

## PRIKAZ STRANIH ISKUSTAVA

SOCIAL PEDAGOGY IN FINLAND<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. SOCIAL PEDAGOGY AS A SCIENCE

*a) The Theory of Social Pedagogy*

In Finland, the theory of social pedagogy is not only fixed to certain philosophies. As a science, social pedagogy is based on open communication across theoretical perspectives. In theory and analysis it might be increasingly sophisticated. It might be questionable to speak about a special Finnish interpretation and theory formation of social pedagogy, because there is no unified self-conception. Instead of this, it would be better to speak about debate on social pedagogy in terms of different theoretical self-conceptions and interpretations.

*Many kinds of theoretical coordinates*

In the Finnish debate on the theory of social pedagogy, the traditions of German- and Romanic-speaking areas play a fundamental role. The first Finnish textbook of social pedagogy (Hämäläinen & Kurki, 1997) illustrates the field expressly through these traditions from various aspects, including the history of ideas of social pedagogy, especially in the German and Romanic language and culture regimes. Apart from this, Finnish social pedagogy is also influenced by the debate on social pedagogy in Nordic countries as well as in other European countries. Thus, the theoretical self-conception of social pedagogy in Finland is mostly shaped by German, Romanic, and Nordic interpretations.

Generally speaking, social pedagogy is identified in two main lines that penetrate each other. The first is the line in which human growth is considered from the point of view of citizenship and membership of society in terms of citizenship education (e.g., Kurki & Nivala, 2006; Nivala, 2008). The second is the line focusing on mechanisms of social

deprivation, social exclusion, marginalization, social and psychosocial problems, and requirements of social integration from a pedagogical point of view (e.g., Vilppola, 2007). Both lines are found to be relevant in social pedagogical theory formation (e.g., Hämäläinen, 2007b). Thus, social pedagogy has been conceptualized both in terms of citizenship education and in terms of education for the socially excluded and those threatened by exclusion.

Age is an important factor in the theory formation of social pedagogy. It is easy to follow the lifespan perspective based on a general classification of education in terms of early, youth, and adult education. In addition to this, there are discoveries and divergent analyses of social pedagogy for elderly people as well (Kurki, 2007). Obviously, social pedagogical questioning differs depending on the age of the individuals it targets. People of different ages have different kinds of processes and problems in relation to their social environments.

In the Finnish interpretation of social pedagogy, its character as a special way of thinking has been underlined instead of interpreting it as a set of methods and techniques. There is space for different kinds of methodological discoveries and innovations. Attention is often paid to methods in which the elements of activity, community, and experiences play an important role (e.g., outdoor adventure (Hämäläinen, 1998), community education (Kurki, 2002), and socio-cultural animation (Kurki, 2000)). Nevertheless, the theoretical identity of social pedagogy has not been based on these kinds of techniques and methods alone.

It is important to underline that the concept of social pedagogy in Finland is reduced to neither a theory and practice of community education nor a process of

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institutional care. It is not a system of re-socialization or any other corresponding special area of social education that might be common in some other countries. Instead of very exact and narrow definitions of the concept referring to special methods or fields of social and educational activities, social pedagogy is seen to refer to a many-sided body of knowledge and action in which there is room for different kinds of interpretations, opinions, and activities in theory and practice.

#### *Focus on individual-society relations*

According to the dominant way of thinking in Finland, the contribution of social pedagogy to academic debate as well as to practical social and educational work is based on its attempts to bring social and educational issues into the same picture, both in interpreting individual-society relations and in developing practical activities for helping people to achieve active membership in society. Thus, the theory formation of social pedagogy focuses on this problem area. Through its own questioning—which is based on the intention of combining social and educational perspectives in terms of pedagogical action, in theory and practice it completes the other kinds of perspectives and theories about individual-society relations offered by other disciplines.

