

RECENZJE/REVIEWS

Sh. Waren, J.Ch. Deckert (2020). *Contemplative Practices for Self-Care in the Social Work Classroom*, "Social Work", 65 (1): 11–20.

Reviewed by Magdalena Surówka

The main idea of the article is based on the fact that social work requires a lot of personal commitment and substantive knowledge. Social work students prepare for the requirements of the profession by learning the skills, knowledge, methods, and values that they will use in working with various social welfare clients. Social work educators emphasize the role of combining substantive knowledge with self-care practices. Social workers experience emotional, psychological, and physically demanding work with people, and the inability to deal with difficult situations can bring sadness, stress, and even trauma to a person's life. The article shows how self-care practices can be helpful in future work, but also in the challenges of learning and gaining knowledge by students. The authors presented three examples of practices used in their students and the reactions to these practices. The article also covers the precautions and safety precautions associated with intense personal reflection.

The purpose of the article is to show the importance of self-care practices and practical methods of using them in social work. This topic is important because taking care of yourself in the helping profession is a way of not transferring problems to your personal life, preventing professional burnout, and the possibility of greater involvement in the matters of those we help. The authors, by outlining the theoretical value of the subject of the article, have smoothly moved on to show the practices that are based on their own experience but also supported by theoretical assumptions. Their findings are clearly defined, supported by theoretical and practical experience that demonstrated that self-care practices are key to good work and that their learning should start during their studies. The article broadens the knowledge about self-care practices and encourages readers to participate in them and look for those that are right for them.

The article is well-structured. It has a theoretical introduction, supported by extensive literature, a transition to practical aspects that combine literature with experience, a summary, and a written bibliography. The whole of the study encourages you to read the content and expand your knowledge about the topic under study. At the beginning of the article, we can find a short introduction that outlines the purpose and content of

the content. It explains the reasons for going deeper into the subject and, which has been emphasized, the combination of the theoretical foundations with practical activities.

The introduction indicates that reflexivity is an important part of the evaluation of social workers' work and that contemplative and self-care practices can support the development of their implementation skills. The first part of the article deals with contemplative practices. The text develops a concept, defines it, and includes references to scientific texts. Contemplative practices are purposeful activities that help in everyday life not to forget about important and important things for us. They can be combined with being physically active, being alone, in silence or noise, or being together with other people. They allow you to recognize and express accumulated feelings, work on relationships, and even a wider understanding of the world. These practices are not new: they are known in education, but their role in the practical learning of social work is extremely important – they allow you to learn ethics, which should characterize the activities of a social worker. The authors refer to the research that showed that students experiencing contemplation increased their concentration on professional internships and coped better with academic life. In social work education, it is necessary to change the approach from quantitative methods to improve the aid process to perceiving the human being in the system. "If we cannot take care of ourselves, we cannot take care of others" – this sentence guides the authors to prove the idea of the article. Self-care for students is a means of getting to know oneself, caring for, oneself and learning self-worth, which translates into more effective and ethical work in the profession of a social worker.

The second part of the article refers to examples of contemplative practices in the education of social work. The practices included in the education process encourage students to focus more attention, understand the course content more deeply, develop compassion and bond, and help to improve professional skills. The first practice is mindfulness. It is a method of contemplation involving the use of different techniques to focus attention. Most of them intentionally focus on their inner emotions, recognize them and learn to deal with them. Mindfulness allows you to increase tolerance, not judge others, kindness, willingness to act, or an attitude of openness to others. The belief in the effectiveness of mindfulness was supported by the reflections of people who, during the classes with the authors of the article, experienced the technique of contemplation that is mindfulness. The second technique presented in this article is the Photovoice Reflection technique. It is a learning technique that works by combining images with the methods and concepts used in social work. This technique allows you to practice reflexivity by becoming interested in the selected photography and finding its meaning. Students who received education and practiced this technique indicated that thanks to this, their reflection and awareness of the greater expression of life, which translated into more productive and lively conversations deepened.

