "macro-social" (p. 185) concepts. This means that the way people live together, and how resources and changes are distributed, is largely fixed by "capitalism," "patriarchy," and "imperialism" (p. 185).

In Healy's argumentation the effects and meanings of the possession of power are approached and strongly emphasized several times. Concerning this matter, one central objective of the author is to point out how powerful social workers are in their positions and how essential self-reflection is for the practitioners. The consequence should be that the professional's influence is used to help clients become more powerful.

Furthermore, Healy sees it as a crucial part of social work to increase awareness raising in order to discover unequal systems. Especially the clients, who are assumed to be "oppressed" (p.186), should be enabled to see the structural causes of their problems and to start fighting against these causes. Options for participation and collective activities should be provided with the goal of reaching social change.

After aptly outlining the development of critical social work, the author deals with this aspect contemporaneously. For that she refers to the "Social Work Action Network in the UK" (p. 191) which is a cooperative, radical social work organization. Among its current working focuses are the influences of neoliberalism, the injustice of "class inequality and material disadvantage" (p. 191) as well as the new form of organizing and managing social work practice. Healy claims that critical social work must analyze discriminatingly the structures and realities that produce social disparity.

A quite large part of the book chapter deals with one current form of critical social work, i.e., "anti-oppressive social work" (p. 192). Once more Healy states that the goal is to attain social change by first perceiving and illustrating the structural causes of social

problems as well as various kinds of oppression and inequality. The claim is that oppressive relations are found, for example, between men and women, rich and poor people, or children and adults. The author refers to Thompson's "three-dimensional model of discrimination" (p. 193) which includes the levels of personal, cultural, and structural oppression. Therefore, it is shown that there are links and interactions between different forms of oppressions (e.g., sexism and racism) which make this even more complex. What I consider very important is how Healy points out that, as a consequence, the social work profession is strongly political and that knowledge and power must be used for the matter of social change.

Finally, concerning a case study, the author analyzes five key principles for anti-oppressive social work practice. After every theoretical description she poses questions referring to that case study which, in turn, helps the reader emphasize the meaning of the principles.

The first key point is self-reflection. Social workers should constantly think over the power of their positions as well as the way they are shaped and influenced by their own history, social relations, categories, and many more factors. The awareness about that is considered as important as the critical evaluation of the dimensions of oppressions that clients face. Reflection upon the influence of factors like race and gender, of unjust systems and of present ideologies is essential. The last three principles can be contained in one sentence: empowering the clients by working with them, performing the minimal necessary interventions. Healy distinguishes between empowerment on an individual, institutional, or structural level. This means that awareness-raising as well as the strengthening of the capabilities and confidence of clients is as important as training social organizations in consciousness and going for just social and political reforms. Collaboration is considered anti-oppressive, if transparency and appreciating communication are the foundation, and if the participation of clients is as high and the external interference as low as possible.

As a concluding section, the author summarizes the strengths of anti-oppressive social work. She accents once more that it contains a multidimensional, reflective perspective for analyzing cultural and political context with the permanent focus on social justice. Beyond that, Healy looks at all this critically, too: she points out what might be the limitations of this kind of social work practice. She considers that personal, psychological factors might be excluded by focusing on structural causes. In addition, she takes into account that, by speaking of oppressions, too radical a polarization can easily take place. Furthermore, the author admits that the decisions that have to be made in demanding situations are sometimes really crucial and that minimal interventions might not always be suitable.

Overall, I consider this book chapter to be quite valuable. Karen Healy elaborates the impact of social and political structures on the emergence of social problems and arrives at essential principles for social work practice. She makes explicit how important critical reflection and awareness raising is. Although her perspective is rather broad, the author is repeating her main statements several times. Instead of that, in

my view, it would have been beneficial to get deeper explanations of what oppressions can look like and how exactly they shape social problems. Nevertheless, I recommend this book chapter to every (becoming) social worker. Though I believe the critical reflection of given structures and dominant influences should be promoted for people in general, Healy's text does not seem to be very suitable for "outsiders" as she refers explicitly to the profession of social work.

Puntervold Bo B. (2014). *Social work in a multicultural society: New challenges and needs for competence*. "International Social Work", 1–13, DOI: 10.177/0020872814550114.