Unlike interpretations that exist in some other countries, in Finland, the theoretical self-conception of social pedagogy is not primarily based on mixing and combining theories developed in other disciplines. Social pedagogy might, of course, benefit from sociological, psychological, educational, and corresponding theories and concepts. In empirical research, it correspondingly shares the common research methods also used in other social and educational sciences. However, its basic theoretical questioning and theory formation is fundamentally based on reflecting its object, individual-society relations, at the same time both from the perspective of general social theory and general educational theory as well as theories of social and pedagogical action.

On this basis, social pedagogy is seen as bringing forth special social pedagogical conceptualizations of individual-society relations. The fact that it puts the dimension of human growth and the dimension of human action into the same picture is essential. Both pictures aim at the promotion of such human development, which enables and is necessary for the achievement of social integration, participation, and human well-being in people's life courses. This is produced by reflecting the individual-society relations based on general social and educational theories and the general theory of human action.

Social pedagogy applies theories developed in other disciplines that are relevant to interpretations of individual-society relations. However, the general theory of socialization, the theories of development psychology and corresponding theories are merely in the background when it comes to pedagogical action in terms of an action theory (Hämäläinen, 2007a). In social pedagogy, according to the Finnish interpretation, individual-society relations are primarily considered by asking what to do and how to act. Thus, social pedagogy is seen as having the practical character of an action science.

In terms of individual-society relations, the theory of social pedagogy is essentially linked to social analyses and interpretations of social realities, and it is time dependent. Thus, social pedagogy has been developed as a pedagogical tool or set of tools having social relevance in terms of preventing and intervening in the social problems of modern society. Special attention has been paid to the pedagogical challenges caused by the educational consequences of the growing requirements of the modern information society in which job markets are based on high vocational skills (e.g., Hämäläinen 2006b, 43–46). It is a fact that not all members of society are responding adequately to the growing expectations. Therefore, they are threatened by exclusion and marginalization. In relation to this, social pedagogy is interpreted as a discipline that deals especially with this problem area. It is seen as a form of pedagogical action that might influence the mechanisms of social and educational exclusion in terms of intervention and prevention in people's everyday lives, which are shaped by increasing instability and insecurity.

#### *Emancipative approach*

Generally speaking, social pedagogy focuses, in theory and practice, on the processes of human growth, which produce social integration, participation, and well-being in members of society. The emancipative perspective also plays an important role in the theoretical interpretations of social pedagogy in Finland, especially the tradition based on Paulo Freire's theory of education (e.g., Hämäläinen & Kurki, 1997). This line in the Finnish social pedagogy has been strongly fixed to the method of "socio-cultural animation" developed especially within the Romanic tradition of social pedagogy (Kurki, 2000). In connection to this tradition, a special concept of "personal social pedagogy" has been developed (Kurki, 2002) following the idea of a reciprocal significance of community and its human relations to personal human growth and emancipa-

tion. In this context, the concept of dialog plays an important role in the debate and theory formation of social pedagogy in Finland.

Generally speaking, there are good reasons to identify the Finnish self-conception of social pedagogy as a combination of pedagogical action theory and pedagogical action in practice dealing with the mechanisms, requirements, and processes of the social integration, participation, and well-being of people. From this point of view, social pedagogy offers a special theoretical perspective and practical contribution to the personalization and socialization processes - not only by analyzing, interpreting, and explaining the processes, but also by asking how to promote these processes of human growth and how to help people in the trying times that are so common in modern society.

Aiming at the prevention and intervention of social and educational exclusion and the promotion of well-being requires linking social pedagogy and social policy in theory and practice. Theoretically, this connection is natural but not unproblematic (e.g., Hämäläinen, 2006a). From the point of view of the emancipative theory of social pedagogy, social critiques and pedagogical activities are closely tied. They primarily aim at changing the oppressing political and economic power structures of society. The aim is to spur people to common action in order to break oppressive boundaries and to attain social change. Thus, the aim is to create social movements that innovate and produce social reforms in the social political system and beyond.

