

SOCIAL PEDAGOGY AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE IN THE FAMILY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES: THE FINNISH SCENARIO

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ABSTRACT

The nature of social pedagogy as an academic discipline is discussed from the point of view of the experiences on the development of social pedagogy in Finland. Attention is paid especially to the position of social pedagogy in the body of social sciences and its relation to social work. There are two universities in Finland, in which studies of social pedagogy are offered and social pedagogy is established as a discipline. In addition to this, study programmes based on the concept of social pedagogy are developed in several polytechnics. However, there is no academic tradition in Finland based on the concept of social pedagogy. Therefore, it makes sense to consider the rise of academic interest in the subject.

In the short history of academic social pedagogy in Finland, the most important themes of debate have been the content of the concept and the relation of social pedagogy to social work. Social pedagogy is defined in terms of theory and practice based on theoretical foundations of its own. It has been seen a discipline useful not only for one certain profession but for several professional groups. Thus, it has been developed as a dynamic entirety being composed of research, academic education and practical activities without special professional interests.

This goes to show that social pedagogy is not identified with social work like in some countries. A strong tradition of social work in Finland is connected with sociologically oriented social policy in theory as well as practice, and in a way with psychological theories as well. In relation to social work, social pedagogy is viewed rather as a new theoretical approach than a parallel corresponding subject.

In the family of social sciences, social pedagogy plays a supplementing role. In theory and practice it deals with processes and problems of human development and education in terms of citizenship, social identity, life capacity, participation, and inclusion. It covers all the areas of social education having a foothold in all the fields and forms of early, youth and adult education.

Key words: *Social pedagogy, Finland*

INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the potentiality and compass of the development of social pedagogy as an academic discipline basing on the Finnish experience. The variety in usage of the concept of social

pedagogy is considered from this point of view. Attention is paid especially to the position of social pedagogy in relation to other social sciences.

The concept of social pedagogy is general-purpose. It might be defined in several ways, referring

somehow to

- 1) a principle emphasizing the promotion of human dignity, spiritual values, welfare, inclusion, integration and participation in societies by pedagogical means
- 2) a reformist movement underlining pedagogical viewpoints in societal reforms and development of communities
- 3) a system of welfare work based on pedagogical activities aiming at prevention and alleviation of different kinds of social problems in terms of social help
- 4) a discipline or a sub-discipline in social and educational sciences.

So, social pedagogy to say the least represents at least a pedagogical principle, a movement, a system and a discipline combining social and educational standpoints. These dimensions are historically and logically connected with each other. The multicontext nature of social pedagogy creates often a conceptual confusion and incoherence. Therefore, it is particularly important to be very careful in using the concept in scientific debate.

Social pedagogy can be interpreted as a pedagogical tradition, a branch of study and a strategy, tendency or paradigm of social work (Hamalainen 1989, 117). As a discipline, it stands on the tradition of thinking and action developed around the concept and even originates from the pre-conceptual time, i.e. the time before the appearance of the concept of social pedagogy. In this tradition, social issues are looked at from the pedagogical point of view and pedagogical issues from the social point of view. Social and educational processes and activities are seen to be reciprocal, interpenetrative and nested.

APPEARANCE OF SOCIAL PEDAGOGY AS A DISCIPLINE IN FINLAND

The development of social pedagogy as an academic discipline in Finland really began only a decade ago. There is no tradition of research and scientific debate basing on the concept of social pedagogy in Finland. For several reasons it has been very difficult to locate a new subject in the dominating academic system. There are lots of obstacles, more or less rational, for the justification and authorization of social pedagogy as an academ-

ic discipline. One difficulty has been the lack of theoretical analysis and arguments of social pedagogy itself. In order to become a fully authorized academic discipline, social pedagogy has to give proper reasons for its existence.

The concept of social pedagogy is rather new although it can be found occasionally mentioned in the older literature of social and educational sciences (e.g. Nieminen 1955; Bruhn 1962). The breakthrough of the concept did not take place in the scientific debate institutionally until the 1990s when it gained a foothold in the system of higher education. The appearance of social pedagogy in the Finnish society occurred properly with the setting of the concept in the educational system. This on the other hand required a sort of clarification of the theoretical basis of the field.

Since the latter half of the 19th century, there have been lots of activities in the Finnish society based on ideas important in social pedagogy although they have not been termed with the concept of social pedagogy. Especially, the movements of child welfare, popular education, temperance, home mission and later the settlement movement as well are worthy of mention as origins of organizations with socialpedagogical ideas. Present students of social pedagogy having work experience within these organizations declare that they have found theoretical outlines for their job with the help of their studies. The studies of social pedagogy are found to be helpful also for the development of job practices dealing with social-pedagogical issues.

