

Social Pedagogues – from Knowledge to Faith in Change

Socialni pedagogi – od znanja do vere v spremembe

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Abstract

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This paper presents results of the research program 'Scientific foundations and development of social pedagogy in Croatia'. The project is primarily focused on finding answers to questions about the identity of social pedagogy. It is also focused on establishing scientific criteria that are fulfilled by social pedagogy, as well as on finding a model to form theories which can be empirically examined by scientific knowledge and practical experience. Therefore, it is important to describe the professional identity of social pedagogues which is defined by the professional competences these experts possess. This paper shows how social pedagogues, who are employed in different jobs and engaged in different areas of work in Croatia, evaluate professional competences (n =

117). *Competences are divided into metacompetences, cognitive, functional, behaviour and value competences. It has been established that all the mentioned elements form a system of professional competences of social pedagogues and that specificities in assessing the importance of certain competences derive from the content and level of intervention in which the examinees are engaged.*

Key words: *social pedagogy, professional identity, professional competences.*

Povzetek

Članek predstavlja rezultate raziskovalne naloge Znanstvena podlaga in razvoj socialne pedagogike na Hrvaškem. Projekt je bil orientiran na iskanje odgovorov o identiteti socialnih pedagogov, poleg tega je usmerjen na vzpostavitev znanstvenih kriterijev, ki jih izpolnjuje socialna pedagogika, in na iskanje modela za tvorbo teorij, ki bodo preverljive z znanstvenimi metodami in izkušnjami iz prakse. Zato je pomembno opisati poklicno identiteto socialnih pedagogov, ki jo definirajo njihove strokovne kompetence. Ugotovitve članka pokažejo, kako socialni pedagogi na različnih delovnih mestih na Hrvaškem ocenjujejo poklicne kompetence ($n = 117$). Kompetence so razdeljene na metakompetence, kognitivne, funkcionalne, vedenjske in vrednostne. Ugotovili smo, da omenjene kompetence tvorijo sistem poklicnih kompetenc ter da so specifične ugotavljanja ocenjevanja pomembnosti posameznih kompetenc povezane z vsebino in ravni strokovnih intervencij, ki jih izvajajo strokovnjaki.

Ključne besede: *socialna pedagogika, poklicna identiteta, poklicne kompetence.*

Introduction

In most parts of Europe pedagogy is considered to be a special, comprehensive and personal educational model of work with children and young people in different pedagogical environments which is focused on their well-being and development (Petrie, 2005). In literature pedagogy is usually divided into 2 main parts: 'school of education' and 'school of life or pedagogy' (Frolov, 2003). 'School of education' is, on the one hand, primarily focused on knowledge acquirement and the development of a cognitive personality component. On the other hand, the 'School of pedagogy' is trying to affect the beliefs, attitudes and other conative aspects of behaviour. Although these orientations are interconnected, in some pedagogical environments it is possible to notice the domination of educational or pedagogical issues. Social pedagogy, for example, belongs to the pedagogies that are primarily oriented towards upbringing, but it also includes both pedagogic components (upbringing and education in a broad sense). It is, unlike 'private' family pedagogy, led by the interests of society and focused on work with vulnerable social groups (Petrie, 2005). This means that it is contextually adjusted to the needs of institutions which take care of children, work with young people, family support, juvenile court, institutional treatment and other ways of work with children and young people.

The disproportion of the development of social pedagogy in some countries has influenced the level of the development and understanding of the specific content of this young profession, its position within the system of science (from social to pedagogical scientific disciplines) and the development of the education system of social pedagogues. Regardless of the numerous differences, the development of social pedagogy can be noticed. It is becoming more influential with time among the so-called 'helping professions'. It encompasses a wider area of work, trying to form its own professional identity at the same time. The widening of the work area places a new challenge on the social – pedagogic profession and raises new questions for the creators and performers of the educational programme (Kobolt & Dekleva, 2006). Moreover, the search for identity within a professional

group is neither new nor surprising. In many professions it is a continuous process in accordance with the environment which is constantly changing (Knežević, 2003).

Anyway, every discussion about the identity of the profession begins with a definition of the work area, which is connected to the defining of the competences which make a profession recognisable in the real world. The competences are difficult to define unambiguously, especially when the professions concerned are those focused on the realisation of complicated tasks and when they ask for the implementation of other abilities. However, authors agree that professional competence includes one's ability to do, manage or work with a certain amount of knowledge, skills and abilities (Mijatović, 2000: 158). Although there is no distinction between 'competence' and 'being competent' in many dictionaries, Rowe (1995) emphasises the need to distinguish the two expressions. Therein, the term 'competence' refers to abilities and acquired standards of professional work. On the other hand, the term 'being competent' includes acquired standards of behaviour. In other words, competence defines what people can do and being competent the way certain things are done. Anyway, it concerns the ability to apply knowledge and skills in the real world which is seen in the results of practical work and includes integrated implementation of understanding, skills and system of values in educational practice.