The labyrinth as a tool of contemplation is the third and last technique that builds the practical perspective of the article. Walking through the maze in many professions and disciplines brings positive results, including those with self-care – reducing stress, and focusing on emotions. This technique turned out to be despite the conviction that to

contemplate one should not move. The author has proved in her practice that moving in the fresh air and communing with your thoughts can unravel a lot of doubts. The maze is not a puzzle, but a project that allows you to follow the same path following different thoughts. The labyrinths become a reflection of a calm mind – there is no one right path, but walking calmly teaches solutions to even the most difficult situations. Although not everyone has the opportunity to walk through a real, large maze, even a finger or pocket maze makes the experience of learning yourself better. The final paragraph emphasized the value of self-care. Regular practice of techniques helps to become more effective social workers, teaches the separation of professional and private spheres, which, according to the authors, affects the whole picture of life and self-perception.

The theoretical foundations of the article are well prepared, they allow for the development or exploration of the presented theories, although they do not seem to be fully satisfactory. Throughout the article, you can find links to specific authors and research that confirm the theses introduced by the authors. These references, however, do not fully exhaust the knowledge (which is never fully possible), but in the general reading of the article, it can be stated that there is no further development of the theory. The presentation in good style is to combine the theory with the practice of the authors, which was also supported by the assumptions of other researchers. In general, however, one can get the impression that the theory is not presented exhaustively and should be more extensive.

A scientific article is characterized by an arrangement in which the main part of the article – the heart should be in the most important part and constitute a practical extension of the theories mentioned in the introduction. An article by Sherry Warren and Jennifer Chappell Deckert is a reflection on this topic. The division it presents may seem correct as in the image of the article more space is devoted to reflections on the authors' research and practice than to theory. The essence of the problem, however, is the fact that the described practical activities are also built based on the literature. In the opinion of the recipient, this may suggest the uncertainty of the researchers in their activities or the lack of sufficiently extensive research. The logic of the article is clear, the authors did not introduce an incomprehensible text, editorial turmoil, or very complicated, specialized vocabulary. The article does not contain any tables or figures, which is not a mistake, considering the nature and subject of the article, but could make it more interesting. The article does not contain any tables or figures, which is not a mistake, looking at the nature and subject of the article, but could make it more interesting. The experiences described in the research part of the article are presented only in a substantive form. Statistical data were not presented, which may suggest a small scale of the research carried out or its incomplete conduct.

The style of writing of the article can be assessed as clear, fairly clear, and understandable. The article contains phrases that may be incomprehensible to a person who does not use specific vocabulary in the field of psychology and social work. The message and description of the research are provided unambiguously and directly. A great advantage is an inclusion in the research results of the statements of the participants – students of

authors who have most closely experienced the contemplative techniques discussed in the article. The key terms are explained with definitions, which improves the understanding and clarity of the article. The handwriting is correct: it cannot be considered that the article was written by people with rudimentary knowledge of grammar or not fluent in the language. The layout of the article is quite an unusual form. It was written in two columns. This is not a mistake, but it may affect the readers' perception of the article. For some people, such a layout is unreadable, introduces chaos and confusion when reading.

In my opinion, the article is an interesting reading proposition that may inspire you to explore the topic of self-care in the experience of social work. The presented theories clearly show that the issue is necessary to introduce future social workers during the learning process because it is positive not only in the context of work but also of studies. The choice of words, adaptation to the reader, the multitude of literature, or the presented accounts of research participants encourage you to read this article. It is worth noting that in the reception of the article one can sense the great commitment of the authors, who in the course of educating students allowed them to depart from rigid teaching techniques in favor of more effective and engaged work. The advantage of the article is also the balance between the issue of social work and private life. Although aid professions are theoretically referred to as those that affect the questioned life, the theoretical basis shows little how to deal with this symbiosis positively. The article may also be useful for employees from a sector other than social work. The contemplative techniques presented are helpful wherever stress, commitment, and self-devotion at work are disturbed. Despite several shortcomings, such as the layout of the article, the lack of statistical data, or the lack of use of images in the content of the article, it can be considered valuable. In my opinion, it presents positive and useful content that, even after reading an article that will never fully exhaust the topic, should be implemented in the education of students and the work of social workers.

R.B. Nikku, A.Z. Hatta (2014). *Spiritually Sensitive Social Work: The Road Worth Taking*, in: *Social Work Education and Practice: Scholarship and Innovations in the Asia Pacific*, Chapter 10. Primrose Hall, Australia. ISBN: 978-1-304-77913-7.