### ***b) Research in Social Pedagogy***

Social pedagogy research is primarily concentrated on basic concepts and a theoretical self-conception of the field. In the frame of master's and doctoral studies, empirical research has been done. The subject is new, and knowledge production is not yet very abundant. The Finnish strategy to develop social pedagogy as a discipline and a special branch of studies emphasizes research on its theoretical foundations as a modern scientific system.

#### *Clarification of the theoretical basis*

In correspondence with the theoretical identification of social pedagogy in terms of action, action theory research plays an important role in the subject. Action research is also introduced as a part of the social pedagogical work orientation; for example, within the so-called socio-cultural method or paradigm of social pedagogy (Hämäläinen & Kurki, 1997; Kurki, 2000). Nonetheless, the main stream in

social pedagogical research reflects the historically and philosophically oriented study of its basic concepts and its character as a special theoretical way of thinking and a field of action in practice.

Thus, social pedagogy research focuses strongly on the inner nature of the subject, aiming at clarifying its theoretical basis and offering a fundament for its development as a social system in which research, education, and practice activities form a dynamic, interacting whole (Hämäläinen, 1998, 2003a). In addition to this, empirically oriented studies have been conducted, especially by social pedagogy students within their studies. They often aim at investigating particular aspects of social pedagogical work in practice in terms of work with special target groups and developing special techniques and methods for different work contexts.

The development of social pedagogy as an academic discipline depends decisively on research and theory formation in the field. There is a fundamental need for analysis that clarifies basic concepts and brings insight into the inner nature of social pedagogy. Apart from empirical knowledge production, it is also important to mention research on the history of the ideas of social pedagogy (Hämäläinen, 1995) as well as analysis of its theoretical basis in terms of philosophy of science (Mikser, 2006) and leading motives in interpretations of the concept of social pedagogy (Ranne, 2002).

Finnish social pedagogy is strongly theory-oriented, both in research and in education, and it deals with the theoretical basis of social pedagogy. For example, at the University of Eastern Finland, first-level social pedagogy studies are structured according to the theoretical perspectives on social pedagogical thinking and action into five main categories:

- 1) Introduction to Social Pedagogy (including history of ideas, basic concepts, and theory-practice relations),
- 2) Social Theories in Social Pedagogy,
- 3) Anthropology and Ethics of Social Pedagogy,
- 4) Philosophies of Science concerning Social Pedagogy, and
- 5) Practice Applications in Social Pedagogy (including working forms and principles, fields and institutions, client groups, and problem areas).

Theoretically fundamental questions of social pedagogy are analyzed within these topics. They are studied from different theoretical viewpoints

in connection to the history of the ideas of social pedagogy as well as perspectives offered by other social sciences, social philosophy, philosophical anthropology, and philosophy of science (e.g., Hämäläinen, 2003a, 141). Similarly, the orientation is fundamentally a theoretical one in the research of social pedagogy as well.

Thus, from the very beginning of their studies, social pedagogy students become familiar with the need to clarify the theoretical basis of the branch as well as the most important intellectual questions and problems therein. Students are challenged to participate in the process of developing social pedagogy as a research-based academic discipline in which it is necessary to deal with the fundamental theoretical questions. The same orientation strongly characterizes the Finnish research of social pedagogy that a Swedish colleague has justly and critically asked if it is interpreted to be a practice-oriented knowledge field without practice research and a client-centered approach without experience near perspectives (Gustavsson, 2003, 178–179). The enormous need for various practice-oriented and applied empirical research studies on different problem fields, working forms, and client groups is well recognized and acknowledged, but the volume of research has been low so far. This may be of great significance to the development of social pedagogy as a practice-oriented discipline based on close theory-practice relations as well as the clarification of its theoretical basis.