Cheetham and Chivers (1996: 24) distinguish four main elements of professional competences: functional competences, personal or behavioural competences, cognitive competences and value or ethical competences. *Cognitive competences* imply proper knowledge and its efficient implementation. They also include practical, theoretical, procedural and contextual knowledge. *Functional competences* are defined as the ability to do different tasks successfully. They include specific abilities, psychosocial skills and organisational skills. *Personal or behavioural competences* include the ability to acquire adjusted and recognisable behaviour in professional situations. They refer to the professional, interprofessional and wider social area. *Value or ethical competences* are defined as the possession of suitable personal and professional values which ensure the ability to rationally judge different

situations whether in the private or professional life. The elements described form the main competences which are surrounded by the so-called *meta-competences*. They include communication skills, the ability of self-development, creativity, analyticity and the ability to solve problems. The special importance of meta-competences can be seen in the way they aid in the development of the main competences.

The described model of understanding professional competences can be applied to social pedagogy as well, which is in Croatia described as a science, theory and practice of the prevention of social integration difficulties of persons with behaviour disorders, especially by helping with the upbringing of individuals as well as specific society groups (Bouillet and Uzelac, 2007). The professional competences of social pedagogues are often grouped into three general parts - professional knowledge, professional skills and personal potentials, talents or personality characteristics. *Professional knowledge* includes knowledge about children, their development and needs, difficulties and problems in the process of their development and social integration, as well as knowledge which gives sense, supports professional forms of behaviour or makes the decision making process easier. *Professional skills* include specific cognitive, interpersonal, social and motor abilities which influence professional identity and the abilities to create a professional environment. *Personality* implies all other personal potentials - from the appearance and personality characteristics through life experience to special talents which a person uses every day by combining them with knowledge and skills (Žižak, 1997: 3).

Anyway, the education of social pedagogues has to focus on reflexive and practical knowledge, which means that the competence education frame stretches from the theoretical to the application dimension of bringing up an individual. This process includes understanding the way people see their own life, relations with other people, the way they function in different social groups, relations between groups and the relation of all the elements of their ecologic environment. Apart from that, psychosocial professions - one of them being social pedagogy - are, as regards their development, in the middle of the two demands of real social

circumstances and the need to protect social values, as well as the individuals' needs and demands for scientifically verifiable theories and the model of practical work (Kobolt and Dekleva, 2006: 172).

With the aim to find answers to numerous questions concerning the present state, but also to develop social pedagogy at the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, the scientific – research project is under way, called '*Scientific foundations and development of social pedagogy in the Republic of Croatia*' carried out by Zdravka Poldrugač, Ph.D., with the financial support of the Ministry of Education.

The research will contribute to finding answers to questions about the scientific foundations of social pedagogy as an interdisciplinary science. It will also point out its subject, tasks and methods. The social foundation of social pedagogy will be observed through social processes, especially those in Croatia which influence the higher need for social pedagogues. It will also try to answer the question on how the education of social pedagogues fulfils the needs of Croatian society and the needs of the individuals, groups and communities their work is focused on.

With this aim, in the empirical part of the research the most significant elements of the professional competence of social pedagogues for their successful work will be determined and evaluated. This aims at a contribution to the improvement of the university and other programs of enabling social pedagogues and the quality of professional social pedagogic work with persons at risk or behaviour disorders with the aim of improving the quality of professional and social activities focused on the social integration of deprived social groups.

This research is part of a scientific – research project and the shown results refer to the data received by the pilot research.

Aim and hypothesis of the paper

The main purpose of this paper is the attempt to elaborate the system of the professional competences of social pedagogues as a starting point in establishing scientific, theoretical and practical

foundations of social pedagogy and the grounds for its professional identity. On the basis of the information received from the pilot research, the paper shows how professional competences are evaluated by social pedagogues who work in different jobs and are engaged in different areas of social pedagogy.

Two hypotheses are examined in this paper. The first supposes that social pedagogues realise the importance of all theoretically suggested professional components which form the identity of that profession. The other hypothesis presupposes that the evaluation of the importance of certain professional competences is statistically dependent on the specificity of the interventions which social pedagogues take part in (the age of the population, the level of the prevention of behaviour disorders and the department the intervention is taking place in). By examining both hypotheses we will also examine whether the division of professional competences to metacompetences, functional, behavioural and ethical competences is applicable in social pedagogy.

