

Editorial

Dear readers,

This is the third issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies* for 2014. It aims to present concepts, perspectives and problems within social pedagogy as an independent pedagogical discipline.

Certain questions appear from the very beginning in relation to the content and status of how social pedagogy as an independent pedagogical discipline functions. How can we define social pedagogy? Who is it intended for? What does it do? What is the difference between social pedagogy and social work and, consequently, between the professional work of social pedagogues and social workers? What about the professionalization of social professions and the education of social pedagogues? How has the area of social pedagogy developed in Germany, where the discipline was first established a century ago, and how does it differ in Slovenia? Answers to these questions are far from unambiguous.

In looking for possible answers, we have found that the public has a rather peculiar view of those who work professionally with social topics in education. We could say, perhaps, that some of these opinions expose quite a level of ignorance – and of prejudice, even. For some, social pedagogues are inveterate professional revolutionaries, trying to improve the world – radical social utopians. For others, they are feeble and helpless assistants to capitalist interests, offering sedative, anesthetic strategies in an increasingly disintegrating modernity; or – as the mission of the social is described by Frommann, using the metaphor of the fig leaf – dealing with social problems in a way that makes them as invisible and undistruptive to the broader society as possible (Frommann in Kobolt 2001). There are also those who see social workers as little more than useless chatterers who do not prepare their users for the seriousness and unkindness of life, a lesson deemed to be absolutely necessary.

What stands out especially within such views and assessments is the following contradiction: on one hand, social pedagogues are seen as those who strive for better social conditions, but on the other hand, their engagement is ridiculed because they seem to believe in a society that is just – something which is thought to be outside of their professional reach. We could say that such views expose both respect and ridicule.

With this ambivalence in the background, social pedagogy as a discipline – related as it is to working in the social pedagogical area – often finds itself between “help and control”, between “rebellion and adjustment,” “normality and deviance,” “power and powerlessness,” and “justice and partiality.” This range exposes the constant conflicts of interest and the tensions within social pedagogy, as well as their insolvability. A real discussion of contradictory interests (which are becoming very visible in terms of concrete actions) is needed if the discipline is to avoid idealized (self-)aggrandizement and (self-)overestimation, or superficial and undifferentiated (self-)discreditation.

It is a fact that social pedagogy – the very fundamental definitions of which relate it to developments and changes in the social realities that influence the development and perspectives of the individual – cannot avoid the phenomena that cause precarious living conditions and lead to hopeless situations. The profession of the social pedagogue is faced necessarily with such matters. If social pedagogues and social workers (among others) are to enable changes and improvements in social living circumstances, then we must be aware that these are not abstract goals or ideals, but concrete social realities which many people require. These are people who are socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged, living on the margins of society, without advocates; existentially endangered and dependent on minimal welfare provision, living lonely lives, homeless, and feeling worthless in society. These are people who have been on the wrong side of the law, who suffer from addictions, and have acute psychosocial problems. Often, these are children and adolescents who experience violence in their families, who have no security and no access to conditions for a healthy and social upbringing; young people who need long-term, professional support. And there are numerous other situations we could provide as examples in which professional social engagement is unavoidable. In such cases, social pedagogues are indispensable and they are advocates, quite literally, with a certain advocating “mission” to eliminate social discrimination and establish social justice.

The history of social pedagogy and its establishment as being a relatively independent discipline began when it was first mentioned as a specific pedagogical discipline in German pedagogy in the mid-nineteenth century, and it became theoretically and practically established in that country at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to Mollenhauer, a focus on the social dimension of education became necessary at this time of fast industrial development and prolific social conflict (cf. Zorc Maver 2006). In addition, social sensitivity to children's and adolescents' deviant behavior also increased. These initial definitions of social pedagogy point to the need for a deeper theoretical and practical understanding of the field today due to increasing social stratification in the neoliberal environment and growing political and economic migrations. Consequently, we are faced, more than ever before, with social conflicts and the marginalization of certain social groups of children and adolescents, which has a strong impact on their educational opportunities.