In the mid 1990s, two universities and some polytechnics initiated the studies of social pedagogy. A couple of years prior to that, Social Work was introduced, at the university level, as a new academic major in the MA degree programme in social sciences. Of course, the position of social pedagogy in relation to social work studies was questioned. Social pedagogy was also developed keeping the development of social work in mind. Eventually, the solution in the university studies of social pedagogy was to define the discipline in poly-professional terms instead of defining it in mono-professional terms only as a framework of social work. This means that at the university level social pedagogic studies can be combined with several other disciplines in academic degrees. Its position in the training programmes of polytechnics is more complicated (e.g. Semi 2004). In fact, social pedagogy is not developed as a theoretically justi-

fied independent discipline in the Finnish polytechnics but rather as a professional denominator.

The institutionalization of social pedagogy in the Finnish society has occurred primarily through the system of higher education. The Finnish Society of Social Pedagogy constituted in 1997 is to be seen a part of this development. The purpose of this association is "to promote research and education in social pedagogy, to contribute to development of social pedagogy as a branch of research, education and study and to intermediate between research and persons in practice". The Society publishes an Annual of Social Pedagogy in Finnish.

THE CONTENT OF SOCIAL PEDAGOGY IN THEORY, STUDIES AND OCCUPATION

The development of social pedagogy as a functional system consists of the dynamics between science, education and work practices. The development of social pedagogical work activities in different organizations depends on the development of social pedagogy as an educational system which on the other hand depends on its unfolding in terms of science. Without improving social pedagogy as a discipline based on scientific analysis about its theoretic

fundamentals it is rather difficult to construct a curriculum for social pedagogy studies and promote its development as an educational system. Without research focusing on social pedagogical work practices it would be absurd to develop social pedagogical theory dealing with practice. (Figure 1.)

In Finland, the theoretical substance for the development of social pedagogy as an academic discipline originates mainly from the German and the Romanic traditions. This results from some personal interests and orientations of the key people in the business. Leena Kurki, the main teacher of social pedagogy at the University of Tampere, is an expert on social pedagogy in Romanic countries like Spain, France, Italy, Brazil and Argentina. Likewise, Juha Hamalainen who is responsible for social pedagogy at the University of Kuopio is familiar especially with the tradition of the German language and culture regime. Following the lines of this division of expertise, they together published their first textbook on social pedagogy in Finland in 1997 (Hamalainen & Kurki 1997). 'Finnish' social pedagogy has got some impulses also from other traditions, especially from the Scandinavian and Baltic countries with which there is relatively a lot of collaboration (e.g. Gustavsson, Hermansson & Hamalainen 2003). However, in developing social

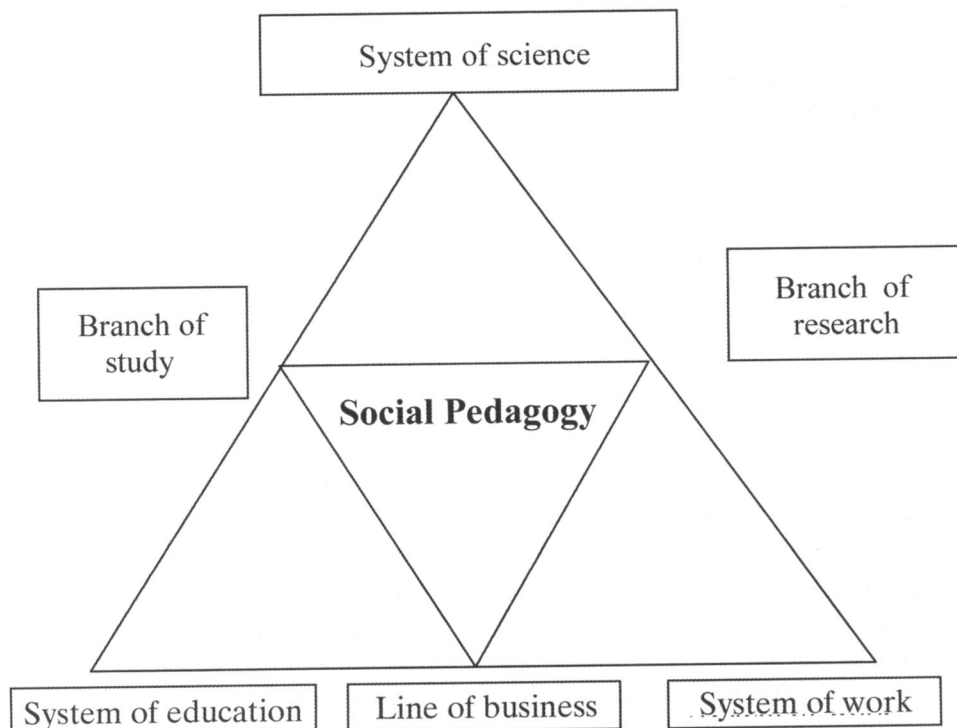


Figure 1

Social Pedagogy as a functional system of science, education and work.

pedagogy there has been considerable sensitivity towards the historical, cultural, political and social characteristics of own country.