Methods

The pilot research was carried out during 2007 among experts who work with persons with behaviour disorders on the level of prevention or treatment.

The research was carried out on 117 social pedagogues (99 or 84.6 % female and 18 or 15.4 % male). Most of them are employed in institutional treatment (39.4 %). This is followed by the group of social pedagogues employed in the social care system (11.1 %) and primary schools (11.1%), as well as employees at courts and the General Attorney's Office (8.5 %). Other examinees are employed in non-governmental organisations (4.3 %), medical institutions (4.3 %) and police (0.9 %). For 23.1 % of the examinees, this information is unknown. The sample covers the age from 23 to 60 with various work experience with the population suffering from behaviour disorders (aged 1 to 36).

Most examinees work with children and minors (49.6 %), or only with minors (35.9 %). The sample includes 7.7 % of examinees who work with adults and 6.8 % of examinees who work only with

children. 59.0 % of examinees are engaged in social-pedagogical treatment, in prevention 19.7 %, in diagnostics 15.4 %, and only 4.3 % of the examinees in detection. 12.8 % of the examinees would change their profession, 17.1 % of the examinees are not sure about that, 70.1 % of the examinees would not change their profession. 31.6 % of the examinees believe in the possibility of a change of behaviour after social pedagogic interventions, 24.8 % think this is likely to happen, and 43.6 % of the examinees consider such changes to be partially possible.

In this pilot research we used the modified questionnaire on the knowledge, skills and characteristics of social pedagogues as a measure instrument. The questionnaire consists of three parts which include three general elements of competence (19 for the area of knowledge, 22 for the area of skills and 33 for the area of personality and talents) and a part about the general information on the examinees and the specificity of their occupation or job. The importance of certain competences was evaluated on a three-level scale and questions about the general information were formed as variables with offered categories (closed type questions). In this analysis a part of the obtained information has been used. Competences which describe the most directly certain elements of the system of professional competence according to the Cheetam and Chivers (1996) model and the variables which describe the specificities of interventions that social pedagogues take part in (age, level of prevention, department of work). Professional competences which are included in the analysis are theoretically classified according to the chosen model and shown in Table 1.

The first hypothesis was examined by analysing the relative frequencies and arithmetic mean of examinees in particular groups of professional competences. The other one was examined by three discriminative analyses. Each analysis treats professional competences as a set of dependent variables. Independent variables are age, level of intervention and the department in which the social pedagogues are engaged.

Results

Table 1 shows the examinees who evaluate certain professional competences to be extremely important. It also shows the arithmetic mean of all the examinees' results. A smaller arithmetic mean implies a higher level of importance given to certain competences by the examinees.

Insight into the data shown in Table 1 tells us that the examinees consider the ability of self-knowledge to have the highest level. It is followed by dealing with conflicts, communication and the ability to prevent problematic situations. Other competences are considered to be important by half or less of the examinees. As far as cognitive competences are concerned, our examinees think that procedural knowledge is the least important. As regards practical knowledge examinees consider methods of individual work, group work and counselling to be significant. As far as contextual knowledge is concerned, they consider social pathology and psychopathology to be important; and as far as theoretical knowledge is concerned, more than one third of the examinees considers all that was listed to be important. As far as practical knowledge is concerned, the examinees consider the methodology of individual work to be the most important. As very important functional competences they regard active listening and first contact, the recognition of one's virtues, group leadership, setting the aims, and planning. Organisational abilities are considered to be the least important. Patience is mentioned as the most important personal/behavioural competence. Two thirds or more of the examinees consider persistence to be very important, as well as tolerance and the ability of team work. The lowest level of agreement among the examinees can be noticed at value/ethical competences which are considered to be very important by less than two thirds of examinees.