Since Slovenian pedagogy and pedagogical practice developed under a strong influence from German pedagogical traditions (until the influence of Anglo-American theoretical ideas became prevalent in recent decades, at least), we thought it sensible to examine the development of social pedagogical theoretical and practical concepts in Germany and Austria in comparison with the conceptualization of social pedagogy in Slovenia. The articles published here reveal numerous similarities in the dominant theoretical concepts, but also some differences relating to how the social pedagogical profession is situated in the educational system, the education of social pedagogues and the links to related scientific and professional areas – especially to general pedagogy and social work.

Speaking of the central paradigms, both German-Austrian and Slovenian environments demonstrate a shift from normalizing, socially reproductive ideas to socially critical concepts (Razpotnik 2006) and from thinking about institutional re-educational practice for children and adolescents with disruptive behavior to directing social pedagogy toward life space; that is, toward “overcoming the individual’s life problems in the integral life context” (Zorc Maver 2006, p. 9). While the traditional paradigm of social pedagogy is best described by the fig-leaf metaphor, new theoretical and practical approaches emphasize the importance of facing social injustices publicly and critically, and of social pedagogical interventions within heterogeneous public and social environments. In this dimension, contemporary social pedagogy bears clear similarities to theoretical concepts in a number of related areas, such as intercultural and inclusive pedagogy and (re-)educational counseling work, vis- -vis the principles of the pedagogy of liberation and dialogic pedagogy.

Another important area marking the development of social pedagogy is that of direct pedagogical counseling work with children and adolescents with disruptive behavior. In the once-politically united Austrian-Slovenian space, systematic social treatment of child and adolescent deviance began at the start of the twentieth century with the foundation of specialized departments for child and youth judiciaries (Bavcon in Šelih 2003), followed by systems of foster families and re-educational institutions for delinquent youth. Recently, both countries have shown tendencies toward more socially integrated forms of work with the population. They are undertaking more sensitive interventions in family environments and replacing socially marginalized (re-)educational institutions with social pedagogical work at group homes in urban centers. The fundamental principles of practical professional work with children and adolescents with serious emotional and behavioral problems are the smallness of (educational) groups, the appropriate location of group homes (close to urban centers and children’s and adolescents’ places of residence), integration into the community, and the concept of openness (Skalar 2006).

The third area approached by the contributions to this issue is the development of social pedagogy as an academic discipline and its situatedness in the system of related disciplines. Until the late 1980s, social pedagogy in Slovenia was developed within the Pedagogy department at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, as well as within the study of special education for children with behavior and personality disorders at the Pedagogical Academy in Ljubljana. The study programs were then merged and in 1991, the program of Social Pedagogy was established at the Faculty of Education in Ljubljana (*ibid.*). Similar trends in the professionalization and increasing independence of social pedagogy can also be found in Austria and Germany.

Looking more closely at social pedagogy as a discipline thus reveals that in recent decades, it has been gaining importance in the context of pedagogical science, with its varied emphases. Its content areas are frequently very diversified, but interrelated. An observer not well-versed in pedagogical scientific discourses may get the impression that issues in social pedagogy are present and relevant

everywhere where socially conditioned problems that have a decisive influence on the education, development and upbringing of individuals and whole groups occurs. Such perceptions lead to the assumption, whether intentional or not, that each educational work is related to social phenomena, which are primarily under the responsibility of social pedagogy, with its theories, analyses, explanations and methods. In relation to critical social theories (including critical pedagogy), leading representatives of social pedagogy are keen to emphasize its necessarily socially critical character. This is true not only of Germany and Slovenia, but also of the views and approaches that originate in English and French traditions.

Recently, the range of activities within, and the importance of, social pedagogy have increased, especially because of socially political and socially economic circumstances and their close relationship to migrations, among other things. This can be observed within pedagogy, which devotes a large share of its expert and scientific discourse to the theories and practices of social pedagogy. It is also reflected in an increased number of scientific conferences and publications. In addition, interest in studying social pedagogy at different universities and institutions of higher education is on the increase. These trends are clearly visible across Western Europe.

