Derleme

ACTIVE LEARNING FOR A CLIENT-CENTERED PRACTICE

Müracaatçı Merkezli Bir Uygulama İçin Aktif Öğrenme

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma, sosyal hizmet eğitiminde aktif öğrenmeyi sosyal hizmet eğitiminin müracaatçı merkezli bir uygulama için potansiyeli itibariyle tartışmaktadır, çünkü her ikisi de öğretmen ile öğrenci ve uygulayıcı ile müracaatçı arasındaki hiyerarşik ilişkiye ontolojik bir karşı duruş ortaya koyar. Bununla birlikte, sosyal hizmet mesleği insan çeşitliliği ve çoğulluğuna duyarlığı olmaksızın toplumu değiştirmeyi amaçladığı zemininde eleştirilmektedir. Diğer yandan, müracaatçı merkezli yaklaşımlar, bireylerin gelişim kapasitelerine ve dahası böyle bir kapasitenin bireye içkin olduğuna inanır. Aktif öğrenme belki de müracaatçılarla kurulan ilişkinin diyalojik doğasının ayırtında olan sosyal hizmet uzmanlarını eğitmek için en yararlı araçlardan biridir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Müracaatçı merkezli uygulama, aktif öğrenme, sosyal hizmet*

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses active learning in social work education with reference to its potential for a client-centered practice due to the fact that the two raises an ontological opposition to the hierarchical relationship between the teacher and the student, and the practitioner and the client respectively. However, the profession of social work has been criticized on the grounds that it aims at changing society without any sensitivity to human diversity and plurality. Client-centered approaches, on the other hand, believe in the capacity of individuals for development and believe further that such a capacity is inherently available. Active learning is maybe one of the most useful tools for educating social workers who are aware of the dialogical nature of the interaction with clients.

Key Words: *Client-centered practice, active learning, social work*

INTRODUCTION

Active learning and the client-centered approach have been two separate issues of debate especially since the last quarter of the twentieth century. Concurrently, how to archive the client-centered approach in the field still remains a question. Active learning in social work education has significant

ideological implications in training the future social workers. Social work profession has begun to question its "imperialistic" and modernist bases for almost twenty five years (Canda and Furman, 1999). Critical social work approaches such as feminist social work, postmodern approaches, spiritual social work, etc. have tried to replace the power relations in the profession with more egalitarian intervention models. Critical thinking in social work has paved the way for new and critical approaches to education. Active learning emerges as one of the most important of these approaches having the potential to bridge the gap between social work education and practice, and challenges the status quo in teaching activities transforming the one way imposition of the required knowledge, values and skills by locating the student in the position of "learning" those by her own will and participation.

On the other hand, the client-centered approach is one of the most powerful challenges of the idea of critical social work against modern society and its web of power relations. But the practical question on how to prepare social workers for the client-centered practice still persists.

Before expecting social workers to perform the client-centered approach in practice, one has to clear her prospects from the social worker. The latent expectation in the client-centered approach is a challenge since it is to expect the social worker to reverse and equalize a relationship (client- social worker relationship) which used to be a hierarchical one as she has been grown up in a stratified society with hierarchical relations. Since hierarchical relationships rather than equitable ones are dominantly embedded in society, the social worker has to learn how to equalize relations in a special process. At this point, one shall expect a strong link between social work education and practice.

Before handling the process, one first needs to determine the components of active learning within a theoretical framework. That is to say, having a perspective on the basics and logic of active learning, one needs to understand how the process shapes the "didactic" part and is shaped by the "participative comprehension" of the students. It will be possible only through such a position that one could establish a bridge between active learning strategies and social work practice both of which refer to solution-oriented and client-centered perspectives.

The bridge between active learning and social work practice could be inspired by the challenges both in the education and practice of social work. While active learning is a challenge to the didactical teaching methods which tends to see the student as a "tabula rasa" to be formed by the superior authority, the status quo in practice tries to shape the client according the pre-given categories and schemes. Through an active learning experience, having been a part of the education, the student starts to focus on creative ways of solution. Therefore, the practitioner in the field needs to include the client as a part of the change process, which is in harmony with social work's principal of self determination. Solution-focused practice appears on the same grounds as active learning in social work education. Social worker-client interaction is

a process of exploration and evaluation in which the current situation is understood, and alternative ways of solutions are tried to produce.