Table 1: Proportion of examinees which consider certain competences to be very important (%) and the arithmetic mean of all the examinees' results (M)

Content of competence	Variable/competence	% (n = 117)	M
1. METACOMPETENCES			
Communication skills	Communicativeness	62.9	1.41
Self-development ability	Personal experience	48.3	1.69
	Good opinion of oneself	41.4	1.73
	Self-knowledge	77.8	1.35
Creativity and analyticity	Intellectual creativity	51.7	1.60
Problem solving	Prevention of problematic situations	67.2	1.43
	Conflict settlement	74.1	1.35
2a. COGNITIVE COMPETENCES			
Practical knowledge	Methodology of diagnosing	69.2	1.52
	Methodology of institutional treatment	45.7	1.85
	Methodology of treatment out of institutions	29.3	1.96
	Methodology of post-treatment protection	25.9	1.98
	Individual work methodology	86.2	1.30
	Group work methodology	83.6	1.39
	Counselling methodology	83.6	1.31
Theoretical knowledge	Pedagogy of persons with behaviour disorders	84.5	1.45
	Psychology of persons with behaviour disorders	88.8	1.30
	Types of behaviour disorders	76.6	1.46
Procedural knowledge	Legal aspects of interventions	15.5	2.08
Contextual knowledge	Criminology	44.0	1.83
	Social pathology	69.8	1.56
	Psychopathology	64.7	1.60
2b. FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCES			
Specific abilities	Active listening	81.0	1.22
	Asking questions	55.2	1.43
	Giving and receiving feedback	54.7	1.49
	Goal setting and planning	63.8	1.38
	First contact establishment	75.0	1.35
Psychosocial skills	Recognising virtues	69.0	1.45
	Managing a discussion	76.7	1.30
Organisational skills	Group management	65.5	1.62
	Organisational skills	44.8	1.66

Continuation of table 1:

2c. PERSONAL/BEHAVIOURAL COMPETENCES			
Professional area	Persistence	75.9	1.37
	Tolerance	75.2	1.35
	Patience	82.8	1.28
	Thoroughness	54.3	1.46
Interprofessional area	Team work	72.6	1.41
Wider social area	Support of friends and relatives	25.0	1.99
	Satisfaction with personal life	48.3	1.70
2d. VALUE/ETHICAL COMPETENCES			
Judging area	Faith in people	50.9	1.66
	Faith in the possibility of a change of behaviour	69.8	1.45
Value area	Honesty	62.4	1.42
	Integrity	69.0	1.34
	Orientation towards positive thinking	63.8	1.50

Anyway, it can be concluded that most of the analysed competences are considered to be important for the social - pedagogic occupation which is in accordance with the results of the previously carried out surveys (Žižak, 1997). It can also be noticed that social pedagogy contains all the theoretically presupposed components of professional identity which is important to have in mind during this analysis.

Are there differences between examinees regarding the specificities of their jobs? We examined that with the use of three discriminative analyses. In them professional competences are treated as dependent variables. As independent variables we used the age of the population the examinees work with (children, minors, children and minors, adults), the level of intervention (diagnosis and detection, primary prevention and treatment) and the department in which the examinees are employed (social protection, education and the justice system). Table 2 shows the main statistical data of isolated discriminative functions. It can be concluded that as far as importance is concerned more than 95 % among groups arranged according to dependent variables, there are statistically significant differences in which professional competences they consider to be different.

Age and department have led to one statistically significant discriminative function, whereas each level of prevention has produced two statistically important discriminative functions.

Table 2: Statistical amount of discriminative functions

Function	Function value	% of explained variables	Canonic correlation	Wilks' Lambda	T-test	Statistical importance
AVERAGE AGE OF THE POPULATION						
1.	1.153	43.3	0.732	0.153	173.006	0.003
2.	0.925	34.8	0.693	0.328	102.455	0.063
3.	0.582	21.9	0.607	0.632	42.201	0.376
LEVEL OF INTERVENTION						
1.	1.888	47.6	0.809	0.084	222.900	0.000
2.	1.245	31.4	0.745	0.243	127.452	0.001
3.	0.836	21.1	0.675	0.545	54.674	0.061
DEPARTMENT						
1.	67.445	92.6	0.993	0.002	118.467	0.000
2.	5.355	7.4	0.918	0.157	36.059	0.419

Table 3 shows the structure of isolated functions which points at the professional competences considered not equally important by examinees with consideration to their jobs.

Table 3: Structure coefficients of statistically important discriminative functions – Coefficients which are included in the formation of functions are marked (*)

Professional competence	AGE	LEVEL OF INTERVENTION		DEPARTMENT
	1st function	1st function	2nd function	1st function
Communicativeness	0.034	0.097	-0.010	-0.001
Personal experience	0.126(*)	-0.004	-0.001	0.009
Good opinion of oneself	0.199(*)	0.126(*)	-0.035	-0.026
Self-knowledge	0.024	0.018	-0.099	-0.019(*)
Intellectual creativity	-0.067	0.047	-0.015	-0.161(*)
Prevention of problem situations	-0.135	-0.032	-0.077	0.017
Dealing with conflicts	-0.152(*)	-0.082	-0.012	0.008
Diagnosis methodology	-0.118(*)	-0.263(*)	0.053	-0.050(*)
Methodology of institution treatment	0.232(*)	-0.178	0.158	-0.065 (*)
Methodology of treatment out of institution	0.053	-0.109(*)	0.017	-0.041(*)
Post-treatment protection methodology	-0.018	-0.098(*)	0.033	-0.038
Individual work methodology	0.074	0.146	0.186(*)	-0.006
Group work methodology	-0.127	0.044	0.216(*)	0.022