In all respects, research on the history of ideas plays an important role in the knowledge production of social pedagogy in Finland. There are some important student works in which attention has been paid to the history of ideas of social pedagogy in Finland (e.g., Niemi, 1999; Karppinen, 2006; Semi, 2006) as well as studies that clarify the traditions and philosophies of social pedagogy in other countries, especially in Germany (e.g., Hämäläinen, 1995; Mikser, 2006) and Spain (Kurki, 2002; Nivala, 2008). Studies on the history of ideas within social pedagogy contribute significantly to the need for conceptual coordinates in pursuits of clarifying the theoretical basis of the subject.

#### *Empirical knowledge production*

Empirical studies often deal with very special problems; however, they occasionally form a certain problem field as well. For example, in several master's theses, the pedagogical use of horses and riding activities has been studied from different points of view. Such points of view include the educational meaning of the stall community, the

relationships between young people involved in this hobby, the opportunities to intervene in delinquent behavior and other behavioral disorders, and the opportunities to prevent social exclusion using equestrian activities. The body of knowledge on the pedagogical use of horses and riding activities as a hobby as well as a method of psychosocial rehabilitation has offered a basis for developing further education programs in the field and inspired the establishment of a national association for social pedagogical horse activities.

Social pedagogical research has been carried out within several development projects. One of the most significant projects was the Activity School of Eastern Finland 2000 Project administrated by the University of Kuopio from 2001 to 2005. This project aimed at developing pedagogical tools for intervening in educational exclusion and dropout problems in vocational education. Empirical research and theoretical analyses were performed within the project. The project made social pedagogy known through several publications in which social pedagogical contributions to the problem field of educational exclusion were critically analyzed and pedagogical innovations as well as recommendations for reform of the structures of education policy were produced. The basic concept of an "activity school" was adopted into the Governmental Program of the Government of Finland from 2003 to 2007. Some cities have used the concept in their local strategies for the development of vocational education and youth policy. In 2008, Helsinki began to work out the usability of the concept within its youth policy program.

Social pedagogy research deals largely with youth issues from different perspectives. From 2003 to 2007, a Master's Degree Program in Youth Education, in which social pedagogy was a major subject, was developed at the University of Kuopio. Social pedagogy research - focusing on different aspects of youth culture, the problems of young people, and educational work with them - was carried out within this project, both as a student's master's thesis and as a research study conducted by the project personnel. It might be right to say that social pedagogical research in Finland is primarily focused on the area of youth education. It seeks to create educational innovations and develop pedagogical methods for promoting young people's social integration, participation, and well-being. Moreover, it seeks to prevent and intervene in social and educational exclusion, behavioral disorders, and different kinds of life-management problems among them.

Pedagogical methods and models have been



developed within the concept of social pedagogy in order to avoid the dropout problem in vocational education (Hämäläinen & Komonen, 2003; Vilppola, 2007). In the Finnish social pedagogy, much attention has been paid to the prevention and intervention of the educational and social exclusion of young people after their compulsory education. This has been defined as one of the most significant social problems of Finnish society in the 2000s - not only by representatives of social pedagogy, but also by educationists and social politicians in general. The significance of the problem is closely connected to the character of modern Finnish society as an information society based on members with high levels of education.

### *c) Social Pedagogy as a Scientific Discipline*

Actually, the concept of social pedagogy was not totally unknown in the history of social and educational sciences in Finland. However, the active use of the concept is a new trend in the Finnish academic world. There is no tradition of research and theory formation based on the concept of social pedagogy, although the concept exists in some older social and educational science textbooks (Hämäläinen, 1999). Theoretical debate on social pedagogy did not ensue in the proper sense until the 1990s along with the development of social pedagogy as a scientific discipline.