Although several of the above-mentioned statements are only cursory, as presuppositions about the social conditioning of education have been part of general pedagogy since its very beginning, we are interested, nevertheless, in international traditions of social pedagogy. We decided, therefore, to look more broadly at the general vicinity: to Germany and Austria. We have succeeded in acquiring two contributions from Austria and one from Germany; that is, from two countries with similar pedagogical development tendencies to those of Slovenia. Every glance across one's own border is interesting in itself as it awakens curiosity, but it is also made difficult by differences in terminology and in understandings of specific concepts. Consequently, a mere translation of the notions related to the discipline, of professional titles and legislation, does not suffice if we are to achieve a full understanding of what is being said. Hence, certain translations from German are provided alongside the terms/notions in the original language, while some "literal translations" are supplemented with explanations. The three foreign articles are complemented by one by a Slovenian author, considering the development of, and today's conceptualization of, social pedagogy in Slovenia.

Franz Hamburger opens the thematic section of this issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies* with *Social pedagogy in Germany: A representation from the perspective of traditional educational science* in the introductory thoughts, the author stresses the idea that "social pedagogy" encompasses three different phenomena that are closely related to the social pedagogy construct. They are historical "reality", with its social structure; theoretical systems, approaches and views; and the "discourse" of social pedagogy itself. The concept of social pedagogy entered pedagogy as an independent discipline in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century, arising from the social reality of the day (industrialization and, subsequently, pauperization) and its strong impact on education. The author notes that the original restriction of social pedagogy to

everything related to education outside of school and family soon turned out to be inadequate in the circumstances of the time. Therefore, the scope of the subject had to be broadened to include supporting, planning life together, providing required social and material resources, and reflecting, educating and including the public. Only thus was social pedagogy publicly legitimated, having formed and directed the relationship between individual and social reality in modern societies. The author also approaches some historical aspects of social pedagogy and highlights that new views were introduced in the twentieth century due to international development. The article reveals that social pedagogy has always had to adjust its notions to the conditions of the time, and that a strict division between social work (practice) and social pedagogy (theory) leads to a blind alley. Hamburger concludes by stating that there is no single social pedagogy theory; rather, constant reflection upon theories and practice is needed, since each theory has its own cognitive value. The author, Franz Hamburger, now retired after having lectured and researched for many years at Mainz University, is one of the most influential scientists in the field, belonging to an academic group which succeeded in broadening the activities of social pedagogy in the face of migration-related challenges. This move gave social pedagogy in Germany special social and scientific importance.

The second article, *Past and current developments in social pedagogy in Austria*, is written by **Stephan Sting**, a professor at Klagenfurt University, and addresses questions similar to those raised in Hamburger's article. At the beginning, the author asks how "social pedagogy" is understood in Austria and he finds that, due to various factors, there can be no one, unambiguous answer. The reasons include the following: social pedagogues are responsible for different activities but their professional area is not legally defined; educating specific "social" professions is partly locally organized and depends on private structures; and Austrian contributions to the theoretical discourse of social pedagogy lack recognition in Germany. The concept of "social work" (*Soziale Arbeit*), which is now well established, was long used to refer to various forms of social activities, which means that behind it exist a hidden hierarchy and competition among social professions. The historical perspective of the article demonstrates that the first attempts at professionalization occurred very early on, dating back to the first half of the nineteenth century, in relation to pedagogical practice in the then-evolving preschools. Immediately after World War I, there were serious attempts – under the influence of the psychoanalytical movement – at profiling and professionalizing social pedagogy. With the rise of National Socialism, the movement died down. After World War II, no important changes, in a social pedagogical sense, were seen for a long time. Only gradually, writes the author, did institutions appear (e.g. the Academy for Social Work in 1975) that educated people specifically for professions in the area of social work at post-secondary level. Orientation toward (vocational) education for social work, however, had the consequence of there being no adequate qualification providing thorough theoretical knowledge. Indeed, the introduction of social pedagogical topics within pedagogical studies at some Austrian universities (e.g. Graz, Vienna, Salzburg and Klagenfurt) has only occurred in the

last two decades, the author notes. The Bologna reform brought new content and new structures to the professionalization and academization of social pedagogy. Stephan Sting is a professor of social pedagogy at Klagenfurt University. It is due to him largely that, in recent years, there has been a visible recognition of social pedagogical research, especially at the universities of Graz and Klagenfurt.

Where the first two thematic articles examine the historical and systematic aspects of discourses on the terminology and conception of social pedagogy, the third article – *The multi-generation perspective as a professional challenge for children's and youth services* – presents an empirical research study into an area with a social pedagogical background. It was written by **Ulrike Loch**, an Associate Professor of Pedagogy at Klagenfurt University. The author looks at how institutional and professional counseling can offer children help in remaining within the education system and continuing to be educated. The study was conducted as part of the project *The care of children whose parents have mental problems*, and it is an illustrative example of the matters and problems that social pedagogy deals with today. Loch uses ethnographic observations to focus on the professional procedures and interventions that are absolutely necessary in the care of children. The process reveals the importance of the role of multigenerational family relationships for the provision of help. This applies especially to the cases in which the recipients of various caring measures belong to families where close relationships exist across different generations. This is a comparative research study, carried out in Germany and Austria. In the theoretical part of the article, the author offers the thesis that counseling and helping children and adolescents can be successful if orientation toward the family remains the primary task of all caring measures, if the perspectives of both parents and children are taken into account, and if the context of the family is respected as an important area of socialization. The author supports her thesis by drawing on the relevant Austrian and German legislation that forms the legal basis for such social pedagogical activities. The research demonstrates that in some cases, new possibilities need to be opened up within pedagogical actions, being directed not only at parental responsibility, but also at multigenerational undertakings. This allows for a break in the reproduction of burdening family dynamics, and children and adolescents are more likely to remain in education in situations where there is family loyalty toward a parent (or parents) with problems – for instance, with mental illness. Ulrike Loch, who lectures and researches at the Department of Social Pedagogy, Klagenfurt University, participates in numerous social pedagogical projects concerned with counseling and helping children and adolescents.

The selection of foreign articles is complemented by Špela Razpotnik's Slovenian contribution, entitled *The "social" in social pedagogy*. The author provides an in-depth and well-documented overview of the dilemma presented at the beginning of this editorial: is it the mission of social pedagogy to adjust individuals to existing circumstances, or to critically examine the existing state and endeavor to provide users with better resources and real opportunities to face their own existential problems? The author illustrates the paradigmatic shift from the normalizing role to the socially critical role with numerous arguments, which

include debates on the necessary changes within the naming of the target groups that are the most frequent users of social pedagogical professional services. She also emphasizes the fundamental anthropological and counseling strategies of contemporary social pedagogical theories. In spite of the fact that the numerous conceptualizations of social pedagogy impede the identification of one single theoretical direction in the discipline (as Franz Hamburger maintains), Špela Razpotnik stresses that several contemporary concepts (relational, dialogical and shared-responsibility approaches), still make connections with related concepts in general pedagogy possible.

This suggestion is also made in the last article, *The teacher's authority and the concept of respect*, by **Danijela Makovec**. The author takes historical (Weber and Gogala) and current (Kovač Šebart, Krek and Kroflič) debates on pedagogical authority and highlights two dimensions of authority that are both equally important for successful educational work in schools: the broader social dimension of the status of the profession and the narrower, relational dimension of the personal relationship between the student and the teacher. According to Makovec, the issue of the legitimization of authority is crucial for both dimensions, the key role being played by the possibility of the student taking an active part in the process of recognizing both the teacher's superior role and the reputation of the school as an institution. At the same time, her analysis of historical sources and current, sometimes polemical discussions demonstrates an important correspondence between the establishment of authority and the adequate mutual respect of all participants in a relationship. The author supports her conclusions with the results of an empirical research study conducted in 2009 on a representative sample of teachers and students at secondary schools for vocational education and training in Slovenia. The findings show that both the students' respect for teachers and the teachers' respect for students must be given equal attention. The teacher's attitude toward his/her students and his/her expectations thus have an important effect upon the establishment of respect: the foundation of authority.

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Editors of the thematic issue

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