Continuation of table 3:

Counselling methodology	-0.014	0.101(*)	-0.008	-0.029(*)
Pedagogy of persons with behaviour disorders	-0.002	0.024	0.154(*)	0.002
Psychology of persons with behaviour disorders	0.005	-0.096(*)	-0.075	-0.038
Forms of behaviour disorders	-0.251	-0.010	-0.050(*)	0.009
Legal aspects of interventions	0.069	0.161	-0.222(*)	-0.040(*)
Criminology	0.058	0.065(*)	0.024	-0.034(*)
Social pathology	0.034	-0.019	-0.017	-0.020
Psychopathology	0.004	-0.015	-0.070	-0.019
Active listening	-0.049(*)	-0.099(*)	-0.012	0.007
Asking questions	-0.150	-0.095	-0.053	0.015(*)
Feedback	0.189(*)	-0.162	0.198(*)	-0.033(*)
Setting aims and planning	-0.018	-0.010	0.218(*)	0.003
First contact establishment	-0.130(*)	-0.085	0.000	-0.007
Virtues	-0.080	0.107	-0.114(*)	-0.017
Managing discussions	0.070	-0.109	-0.025	-0.009
Group management	-0.099(*)	-0.060	0.117(*)	0.040
Organisational skills	0.063	0.122(*)	0.078	-0.035
Persistence	0.020	0.061	-0.026	0.004
Tolerance	0.028	-0.032	0.146(*)	0.012
Patience	-0.097	-0.029	-0.036(*)	0.019
Thoroughness	0.172(*)	0.105	0.115(*)	0.001
Team work	-0.063	-0.070(*)	-0.040	0.027
Support of friends and relatives	0.105(*)	0.023	0.041	-0.032(*)
Satisfaction with personal life	-0.134(*)	-0.045	0.004	-0.010
Faith in people	-0.052	0.032	-0.119	-0.028
Change in human behaviour	-0.196(*)	-0.073	0.016	0.054
Honesty	0.035(*)	-0.172(*)	-0.005	-0.050(*)
Integrity	-0.009	0.080	0.009	-0.017
Orientation towards positive thinking	-0.020	0.106	0.128(*)	-0.018

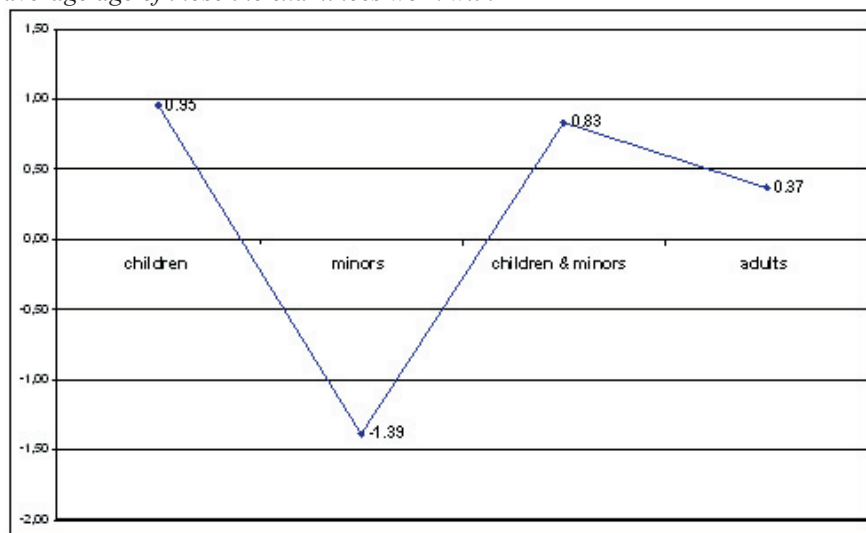
An integral analysis of the structure of all the shown discriminative functions brings us to the conclusion that among the examinees arranged according to the specificities of their jobs there are no differences in the evaluation of the importance of the eight analysed professional competences. These are: communicativeness, ability of prevention of problem situations, ability to discuss, knowledge of psychopathology, knowledge of social pathology, persistence, faith in people and honesty. These competences include all five elements and are evaluated as very important by more than two thirds of the examinees (exception is

faith in people which is regarded as important by more than half of the examinees). Therefore, we can conclude that these competences form a significant part of the identity of social pedagogues regardless of the specifics of their jobs.