#### *Some examples of former definitions*

In the book *Johdatus yleiseen kasvatustieteeseen* (Introduction to General Theory of Education), published in 1952, Professor Aukusti Salo specifies three approaches in terms of educational aims: individual pedagogical, social pedagogical, and cultural pedagogical approaches. According to his reasoning, the social pedagogical approach is based on the fact that human beings are social creatures. He claims that social pedagogy poses societal prosperity as the main aim of education. From this point of view, social pedagogy comprises the idea that education takes place primarily for the society or community rather than for the development of individual personalities (individual pedagogy) or for the intermediation of being implicated in cultural values and formations (cultural pedagogy). According to Salo, the social pedagogical way of thinking is closely connected to the moral aims of education. Social virtues play an important role therein, and the citizenship sees education as a special dimension in social pedagogy (Salo, 1952, 174–181).

In the book *Mitä on sosiaalipolitiikka?* (What is Social Policy?), published in 1955, Professor Armas Nieminen notes, “If the great significance of educa-

tion and instruction is taken into consideration, it is obvious that social policy has interests common with social pedagogy” (Nieminen, 1955, 180). He describes social policy in terms of attempts and actions aimed at undertaking standards of living, social security, and prosperity for different social groups, families and individuals (Nieminen, 1955, 95). From this point of view, social pedagogy is seen as being connected to social-political purposes.

In the book *Kasvatustieteen historian kehityssuunnat* (Trends of Development in the History of Education), published in 1961, Professor Karl Bruun separates three main paradigms in educational thinking: the individual, social, and liberal paradigms. He tries to identify and classify educational theories based on this conceptual system. According to the author, representatives of the social pedagogy paid attention to the social conditions of educational activities and to the opportunities of education to influence the social conditions of people’s everyday lives, to prevent social problems, and to promote people’s well-being. They created a theoretical foundation for understanding education as an important factor in social life and in the development of society.

The references to the concept of social pedagogy in the former literature of the social and educational sciences make a kind of historical dimension of Finnish social pedagogy, but there is no question of the theory and research tradition (Hämäläinen, 1999, 83–84). Based on the idea of interpenetrating social and educational perspectives in individual-society relations and both in individual and social development processes social pedagogy, the former users of the concept already saw it as relevant in interpreting the mechanisms and problems of human growth and social progress from this point of view as well as in producing tools for educational work directing at social aims.

Despite the fact that there was no research or theory formation on the concept of social pedagogy in Finland, since the 19th century, there have been several activities and social movements in which social and pedagogical perspectives and interests have been purposefully put together. From this point of view, social pedagogy is not at all a new phenomenon in Finnish society, although it is a new discipline, research field, and area of education.

#### *Development of social pedagogy as a discipline*

In spite of referring to the concept of social pedagogy in the older literature of the educational and social sciences, social pedagogy was not developed

as a discipline because of the lack of theory formation based on the concept. Thus, social pedagogy was not formally developed and established as an academic discipline as social policy and social psychology were. This did not occur until the middle of the 1990s. After this, social pedagogy was taken as a discipline in several universities (Kuopio and Tampere) and polytechnics.

It is rather difficult to develop social pedagogy as a scientific discipline due to the diversity of the use of the social pedagogy concept. However, in Finnish universities, much attention has been paid to the identity of social pedagogy as a science. Social pedagogy has been introduced as a scientific discipline that has a theoretical questioning of its own, completing the perspective on human life offered by other social sciences. Several doctoral dissertations and master's theses (e.g., Ranne, 2002; Mikser, 2006; Ikonen, 2008; Nivala, 2008) as well as other publications (Hämäläinen, 1999, 2003a) have focused on the interpretation of social pedagogy from this point of view.

In the development of social pedagogy as a scientific discipline, special attention is paid to the questions about its inner structure as well as its relations to other disciplines (e.g., Hämäläinen, 2003a, 140 - 145). Social pedagogy is claimed to be a practical science based fundamentally on an intensive practice-theory interaction. However, considering this thesis critically, it is actually very difficult to find evidence for it in the Finnish research of social pedagogy. The research is theoretically oriented and seems to include the idea that theory formation based on speculative analyses about the concept of social pedagogy, the social pedagogical way of thinking, and the social pedagogical orientation produces social pedagogical application in practice.

The strong focus on theoretical issues can be explained by the fact that social pedagogy is a new concept and a rather unknown research field that has to be able to introduce itself to the academic audience in order to legitimize its position as an academic discipline. This requires clarification of the theoretical self-conception of the subject. For a new subject, it is also important to be attractive to potential students and other representatives. This is also necessary to strengthen the identity of the subject through the clarification of its theoretical foundations.

As a practical science, social pedagogy has been seen as being related in a special way to social policy and as having the character of a practical science

as well. The position of social pedagogy within the system of scientific disciplines has been described as being between the educational and social sciences and in the family of social sciences as a practical action science (as Social Policy) between knowledge about values of action (Social Ethics) and conditions of action (Sociology, Social Psychology) (Hämäläinen, 1999, 2003a, 2006a). However, social pedagogy is a new discipline whose position in the system of disciplines is not yet firm or clear, either as a field of research or as an area of education.

## 2. Social Pedagogical Education

The Finnish system of higher education consists of two lines: universities and polytechnics. Social pedagogy takes place in both of them. In addition to this, there are some other social professions in the Finnish system that are also influenced by the debate on the concept of social pedagogy. The Finnish system of social professions is actually versatile and various in terms of professional boundaries and titles (e.g., Hämäläinen, Niemelä, & Vornanen, 2005). Therefore, it is rather difficult to define the role of social pedagogy within the system of education as well.

There is only one university, the University of Kuopio, in which social pedagogy has the status of a major subject. In the University of Tampere, it has the status of a large minor. In some other universities, social pedagogy does not have a discipline status, although it might constitute a part of other disciplines and even be presented within some other concepts. In general, the position of social pedagogy as a field of academic education and a part of the educational system is not very clear. The inaccuracy of the concept of social pedagogy and its partial overlapping with other social and educational sciences make it rather difficult to define its relations to other disciplines and to place it in the system of university study programs.

In the polytechnic sector, social studies take place in more than 20 polytechnics. The degree is parallel to a bachelor's degree and chiefly called social service work (*sosionomi-amk*). It is separated from the social work degree based on university education at the master's level, and in the job market, graduates are identified with the title of social guidance worker. They mainly aim at promoting the social security, social participation, and well-being of people within different contexts and through different kinds of professional activities in terms of guidance, planning, evaluations, development, and expertise.

Theory formation produced by universities, especially in social work research, offers conceptual coordinates to which the education in polytechnics can be anchored (Ministry of Education, 2007, 22).

In all, the study programs in polytechnics are multi-disciplinarian and relatively heterogeneous in relation to each other, and social pedagogy is actually one subject among others within the “social” framework for social service work (e.g., Murto et al., 2004, 40–44). Nevertheless, in three out of four polytechnic study programs of social studies, the concept of social pedagogy is somehow used as a basic concept of the curriculum (Semi, 2006). However, there are big differences between polytechnics concerning the concept being used. There is some cooperation between universities and polytechnics in the development of social pedagogical education. The role of universities is primarily to offer a research-based perspective to the concept and a theoretical basis of social pedagogy.

The job division between universities and polytechnics is not very clear. It may be correct to say, generally speaking, that social pedagogy education in the universities is aiming at research and theory of social pedagogy on which it is more based. On the other hand, in polytechnics, the content of studies is primarily traced from the needs of job markets and structured in terms of multi-disciplinarian constellations. As mentioned, within social pedagogy research in Finland, the university studies introduce the theoretical basis of social pedagogy in terms of the philosophy of science, the history of ideas, basic concepts in social pedagogical thinking, the theory-practice relationship, and social pedagogical research questioning. Moreover, they introduce practice applications in terms of the diversity of application areas, the different kinds of target groups and their special needs, and the technical and methodological innovations needed and produced in the field.