In line with the fundamentals of active learning, client-centered approach in social work practice also challenges the "authoritarian" relationship between the social worker and the client. According to this approach, the individual is capable of discovering and perceiving the interrelationships within her own attitudes, and the relationship of herself to reality. She has the capacity to manage the steps which will lead her to a more mature and more comfortable relationship to her reality. This capacity is released in the individual if a suitable psychological atmosphere is provided (Rogers, 1946).

Unlike authoritarian intervention models in which the skills of the practitioner are to be exercised upon the client, the skills of the practitioner in this approach are focused upon creating a psychological atmosphere in which the client can work. If social worker can create a relationship of warmth, understanding, safety from any type of attack, and basic acceptance of the person as she is, then the client will drop her natural defensiveness and use the situation. At this point, the sense of communication is very important. If the client feels that she is actually communicating her present attitudes, superficial or confused, and that her communication is understood rather than evaluated in any way, then she is freed to communicate more deeply (Brodley, 1987; Raskin, 1948; Rogers, 1946).

Nature of social work education is extremely important for a client-centered practice since the later necessitates vital role changes which ought to be organized all through social work education. That is to say, client-centered approach entails the change and equalization of power relations between the social worker and the client. Since power relations are diffused into society, one needs external stimuli to develop necessary sensitivity and qualifications to challenge, change and equate hierarchies in life practices. It is obvious that such external stimuli cannot be created with old "didactic" methods immediately establishing a "semi-holy" hierarchy between "the lecturer" and "the listener", "the speaker" and "the silent", and "the knowing one" and "the ignorant". Since the implementation of a client-centered approach necessitates a "special" education, such an approach has to be guaranteed in education. Active learning appears out to be the most powerful key to provide both the teacher and the student with strong tools to create a more egalitarian and democratic education atmosphere which is supposed to be the basis for a client-centered practice.

DIALOGICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TEACHER AND THE STUDENT

In line with contemporary tendencies, both educators and students greatly need the alternative approaches to education. Particularly, as a requirement of the nature of social work, the dynamics of change and development should be reflected in the field of education just like in all other fields. The resbonsibles of social work education have to be the advocates of this fact. The change and development dynamism of educators in their field will be

the source of both model and motivation for students. Creation of an atmosphere of education based on trust, and providing the students as future social workers with more democratic and participatory environment carries a special meaning in terms of reaching the goals and objectives of social work education (II, 2006).

According to Gibbs (1992), spoon feeding in lectures, seminars and practices require a dependence on educators. Gibbs lists the features of the traditional education in which superficial learning is realized as the following (1992):

- Students are expected to carry a heavy workload
- Hours in class are quite a lot
- There is a rather comprehensive course material
- There is no chance to examine the subjects in detail
- Students do not have the right to choose the subjects and learning techniques
- A tension creating assessment system is valid.

Students should comprehend the fact that learning is not just to remember the produced knowledge, but it also includes producing a functional meaning from what they have learnt. Otherwise, the result would be a superficial gain (Gardiner, 1989).

The objectives in an active learning education could be stated as the following (Lasson, 1985):

- Making students determine their learning needs,
- Making teachers express the changing forcing components in the education process,
- Encouraging teachers and students to form a curriculum to meet the needs of students both as individuals and groups,
- Making the methods to be used in the learning process be planned by the joint participation of both teachers and students,
- Making the teacher “source person” and be sensitive to the needs of students,
- Making students and personnel evaluate the client needs as a participatory activity.

Active learning opens the door for a dialogical environment where the teacher and the student roles are shaped by a participatory and negotiative process. Active learning is based on a contextual and discursive realm where the student is an indispensable part of the dialogical interaction of theory and practice. According to Parker (1997), stories are essentially transmissible and, therefore, create an intersubjective realm between the present hearers/tellers and those who have heard and told the story before. The story is like a quotation; once heard, it becomes a part of the hearer’s discourse and may in turn be quoted, that is, abstracted from the contextual discourse in which it is embedded and put into another’s discourse. This process is dialectical in the sense that both thesis (the teller’s story) and antithesis (the hearer’s reproduction) work together to form a synthesis. In this sense, active

learning is also a challenge to positivistic tradition in education because it gives the student – the hearer – the role of reproducing the teacher's – the teller's – story.

Therefore, the student in an active learning model is the co-writer of the text; she not only participates in the learning process, but in the "teaching" process as well. Moreover, the "context" of learning becomes one of the primary sources of education. In this sense, physical structure of the learning atmosphere has to be re-designed for a participatory and egalitarian education, and also psychological atmosphere shall be created in a positive and egalitarian way.

ACTIVE LEARNING FOR A CLIENT-CENTERED PRACTICE

Client-centered approach was developed by Carl Rogers in the 40's and the 50's. It is a non-directive practice, "directive" meaning any practitioner behavior that leads the client in a certain way. Directive behaviors include asking questions, offering treatments, and making interpretations and diagnoses (Ryan, 2006). Indeed most forms of therapy practiced in the world and in Turkey are directive. This shows the urgency of the call for active learning since the fundamentals of the social worker identity, attitude and behaviors lie in the social work education system.

Therefore, in order to be able to involve in a client-centered "intervention", one must be aware of some factors to be taken into account. First of all, the intervention itself should be thought as a crucial factor to shape and form the behavior and speech of the client. Secondly, one should be aware of the "yesterday's man who inevitably predominates in us, since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed and from which we result. This man makes up the unconscious part of ourselves" (Bourdieu, 2002: 100). That is to say, one should be aware of the "habitus" and context of the intervention. Moreover, naturally, there would be discursive practices playing role in an intervention process, namely, there shall be "internal rules, where discourse exercises its own control; rules concerned with the principles of classification, ordering and distribution" (Foucault, 1972: 220). According to this view, the important thing is not just "what is said" but "what is absent" in the intervention process. These theoretical considerations have strong implications for interpreting and reproducing social work practice and education.

Under these theoretical considerations one must realize the client-centered approaches in a way to understand and interpret the *significant* events and decisions of the client in the past and the present, which emerges as an accumulation of the past experiences, sometimes from the eyes of a psychoanalyst being aware of every detail in life, sometimes as layman as if listening to a life story, and yet sometimes as a student of semiology trying to understand all the signs of the process.

In light of the mentioned theoretical considerations it shall be stated that every student is a unique personal history. So, an active learning strategy would be to assume that whatever is "taught" in the classroom would be "decoded" through personal histories of

the students, and the text would be a common project. In this new environment of education, the teacher cannot expect to receive a homogeneous portfolio of the content, but the content will turn out to be a source of discussion in an intersubjective realm.

The basis of the client-centered approach is that people tend to move toward growth and healing, and have the capacity to find their own answers. So, the following are what the client-centered practitioner emphasizes (Ryan, 2006):

- Listen and try to understand how things are from the client's point of view.
- Check that understanding with the client if unsure.
- Treat the client with the utmost respect and regard.

Client-centered approach is closely related with the value system and mission of social work profession and discipline. Like the client-centered practitioner, the social worker tries to question the dominant knowledge structures, and both of them try to understand effects of history and culture. The way how social workers understand the needs of human beings are determined by economic, political, ideological, and ethical factors. Social workers believe that those who cannot express themselves and their rights, and marginal groups have valuable opinions which are of great value for society. Perhaps social work is the unique profession which can change dominant structures about discrimination of sex, race, disability and prejudice (Witkin, 1999:7).

The perspective of the client-centered approach should not be used only in working with clients, but it also should be integrated as a basic value. In this context, social work has to be careful in using language in congruence with its professional identity. The client-centered practitioner argues that knowledge should be in accord with the demands of the client, not from other sources of power because all power groups produce knowledge in their favor. At this point, the function of social work should be to support the knowledge in favor of the client system which is likely invisible. In order to do this, it is necessary to provide opportunities for clients to narrate their stories in their own language. This is the best way of understanding the life and problems of clients and role of social welfare institutions in their life. Thus, consciously or unconsciously, the social worker shall be excluded from the position of knowledgeable and key person because the solution of problems of the client transforms the worker as an equal partner in their relationship, which gives the client the opportunity to assess the situation. This also helps to conduct qualitative research techniques in social work.

Contemporary tendencies in social work education are prone to alternative perspectives such as active learning, which question the mainstream approaches and target dynamism, creativity and lifelong motivation. Having a deep rooted history in the developed countries, alternative approaches comply with the basic goals and objectives of the higher education. In this framework, one of the stand points of the dynamism experienced in the process of education is to meet the needs of

students at the maximum level as taking into consideration the multifaceted features of this group of early adulthood in higher education. Thus, it is required that the ones who assume the educational authority revise their roles and responsibilities.

The fact of "learning" rather than "teaching" in social work education not only requires a change in the roles and responsibilities of educators, but also determines the direction of this change (Il, 2006). As the professionals of the future, students participate in the process of social work education with the purpose of gaining the required professional formation and improving this in line with their individual equipments. Here comes the importance of a client-centered practice which includes the micro responsibilities such as understanding human beings and society, perceiving human problems, developing alternative solutions; and the macro level responsibilities such as developing and spreading social welfare. Students' individual equipment, in line with the principles of client-centered practice, on the other hand, is comprised of (Il, 1999);

- knowing one's own self,
- having a self-confident and independent personality,
- being creative, initiator and open-minded,
- being open to change and criticism, and tolerant,
- being careful about assuming and fulfilling responsibility,
- having the skills of observation, analysis and synthesis,
- having love, respect and tolerance, and reflecting these into relations,
- having the skills of listening and efficient communication,
- comprehending the particular and the universal,
- knowing the society and people,
- having the bases of professional knowledge, skills and values, and improving them through constant review.

Since the learning process is indeed defined as the teaching process in the traditional approach, educators are perceived as teachers and students as learners. While teachers omnipotently own the power and authority, students passively get what they receive. Students' success is measured in accordance with their ability to state the subjects included in the structured course outline in the exams. In fact, since they cannot participate in the evaluation process, they do not have any idea on neither the criteria determined by educators nor how they are assessed. Haste of educators to complete the course content is a factor which limits student participation which is an extremely important issue in terms of learning motivation. Because of this, majority of the students whose views do not count from the beginning of the planning phase of education process onwards are not aware of why they take the courses within the determined scope. In such a structure, the rational goal of the students is to take enough grades and pass the class. So, it is impossible to mention about a goal of learning. Having passed through such a "directive" and authoritarian

education process, students cannot acquire the required skills for and sensitivity towards a client-centered practice. Therefore, social work practice in accord with its modernist tradition prevails to reproduce and consolidate the hierarchical relations between social worker and client.

CONCLUSION

Both active learning and client-centered approach put the individual into the center because individual can determine or change her own destiny. Therefore, it is only her will to change her own conditions. Here comes the question of the quality of the teacher or the practitioner. Teachers or practitioners should first and foremost know their own self since an efficient social work practice is or has to be self-reflective. However, based on modernist paradigms, the profession of social work has been criticized on the grounds that it aims at changing society without any sensitivity to human diversity and plurality, and that it disregards individual and cultural complexity. Client-centered approaches, on the other hand, believe in the capacity of individuals for development and believe further that such a capacity is inherently available.

Active learning is maybe one of the most useful tools for educating social workers who are aware of the dialogical nature of the interaction with clients. However, students' characteristics and performances in relation to learning are linked with their life experiences on this matter. Having been a part of the dominantly traditional education systems before higher education, it would be unfair to expect students to change their attitudes and behaviors on learning rapidly and radically. Gradually advancing toward adulthood in higher education, students experience dilemmas in line with their changing multifaceted needs. On the one hand, they want to reflect the dynamism of change in parallel with developmental features into education in the form of active participation; on the other hand, being passive in the traditional education system happens to be the easier way. Dealing with this dilemma necessitates primarily new definitions of educational approaches and the educator roles (Il, 2006). Therefore, in order to make use of active learning in social work education, teachers also need to be trained for changing their roles.

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