The concept of social pedagogy combines social and educational points of view in dealing with human development. These dimensions are common elements of all expertise needed in different forms of welfare work. Social pedagogy is a multi-face field of theory and practice dealing with social and educational processes, problems and activities. Definitions of its functional position are located between social theory and theory of human action from the point of view of social and educational help (see Rauschenbach 1999). In the social-pedagogical framework families, communities, organisations and institutions are being considered and evaluated on the basis of their educational capacities and being developed from this point of view. Being identified as a 'theory of social and educational help' social pedagogy is not defined as a set of methods and techniques but a conceptual framework for different kinds of socioeducational help in theory and practice.

Social pedagogy deals with both social and educational theories and combines social and educational dimensions in terms of their interpenetration. Therefore, it is rather difficult to say if social pedagogy belongs to the family of social- or family of educational sciences. There are both kinds of specifications in different countries. Being based on the way of thinking in which the interpenetration of social and educational issues in the helping process is stressed social pedagogy is as a discipline necessarily located between social and educational sciences. In many countries' system of higher education social pedagogy is institutionalized as a sub-discipline of educational sciences. In Finland, its position is still confuse. So far, it is possible to study social pedagogy as a major in one university only - in the frame of degrees in Social Sciences.

Generally speaking, the theoretical nature of social pedagogy does not depend on this kind of institutional definitions and locations. In practice, when belonging to the same faculty with other social sciences - like social policy, sociology and social psychology - social pedagogy is developed primarily in terms of social sciences. From this position social pedagogy is defined as a completing discipline in relation to the scientific questioning and theory formation of other social sciences (Hamalainen 2003). It brings the educational

dimension into the social scientific discussion and research from the point of view of socio-educational help and promotion of social integration, participation and life management.

Actually, there is only one significant dissertation dealing with the essential nature of social pedagogy published in Finland so far - standing in the frame of educational sciences (Ranne 2002). Being based on documents and interviews of some key theorists of the field in Finland and Sweden this study tries to identify the main dimensions and theoretical elements in the interpretations of the concept of social pedagogy. Such an analysis contributes to the development of social pedagogy as a discipline because it nominates its theoretical roots. From the practical point of view social pedagogy is seen to cover widely social and educational work with people in different age groups and to deal with different social problems. It is to be applied in early, youth and adult education both in proactive and reactive contexts (e.g. Hamalainen 1999). Thus, social pedagogy actuates within different professional groups and expertise.

There is an impressive attempt to develop a compact theory of social pedagogy in terms of personalism based on the ideas of togetherness of person and community (Kurki 2002). These - person and community - were defined as key concepts of social pedagogy. In some other presentations also promotion of people's growth into active membership of the society in terms of social subjectivity, social identity, social inclusion, life management needed as a member of society, active citizenship and participation are mentioned as the key themes of social pedagogy (e.g. Hamalainen 1999). Following Paulo Freire's theory of education, dialog and social consciousness have also been mentioned as basic concepts of social pedagogy and the practical applications have been defined in terms of social-cultural animation according to the Romanic tradition (Kurki 2000).

In spite of some different emphasizes between theorists the main stream of development of theoretical fundamentals of social pedagogy has taken place in understanding. There are significant common elements in university studies although universities are completely autonomous in defining their examinations. There are some polytechnic teachers dealing with the theory of social pedagogy but there is a lot of diversity in training programs of polytechnics (Semi 2004). Social pedagogic studies at

the university level are closely connected with basic research aiming at theory formation which brings conceptual systematicity and clarity to the studies. One incorporating element in university studies and research of social pedagogy is the history of ideas (e.g. Hamalainen 1996; Kurki 2002). Also, basic research is necessarily needed for the development of training programs in polytechnics and there is fruitful collaboration between universities and polytechnics therein.

CONCLUSIONS

The development of social pedagogy as an academic discipline is the key of the breakthrough in the field as a functional system in Finland. According to the Finnish experience the theory formation based on basic research in history of ideas and conceptual analysis together with research focusing on social-pedagogical practice create prerequisites for development of social pedagogy as an academic subject. Social pedagogy cannot be defined only in terms of professional factors and methods for practice. It is rather a dynamic combination of the systems of science, education and practice interpenetrating within each other.

In Finland, the process of establishment of social pedagogy in the systems of science, education and working life is still running. One important question refers to its relation to different professional groups and expertise. The Finnish solution is to develop social pedagogy as an academic discipline in the poly-professional context focusing on theoretical basis of the field which is common to all professions dealing with social and educational help. From this point of view social pedagogy is a functional system dealing with the process of human development in terms of social participation, inclusion, integration and correspondence.

The position of social pedagogy between social and educational sciences does not make it easy to develop it as an academic discipline. According to the Finnish experience it is fruitful to institutionalize social pedagogy in the family of social sciences - reciprocally.

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