Reviewed by Michał Holewa

Spirituality enters social work. Spirituality is becoming very important as people have to cope with difficulties, illness, ageing or disability. Social workers should also consider this method. Therefore, in the context of this topic, it is worth examining the chapter by Venkat Pulla, how he defines spirituality, what his opinion on it is, and whether he sees, and if he does, what connections there are with social work. The author begins his text with a conceptual outline. He presents the situation related to spirituality. First of all, he notes the growing interest in research on religion, spirituality and mental health. He

notes that research shows a link between religion and mental health. In the context of social work, he states that this field has closed itself off to spirituality. At the same time, he acknowledges that this is an opportunity and a challenge for social work.

According to the author, research shows that spirituality can play a positive role when people begin to have problems. Spirituality can have a positive impact on a person's physical and mental health. Social work does not use spirituality because this approach focuses on clinical work, and this rejects spirituality and considers it unscientific. Furthermore, the author notes that social workers respond to spirituality in different ways. One group accepts spirituality and the other group does not accept spirituality due to conflicting ideas. The second option has helped social work because through this action social work has academic respect and is a scientific discipline.

The important thing is that many people from poor countries have started coming to western countries. This is also important according to the author because immigrants have some culture, beliefs, spirituality, etc. that they bring with them. For this reason, social workers had to adapt to this situation. In the West, social workers have opened up to cultural diversity. They had to go beyond their own cultural framework. This led social workers to appreciate spirituality in the lives of clients as a form of therapy.

In the main body of the chapter, the author defines the term spirituality. According to him, it comes from the word spirit and is something central and the reason for all human actions. It starts with the feeling of being healthy, having power, energy or hope. He emphasises that spirit is deeply rooted in a person. According to the author, it is the spirit that directs, quickens, and motivates man to survive. The second part of the word indicates that matters of spirit cannot be perceived through individual senses and personal reflection. The spirit of the people should be inferred and confirmed by professional observation. This is an important point because it indicates that spirituality is objective. That is, it is possible to confirm this with tools. In this case it is observation. The author has thus demonstrated the scientific character of spirituality.

After presenting a general definition of spirituality, a reference to social work follows. In the text there is a view that during the last two decades people have started to open up to the concepts of spirituality. This also applies to social work clients. They talk about God or other supernatural figures during meetings or interviews. It is interesting that the author points out here that these beliefs helped people to survive in situations of suffering. That is, the beliefs taught them the attitude of request, petition towards the professed absolute. This passage can be interpreted in such a way that these people of divine origin were an institution of help for ordinary people. It was a kind of image of a social worker who would help with suffering and problems. This is a very interesting perspective in the context of social work.

We should agree with the author of the text that social work should enter the space of spirituality. It is convincing that spirituality can be one of the tools that social workers should use in their profession. Because a large number of people have a need for meaning in life, and spirituality guarantees this. Spirituality helps to find the meaning of life in a non-human world. It makes it possible to integrate all spaces of life into a coherent

whole. This is why it should play an important role in social work. This positive approach is missing from the article. The author is too conservative in his opinions about the connections between spirituality and social work. At the same time, his proposal to link spirituality in social work with the themes of gratitude, forgiveness, redemption and surrender of human will to a higher power is very interesting. This therapeutic approach is needed in social work.

The author distinguishes the concept of innate spirituality in his publication. This is a reference to the fact that every human being is a spiritual being. It does not matter whether he is religious, goes to church or prays, etc. One has to agree with the author that spirituality is not peripheral, that is, it does not concern only selected individuals. Spirituality is something natural. Therefore, it is worth using it in social work. The author suggests that social workers ask themselves many questions before concluding that they have a client with a religious or spiritual identity. His second suggestion is that social workers should stop arguing about beliefs because they might gain a useful perspective that can be applied in the field of social work. The first proposal is important and necessary because an accurate diagnosis of the client greatly helps the social worker. However, the development of this postulate is lacking. First of all, what form should it take: a diagnosis for use by one social worker or general information in the client's file. The second proposal is practical. A professional social worker should not express their views in public. Especially since workers are public officials in some countries.

The social work profession is spiritual by nature. This statement that appears in the text is very important. The author accurately diagnoses that the social work profession is committed to the welfare and empowerment of the client. The social worker is supposed to fight for human dignity and social justice. He should restore the economic, social and environmental balance of his client. In all of this, a place can be found for spirituality and its celebration can be supported. This phrase is the essence of spirituality in social work. Venkat Pulla rightly points this out. This perspective of the social worker is something innovative in social work. The author inspires us to learn more about this subject. Importantly, it is a response to the rational approach in social work. The western world proposes this, to treat social work in a secular, individualistic and materialistic way. However, the text shows that the foundations of social work have always been based on humanitarianism and faith in people.