### 3. Professional Dimension in Social Pedagogy

A very basic question in the Finnish debate on social pedagogy is its relation to social work. There is a relatively strong professional tradition of social work in Finland, but social pedagogy is a rather new concept. Therefore, how social pedagogy is related to social work as a discipline, a branch of studies, and a field of professional activities has been an important question.

In Finland, social work is a legislated, regulated profession fulfilling certain welfare tasks fixed by law. Social work is mentioned in the Finnish

University Law, and there are some general statements about the structure and content of social work studies and the training of social workers. Professional qualification is defined as a master’s degree based on university studies with a concentration in social work. Social pedagogy as a university subject lies in a very different area and has no exact professional boundaries, regulations, or definitions.

Instead of a “mono”/ “solo”-professional character, social pedagogy has been developed within university studies in terms of a “poly”/ “multi”-professional field of activities. This means that the studies do not aim at a specific profession and that the degree in social pedagogy is not fixed in this kind of professional area. Actually, people with different professional backgrounds can study social pedagogy. Social pedagogical orientation is seen as being relevant to many kinds of social and educational work and workers having different professional titles. Social pedagogy has also been conceptualized as an integrating framework for multi-professional inter-disciplinarian cooperation (Hämäläinen, Määttä, & Puurunen, 2005), as it has not really developed in this course yet.

Nonetheless, social work has been theoretically understood as a certain perspective based on a special theoretical questioning in different fields of social and educational work done by different professional groups such as kindergarten teachers, youth workers, schoolteachers, counselors, nurses, social workers, and the like. Some analyses of the social pedagogical perspective within certain professional fields have been performed; for example, in social work (Hämäläinen, 2003b), vocational education (Hämäläinen & Komonen, 2003), school social work (Sipilä-Lähdekorpi, 2004; Kurki, Nivala, & Sipilä-Lähdekorpi 2006), youth work (Hämäläinen, 2007a), social work with elderly people (Kurki, 2007), and socio-cultural work in prison (Kurki, Kurki-Suutarinen, & Taruvuori, 2010). Besides these professionally focused analyses, several general interpretations of social pedagogy have contributed to different professional fields of social, educational, and health care work.

Thus, the concept of social pedagogy has entered several areas of the Finnish welfare system based strongly on multi-professional and inter-disciplinarian activities. The representatives of the subject have tried to show the relevance of the concept (i.e., the social-pedagogical way of thinking) in different sub-fields of the large welfare system consisting of many different kinds of professional services. Attention has been paid to the professional potency

of social pedagogy in early and youth education as well as in adult education. In addition to this, the importance of the social-pedagogical orientation has been emphasized in some less educative professional fields, especially in social work.

In the field of early education, there is a regulation fixed by law that the social services study program at polytechnics qualifies students for the position of kindergarten teacher if the studies include a certain amount of social pedagogy. Social pedagogy content is not defined more precisely in this context; rather, the college is allowed to define it. This is actually the only legislative statement concerning social pedagogy from a professional point of view. In polytechnics, some professional or educational titles closely connected with the connotation of social pedagogy are in use (e.g., “community pedagogue”). In the frame of this and corresponding titles, social pedagogy might have some professional contribution in manifold and diverse fields of childcare, youth work, and citizen activities.

Polytechnic education follows the principle of “having the starting point in work life” (Ranne, 2007, 310), whereas university education in social

pedagogy as well as in other corresponding academic fields follows the inner logic of the discipline (Hämäläinen, 2003a, 140–142). The question about the professional relevance of social pedagogy can be analyzed and answered from both perspectives. On the one hand, the question is how relevant university education is to the needs of work life. On the other hand, the question is whether it is, overall, reasonable to derive the theoretical self-conception of social pedagogy from the needs of work life.

Social pedagogy is a new subject in Finland, and its position as an area of education is so new that it is too early to say anything firm about its status in the job market. Its nature as a subject suitable for several professions makes it actually impossible to define it more precisely from a professional point of view. In Finland, social pedagogy is not a profession, and there is no corresponding professional title (e.g., “social pedagogue”).



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