Reviewed by: Liliana Zarychta

We live in a constantly changing society. In the past, people could not imagine that moving around the world would be possible. Currently, we can travel and cross national borders really easily and this means that societies today are not homogeneous. In this review I would like to discuss an article written by Bente Puntervold Bo who is a university scholar in Norway. In the article the author argues that social work in a multicultural society requires special preparation and that social workers must have specific skills.

The article is divided into two parts. The first one mainly addresses the question of how social workers should work with clients from diverse backgrounds, cultures and nationalities. The second part focuses mainly on schools of social work and considerations of how these institutions should prepare students for activities in a multicultural society. The author shows that social work in a culturally diverse society demands more from practitioners than social work within a majority culture. This thesis is the outcome of analysis of two different sets of data and two different groups.

In the initial study, 50 social workers took part while the second encompassed 48 social workers. Answers from respondents in both studies were very similar despite the 5 intervening years between the two investigations. It is my opinion that, thanks to the fact that the research was repeated, its results are more reliable. The respondents pointed to several key issues as challenges in multicultural social work. The greatest one is communication problems due to lack of a common language. With this I definitely agree: absence of a common means of communication causes anger and frustration. Of course, it is possible to use a translator service but the ultimate translation might be incomplete. Moreover, sometimes it might be difficult to find a translator in a specific language when needed. Furthermore, in my opinion, it is difficult to express feelings and talk about dramatic experiences in an indirect manner.

Another challenge to social work in an inhomogeneous society is communication mishaps caused by different cultural codes of behavior. Cultural codes are really important because they affect an individual's attitude towards life and other people. The author of the article convinces us that family conflicts are another of the most challenging issues in multicultural social work. Here the main problems relate to childrearing practices, generational conflicts, and gender roles. For example, in some cultures, violence against children might be expected. In this situation, it might be impossible to convince someone that violence is bad. Social workers are therefore powerless.

Similarly, social worker interventions in very authoritarian families can be problematic. Relationships in such families are based on prohibitions and injunctions, often associated with gender or age roles. Usually the father is regarded as the breadwinner and the mother's responsibility is to take care of the children and the household chores

(p. 6). Still, I believe that this is a common problem among social work clients, regardless of cultural background.

The author highlights an important issue: the physical and psychological health problems of ethnic minority clients. Many of them experience racism and discrimination because of their skin color or religion. They often experience mental health problems due to, for example, suffering from posttraumatic stress disorders. Not rarely, refugee clients have experienced ongoing wars and dramatic escapes before their arrival in a new country. Many have lost relatives or suffered a separation from family members (p. 6). The role of social workers is motivating clients to participate in therapy. However, social workers must, above all, have knowledge about posttraumatic disorders in order to recognize a client's needs. Mental health problems are frequently viewed as taboo; this is common among minority groups as well as the majority population.

Poland is not involved in helping refugees, but I hope that this will change in the future. Therefore, I think that the information found in this article is important for social workers here, too. Bente Puntervold Bo suggests that structural barriers make it difficult to adapt a social service system to the needs of minority clients (p. 7). I think that this is true: a structural deficiency is the non-adaption of rules and methods to the reality of a multicultural society. Social workers continually follow the same rules, not knowing that they need to be more flexible and to adjust assistance programs to a particular group. Therefore, really important is the preparation of social workers and social work students to act appropriately in today's culturally diverse societies. Personally, university degree programs should include a course on this subject. Students should be well informed how to work among a pluralistic populace. They need knowledge about the living conditions of various groups in society, as well as awareness of the effects of racism and discrimination. What is more future social workers need cross-cultural competences – the ability to create solid relationships which take into account the distinct cultural backgrounds of their clients. Social work students should be culturally sensitive, and have the ability to understand another person's perspective. Moreover, it is necessary to be able to also see oneself as a "bearer of culture" (p. 11).

My choice of the reviewed text was dictated strictly by my personal interest in topics related to social work in a multicultural society. I think that we should open the borders of our country and help refugees, but then social workers will need to be better prepared. This text by Bente Puntervold Bo explains all the important concepts useful in this type of social work. Most definitely I would recommend this article for social work students as well as practitioners.