It can be concluded that differences in the evaluation of the importance of certain competences are most expressed among examinees who take part in different levels of intervention (half of the analysed competences), whereas the age and department in which the examinees are employed lead to differences in the evaluation of the methodology of diagnosis, the giving and receiving of information and honesty.

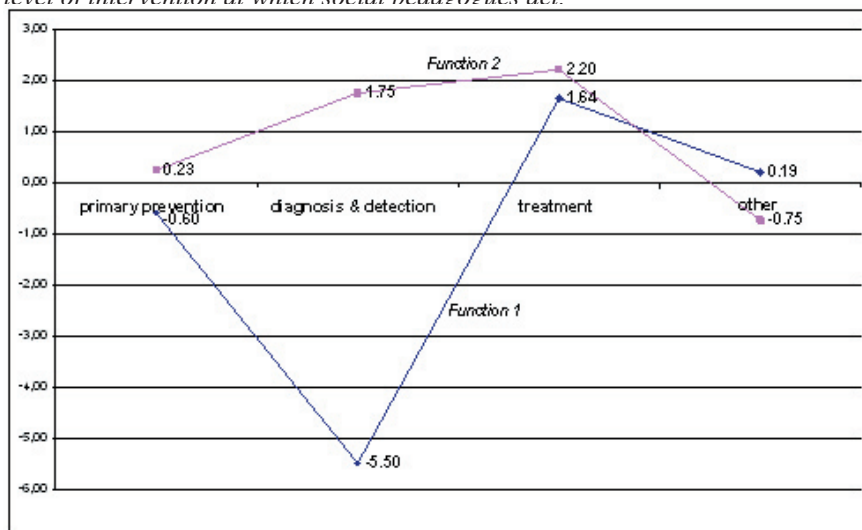
The age element leads to differences in the importance given to personal experience, good opinion of oneself, the ability to deal with conflicts, knowledge of diagnosis methodology, methodology of institutional treatment, the ability of active listening, giving and receiving feedback, first contact establishment, group management, thoroughness, support of friends, satisfaction with personal life, faith in the possibility to change human behaviour, and honesty. Personal experiences, good opinion of oneself, thoroughness, honesty, support of friends and knowledge of institutional treatment are considered to be more important. Less important is dealing with conflicts, active listening, first contact establishment, knowledge of diagnosis methodology, satisfaction with personal life and faith in the possibility of a change of human behaviour. The data shown in Graph 1 inform us about the differences in the age of the examinees. It shows us that the best results are achieved by examinees who work with children and minors; they are followed by examinees who work with adults, while the examinees who work only with minors have the lowest results. In other words, examinees who work with children and minors at the same time consider personal experiences to be very important, as well as a good opinion of oneself, thoroughness, honesty, support of friends and knowledge of institutional treatment. On the other hand, examinees who work only with minors (probably in an educational institution) consider dealing with conflicts to be important, as well as active listening, first contact establishment, knowledge of diagnosis methodology, satisfaction with personal life and faith in the possibility of behaviour change. Examinees who work with adults have average results in this function which implies that there is no significant agreement between them.

Graph 1: Centres of groups on a discriminative function formed according to the average age of those the examinees work with



The structure of the first function, in comparison with the level of intervention in which social pedagogues take part, implies that they distinguish between how important they consider good opinion is, diagnosis methodology, treatment out of institutions, post-treatment protection and counselling, psychology of persons with behaviour disorders, criminology, active listening, organisational skills, team work and honesty. The higher importance of the knowledge of treatment out of institutions, post-treatment protection, psychology of persons with behaviour disorders, active listening, team work and honesty are connected to the lower level of the knowledge of counselling methodology, diagnosis, criminology and organisational skills. On the basis of data shown in Graph 2 we can conclude that the highest results at this level are achieved by examinees who work in treatment and the lowest by those employed in diagnosis and detection.

Graph 2: Centres of groups on a discriminative function formed according to the level of intervention at which social pedagogues act.

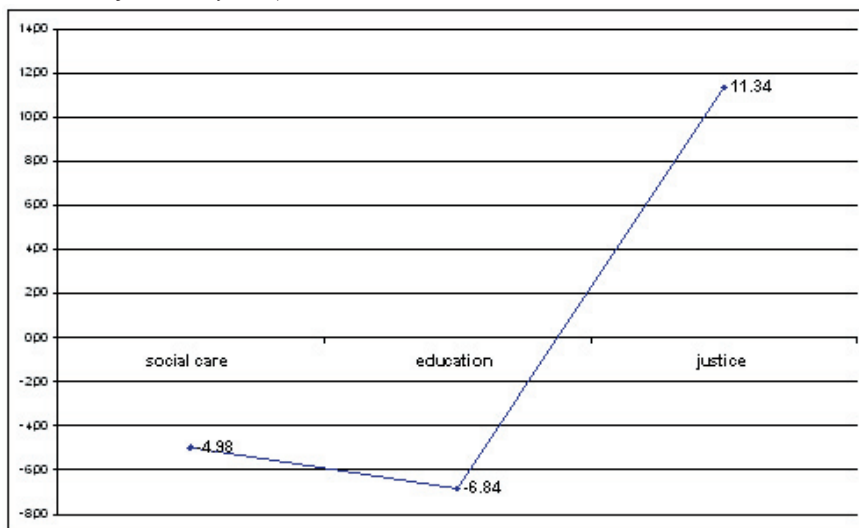


The other discriminative function is formed by variables which refer to the evaluation of the methodology of individual and group work, the knowledge of pedagogy of persons with behaviour disorders and its forms, knowledge of the legal aspects of interventions, giving and receiving feedback, setting the aims and planning, recognising one's virtues, group management, tolerance, patience, thoroughness and orientation towards positive thinking. Therein, a lower level of importance is connected to individual and group work methodology, knowledge of pedagogy of persons with behaviour disorders, giving and receiving feedback, setting aims and planning, group management, tolerance, thoroughness and orientation towards positive thinking. All this implies a lower importance of knowing about behaviour disorders, legal aspects of intervention and recognising virtues and patience. In this function (Graph 2) the highest results are achieved by examinees who work in the treatment of persons with behaviour disorders, whereas the lowest results are achieved by those who are employed in primary intervention.

The department in which social pedagogues are employed significantly contributes to differences in the evaluation of the importance of the following competences: self-knowledge,

intellectual creativity, diagnosis methodology, methodology of institutional treatment, methodology of treatment out of institutions, counselling methodology, legal aspects of intervention, criminology, asking questions, giving and receiving feedback, support of friends and honesty. All coefficients of forming functions are negative, except the one which concerns the importance of asking questions. This means that the lower importance the examinees give to the mentioned competences means a lower importance of the importance evaluation of the ability of asking questions.

Graph 3: Centres of groups on a discriminative function formed according to the department in which the social pedagogues are employed (social protection, education, judicial system).



In Graph 3 we can see how the department reflects the evaluation of these competences. The highest values in this function are achieved by examinees employed at judicial institutions, they are followed by those employed in the social care system and then by those employed in education.

Conclusions

This paper tries to contribute to the clarification of questions concerning specific professional competences of social pedagogues

within the wider discussion on the professional identity of that profile. Taking into consideration the complexity of the profession and the indubitable need for further specialised discussions about the scientific, theoretical and practical specificity of social pedagogy, it is questionable whether conclusions can be made on the subject. Making final conclusions is not appropriate when the results of a pilot research are concerned and which will be used as a ground for further analysis of the social pedagogy development in Croatia. The answer to this question is negative. Anyway, this pilot research opens a few important questions with the possibility of accepting a few starting theses for further research. Furthermore, the way in which certain professions will be regarded depends on the competences of its holders and their level of professionalism. Information received by this research comes from social pedagogues who are at the moment important promoters of social pedagogy.

First of all, it has been shown that one of the most important characteristics of social pedagogy is its close connection to the constructed reality, which means that it depends on the social conditions in which it exists and develops. The mentioned circumstance is recognised by social pedagogues themselves. They have shown they are aware of the need of the development of competences which are widely used and are not necessarily in relation to the treatment of persons who suffer from behaviour disorders. We can conclude that the need for social pedagogues is still increasing, if we take into consideration the fact that the spectrum of their jobs is also getting bigger. That mentioned above can be seen in the fact that social pedagogues are employed in social science (primary schools, health care institutions, non-governmental institutions, social care centres, children's homes, police and judicial systems, etc.) More social pedagogues can be expected to be employed in health care and educational institutions as well as in the non-governmental sector. This implies justification of more precise focusing of the programme for the education of social pedagogues on the development of competences which are necessary for prevention work (especially planning, realisation and evaluation of evidence-based interventions). Demands for evidence-based interventions are strongly expressed as well as those for the applicability of practice to the research results and sensibility to personal effects. All this is in relation to a greater number of