The combination of spirituality and social work is useful in the area of trauma, where people reflect on the end of life, ageing, and illness. But it is also about cultural competence and working with addicts. The author points out that social work is just beginning to adapt to the demands of a culturally diverse world. When clients come in who are of a different culture and diagnose the causes of their condition differently, social workers must understand the cultural background of the client. Therefore, the text proposes inclusivity and a client-centered approach. Because, as Pulla argues, it is crucial to adopt a broad framework of cultural sensitivity. He cites Mel Grey, who proposes a broad view of spirituality. Through her ethical practice, she could improve life for others in social work. Because social work is a practical-moral activity in which

the purpose, mission, meaning and values are essential. Spirituality responds to this and is an important tool to deal with death, dying, and trauma. The text also shows that this issue was raised at a joint conference of the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Federation of Social Work Schools in 2004. The IFSW documents state that spirituality is the domain of the social worker profession. If two organizations that are significant for this discipline speak positively on this subject, it means then this approach begins to play an important role.

The simple example of Venkat Pulla shows that a social worker does his job in a spiritual way. He describes a situation in which the social worker treats the client with respect, when he listens to his story carefully, etc. Such ordinary actions show the client that the social worker treats them as people with their own context of life, values and beliefs. On the one hand, it is necessary to agree with the author, and on the other hand, it is a very idealistic approach.

The idea raised by the author to include spirituality in social work as a dimension to the bio-psycho-social assessment and treatment planning process is an interesting idea. This idea is that the social worker would conduct opening interviews about the client's spiritual beliefs. Because understanding the variety of manifestations of spirituality with and without the connection to religion is important. The author calls this an inclusive approach that allows the social worker to demonstrate an increased awareness of spirituality and how it affects coping with suffering, loss, trauma and injustice. This is a shift towards clinical social work on the one hand and the networking of social work on the other. If this interpretation is in line with what the author had in mind, it is a very good idea. Because a social worker is in some sense a social therapist. At the same time social work should be about cooperation between different specialists. This can be a really modern approach to social work. In this way, the social worker can have a significant impact in helping the client to achieve their goals and become healthy. Also important is the private aspect of the social worker, who can reflect on his or her spirituality and its impact on how he or she works.

Another approach proposed in the reviewed chapter is the client strengths approach. The author believes that through spirituality, this approach could contribute to clients finding a sense of meaning, purpose, and connection. This approach recommends that social workers find in clients' experiences what they know and have learned about themselves, their talents, virtues, cultural and personal stories that have been a profound source of strength for the human race, a sense of pride, personal and family survival narratives, family traditions and rituals. All of this can be used by the social worker to create a spiritual niche that gives clients a sense of comfort. Spiritual interventions, as these conversations are called, are therapeutic strategies that have a spiritual and religious dimension as a central element of the intervention. These interventions consist of client preferences, assessment of relevant research, clinical knowledge and cultural competence. This is the second approach the author has proposed in his text. It is similar to the previous one, although it emphasizes different spaces. It is a very interesting idea because the social worker can support the psychological sphere of the client by referring

to his spirituality. The social worker assumes the role of spiritual director. However, problems arise because this approach cannot be applied to all clients. The social worker has to establish this with each client separately. He has to determine the client's interest in spirituality and religion. And this can cause problems. Clients may be hesitant to discuss this with the social worker. It is also a personal topic especially in western cultures. In addition, spiritual guidance should be based on the client's own interests.

This text is worth recommending because it shows a different perspective in social work. The author combined spirituality with social work and he succeeded. He argued very well that social work can benefit from spirituality. Nevertheless, the author has too often defined social work. There are many definitions in his text, they are consistent with each other, but nevertheless, it has a negative impact on the reception of the entire text. It seems in this case that you are reading a text about what social work is, not about spirituality in social work. It is also significant in the text that the author distinguished between spirituality and religion. It is important in the context of understanding the entire text, thanks to which the author spoke more clearly about spirituality. The chapter is aimed primarily at practitioners. It is a guide. As for the two approaches presented by the author, they are interesting, but too idealistic. However, in general, it is a very interesting reading that shows that spirituality can also be a tool in social work.