The empowerment or the traditional problem-solving model in social work practice? The contribution of subjective theories to social work research

Social work with its new mission, aims, work methods and requirements that are in the process of formation is still a new multi-faceted profession in Lithuania (Ivanauskienė, Varžinskienė, 2003; Večkienė, Povilaikaitė, 2005). Almost 15 years passed the independence of Lithuania, and the concepts, such as social work or social worker become common. The following questions remain very actually still now: What is social work? What do social workers do? How their do? These questions are very important for development of social work education in universities and for social work practice in Lithuania.

Political, economical and cultural context of changing in Europe becomes a challenge for social work professional practice. Lorenz (1998) and Dominelli (2004) in their analysis of the change of social work concepts highlights three main concepts of social work: “self help”, “community”, “participation”. The traditional problem-solving model tends to view the social work as the expert in change of the helping process and generally assumes that it is up to the worker to act in the best interest of the clients. Now, more and more social workers emphasize the empowerment and the strengths perspective in social work practice. Heinonen, Spearman (2001) notes that, often social workers are faced with a decision between doing something for a client or supporting the client her or his own initiative. Usually, if the worker decides to support the client’s initiative, a goal is to help the client empowerment herself or himself (empowerment-based practice). This is very important whether the task at hand is simple or complex.

The concept of empowerment has attracted considerable attention in the past few years of social work practice. The historical and current conception of empowerment practice focuses primarily on individual enlightenment and emancipation. Breton (1994) notes, that empowerment connote both a subjective and objective reality; they are related but different phenomena. She points out, that the objective reality of empowerment refers to the structural conditions which affect the allocations of power in a society and give access to its resources. And, she argues, that the subjective reality of changes in perception/consciousness/enlightenment, while important, indifferent from objective results/outcome, e.g., impaction social conditions.
Empowerment is a process and an outcome. There are numerous interventions that enhance client empowerment, and among them are focusing on clients strengths. Both the strengths-based and empowerment-based approaches emphasize the important of skillfully using language in dialoguing with clients. Dialogues are not simply conversations but are special kinds of relationships in with change, growth, and new understandings are fostered.

New context requirements are challenges for social work education. The documents of the “Global qualifying standards for social work education and training” (2004) notes that the curricula of social work programs can to helps social work students to develop skills of critical thinking and scholarly attitudes of reasoning, openness to new experiences and paradigms, and commitment to life-long learning. And after that social work practitioners will be able to act confidently and appropriately in the diverse and changing circumstances of practice. To developing new concepts of social work practice need the analysis of the situation.

With reference to social construction theory and to the cooperative counselors’ concept (The epistemological subject model), and subjective theories research program, I would answer the following my PhD research question: what subjective theories creating social work students in the mind of traditional problem-solving model and of the empowerment concepts when circumstances of practice are volatile constantly?

Groeben, Ssheele (2001) notes that the basic premise of the narrow concept of subjective theories in “Research Program Subjective Theories” provides that the research subject can and should communicate with the research objects, following the goal of understanding their individual cognitions relating to the self and the world. Thus, the point is to understand complex cognitions aggregates of the research object. By Scheele (1988) and Groeben (1992) the communication validation is accomplished in two steps: the firs step is to determine the content of the relevant cognitions (by conductive a semi-standardized interview) and the second step involves reconstructing the structure of the subjective theory (by structure-formation-technique).

This article aims are: to present the theoretical components which determine the traditional problem-solving model and the empowerment concept; to build questioners for a semi-standardized interview for research of subjective theories; to prepare for the analysis and interpretation of research dates.

Bibliography:


