

Foreword

We present the Reader with a new issue of our journal “Problems of Education, Rehabilitation, and Socialization of People with Disabilities” (2/2014, vol. 19), whose theme, *Constructing a World of People with Disabilities. Different Aspects of Reality*, is part of the extensive studies on the daily living of people with disabilities, as well as on key areas of social activity aimed to improve their living conditions on various levels. The real world consists of different aspects, such as medical care, therapy, rehabilitation, education, and participation in the sphere of social as well as cultural life.

Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer have posed a question whether people with disabilities form a distinctive disability culture, and by way of providing the answer the authors pointed to the developing of a positive sense of collective identity and common interests as factors that unite these people and make them distinct from nondisabled ones (Barnes & Mercer, 2008, p. 121). Key issues addressed in this volume are the following: Can we distinguish between two kinds of reality, or is there one for disabled people and the other for nondisabled ones? Can we lead our existence in two different worlds that permeate each other? Then what are those worlds like? How is the latter one constructed? In the view of constructivist approach to disability, the disability is constructed by way of attributing meaning. Other theories hold it that there would be no concept of disability, if society was laid on different foundations (Barnes & Mercer, 2008; Smith, 2008).

With the advent of the humanistic paradigm over the last twenty years, the social life of people with disabilities has changed considerably. Changes introduced in the living conditions influenced many spheres of life, yet even though it takes time to settle them, some have already been made effective. They can be easily seen in some areas of life due to their conspicuous and dynamic nature, whereas in others they can take a slower and gentler pace.

Amadeusz Krause (2005) once said that changes that occur in post transformational reality refer to the phenomenon of disability and people it affects, both in global as well as local environment. This publication addresses various aspects of the world as constructed by people with disabilities. Hence it presents a range of articles as it would be barely possible to dismember human life into particular areas. Thus, the editors of the volume have made an attempt to view the above-delineated issues from a holistic perspective. The articles therefore address such aspects as sexuality, upbringing, education, therapy, media space, and biomedical conditions.

The 19th issue of the series presented to the reader contains four parts, each depicting different aspect of the world as experienced by people with disabilities. Part one addresses issues of social life including social exclusion often encountered by persons with disabilities; problems that arise in relation to expectations set by the environment; issues of neurobiological conditions of disability, as well as professional activation. Apart from that, this part is enriched with reflections on didactics of the 21st century which is closely related with therapy.

Part two presents disputes over therapy, which plays a significant role in the life of people with disabilities. In the age of holistic approach to disability, and therapy extended to the whole of human life (starting as early as the day of birth, or even earlier, hence prenatal therapy), the therapy is an issue of utmost concern. The question of therapy is very broad though, and therefore each explanation should be given with regard to specifics of particular purpose. This part illustrates therapeutic activities led by educational centers and by occupational therapy workshops.

Part three concentrates on the sphere of education which in fact has been highly explored with regards to the tendencies that emerged in the 1980s and proposed the inclusion of people with disabilities into the standard system of education. Education has been the sphere subject to a great number of changes, from the introduction of the Hamburg integrative forms of education – compulsory for all, including children with severe disabilities. Furthermore, this part takes up the subject of tertiary education – often raised in many disputes on education. Greater opportunities and range of support create favorable conditions for the growing number of people with disabilities who decide to continue education, which at the same time enhances their job prospects as well as the quality of their life. Apart from education, studies enable individuals to improve their interpersonal skills.

Part four presents the Reader with discussions on the issues of daily existence of people with disabilities provided by theoreticians and practitioners in this field. Included is the account from the anniversary conference series on the encounters with special pedagogy, held in Ustroń, which focused on once neglected yet necessary issues of care, rehabilitation, and education of

persons with disabilities. The conference gathered theoreticians who research, analyze, and recount the world as experienced by persons with disabilities, as well as practitioners who deal with these people's daily ups and downs on a regular basis. The meeting resulted in an extremely interesting event to have been made part of the conference devoted to special pedagogy for the first time ever since. Rendering the principle that states "nothing about us without us" integral to the conference, people with disabilities invited to the meeting were given an opportunity to speak for themselves and depict the world surrounding them from their own perspective. Thus, part four gives an account of that panel discussion, whose theme was "The world seen from the other side. Expectations of people with disabilities." Discussions on issues that concern people with disabilities very often arise; moreover, their participants frequently make attempts to perceive the world through their eyes; however, much as they try, the picture of the world as experienced by people with disabilities as they hold, is always distorted and never exact. As it was stated before, our research deals with various aspects of their life. We always aspire to show their experience of reality in an objective way, and to improve the quality of their life. Nonetheless, we often look from the point of view of healthy, well-striving people, and therefore in order to assert the truth, we have to listen to what they have to say, for their voice is as valuable as ours, as people with disabilities can communicate their needs from their own perspective.

By way of conclusion, we present the Reader with a collection of valuable articles, both theoretical and practical ones, with the hope that they will render our picture of the world as experienced by people with disabilities less blurred, more exact, and that they will provoke reflection on social perception as well as their being in the world, as these people are like others yet marked with a single, distinct trait, that is their disability.

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References

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