institutions and organisations that are qualified to provide service to the same users, and to the same pressure which agencies responsible for monitoring exert when documenting the positive outcomes of interventions and the satisfaction of users. During the last fifteen years these trends are felt in Croatia too. They can be felt through the aim of the government and civil sector institutions towards the same work area and what is even more important, towards the same financial resources (Bouillet and Žižak, 2008). At the same time we are talking about the need to get a basic research project which includes the research of environmental factors relations (including all components of intervention) and users' behaviour (Conroy, Stichter, Daunic and Haydon, 2008). Namely, in the history of the knowledge of social, emotional and behavioural problems of children and youth, there has never been so many new surveys, knowledge about characteristics, distribution and ways of identification and treatment. However, the effect of knowledge regarding the rising of the quality of everyday practice is not even close to agreement with the amount and quality of knowledge gained in such a way. (Kauffman, Brigham and Mock, 2004).

Within the context of the study programme changes, the need has occurred to intensify the education about the ethical aspects of the profession, organisational skills development and the importance of legally regulated interventions. It is clear that social pedagogues prefer client-oriented education. Most of the examinees emphasise the importance of methodical competences (for individual, group and counselling work) and communication competences (active listening and other communication components). Such an education programme is closely connected to a competence-oriented approach (O'Reilly and McCrystal, 1995). It is also mostly focused on the practical aspects of the profession. In our opinion the profession has to maintain the development of its scientific and theoretical component. Connection of theory and practice is a real challenge for creators and those who maintain the education of social pedagogues. Many researchers have confirmed that. (Jones, West and Stevens, 2006; Kauffman, Brigham and Mock, 2004.).

In short, the results are grounds for accepting the hypothesis which presupposes that social pedagogues see the importance of all the theoretically supposed components of the professional competences which form the identity of a profession. Therefore,

there is no doubt that social pedagogy is a specific help-providing profession. The question is, however, what makes it specific in comparison to other help-providing professions (especially social work, psychology and pedagogy). All help-providing professions are aimed at helping other people in solving their life problems, with a personal contact between the client in trouble and the 'helper'. (Ajduković & Ajduković, 1996). According to this, the specificity of social pedagogy must be viewed within the global concept of the development of professional and scientific disciplines framed by traditional segmentation and contemporary trends marked by interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. Interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity are possible and even desirable, but always with an awareness of the character and the amount of participation of a discipline. A part of something clearly belonging to a rounded, coherent unit interlinks the value and continuity of the part to the value and continuity of the unit. In this respect, focus on the education and upbringing of persons who are at risk is emphasised as something specific for the development of behaviour disorder, regardless of the level of intervention.

The level and department of intervention, as well as the age of the persons involved in social pedagogic intervention cause this profession to be specific. This can be seen in the confirmation of the other hypothesis which presupposes that estimation of the importance of particular professional competences is significantly dependent on the specificities of the interventions in which social pedagogues take part. In this respect, the level of intervention is very important and is closely connected to the age of the users and the department in which it is taking place. Specificities can be seen in the evaluation of the self-development ability and the value competences which is in inverse proportion to the level of intervention (the highest is in primary prevention). They can also be seen in the evaluation of the importance of contextual knowledge and functional abilities which is proportional with the level of intervention (they are best valued by social pedagogues employed in treatment). These differences are good to have in mind during the preparation for college education in social pedagogy which is at the moment differentiated according to the age of the users in Croatia. It seems reasonable to examine differentiation according to the level of intervention that future social pedagogues will take part in.

Communication is of great importance for all social pedagogues, as well as the ability of the prevention of problematic situations, discussion management ability, psychopathology knowledge, social pathology knowledge, persistence, faith in people and honesty. Since we are talking about competences which encompass metacompetences, cognitive, functional, behavioural and value competences, we think that it is right to use this segmentation of competences in further research.

Finally, it should be said that this paper opens up many questions. Some of them will not be answered even after the research on the scientific grounds and the social pedagogy development in Croatia is carried out. However, it is already certain that social pedagogy will depend on the global social-political situation in certain environments. It will depend on the importance of the social situation. Social rights of the citizens will be important, the quality of social justice or social cohesion. This is connected to problems of social care and social safety systems, not only as jobs, but primarily as functions which are here for the citizens, their communities and societies. In this atmosphere, the future can be predicted with more reliability for the social pedagogic realism or optimism.

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