

# Social Pedagogy and Social Education:

## Creating Hope in Dystopia

# Pedagogía y Educación Social:

## Creando Esperanza en la Distopía

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INTERNATIONAL ONLINE CONFERENCE 22-24 JUNE, 2021  
CONGRESO ANUAL DE CONFERENCIAS INTERNACIONALES 22-24 de JUNIO de 2021



## **Social Pedagogy and Social Education: Creating Hope in Dystopia**

## **Pedagogía y Educación Social: Creando Esperanza en la Distopía**

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## INTRODUCTION

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This collection of writings is from the International Social Pedagogy Conference which took place online 22-24 June, 2021. The conference, Social Pedagogy and Social Education: Creating Hope in Dystopia, was our third international conference. The conferences were held with the intention of bringing together academics and practitioners of social pedagogy and social education from around the world. It is important to note here that "social pedagogy" and "social education" are sometimes considered as equivalent fields, and sometimes are understood as distinct yet related fields, however, the theory and practices in both are recognized and promoted within the Social Pedagogy Association.

Through these conferences, many international partnerships, friendships, and connections have been formed in the name of advancing the concepts of social pedagogy and social education. In true social pedagogical style, participants have bridged differences in theory and practice to create new dialogue about the future of social pedagogy and its potential. All of our conferences have included a wide variety of topics, disciplines, and practices. .

With about 80 participants from more than a dozen countries, and presentations made in English, Spanish and Portuguese, this conference was a small but enthusiastic group of participants. The papers included in this publication constitute a sample of the wide variety of ways in which social pedagogy and social education are studied and practiced around the world. By continuing to build new and develop existing connections at the conference, including the institution of a Global Social Pedagogy Alliance, we are excited and looking forward to the ways in which those connections will influence and impact the growth of social pedagogy and social education around the world.

With the uncertainty of the future of the pandemic and continuing travel restrictions, there are no future conferences currently scheduled, however the Global Alliance is continuing to meet and we look forward to the next time we can come together—hopefully in the not-to-distant future. For more information on future conferences or the Global Alliance, please send an email to [contact@socialpedagogy.org](mailto:contact@socialpedagogy.org).

## INTRODUCCIÓN

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La presente colección de escritos es del Congreso Internacional de Pedagogía Social, que se realizó en línea del 22 al 24 de junio del 2021. El Congreso, Pedagogía Social y Educación Social: Creando Esperanza en la Distopía, fue nuestro tercer evento internacional. Las conferencias se realizaron, con la intención de unir a académicos y practicantes de la pedagogía y educación social de todo el mundo. Es importante destacar que a veces la pedagogía social y la educación social, son considerados como campos equivalentes y en otras ocasiones como diferentes, pero relacionados, de cualquier manera, la teoría y práctica en ambas áreas se reconocen y promueven dentro de la Asociación de Pedagogía Social.

A través de estas conferencias, muchos socios internacionales, amistades y conexiones han sido formadas en el nombre de una serie de conceptos avanzados de pedagogía y educación social. En un verdadero estilo pedagógico social, los participantes han manejado las diferencias en la teoría y la práctica para crear un nuevo diálogo, sobre el futuro de la pedagogía social y su potencial. Todas nuestras conferencias abarcan una amplia variedad de temas, disciplinas y prácticas.

Con cerca de 80 participantes de más de una docena de países, con presentaciones en inglés, español y portugués, fue una conferencia pequeña, pero con un grupo entusiasta de participantes. Los textos incluidos en esta publicación son una muestra de la amplia variedad de estilos en los que la pedagogía y educación social son estudiadas y practicadas alrededor del mundo. Al continuar construyendo nuevas conexiones y desarrollando las existentes en la conferencia, incluida la institución de Alianza Global de Pedagogía Social, estamos entusiasmados y esperando con interés las formas en que esas conexiones influirán e impactarán el crecimiento de la pedagogía social y la educación social en todo el mundo.

Con la incertidumbre aun, sobre el futuro por la pandemia y las restricciones para viajar, no tenemos conferencias programadas por ahora, sin embargo la Alianza Global seguirá reuniéndose y en espera de la siguiente ocasión en que esperamos poder reunirnos en un futuro no muy lejano.

Para mayor información sobre próximas conferencias o de la Alianza Global, por favor envíe un correo a [contact@socialpedagogy.org](mailto:contact@socialpedagogy.org).

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b><u>Inclusion and obstacles: a social pedagogical analysis of narratives concerning work with unaccompanied young refugees with experiences of war in institutional care in Sweden</u></b>	<b>7</b>
Basic, Goran (Linnaeus University, Sweden, goran.basic@lnu.se)	7
Yaka, Matsuda (Kochi University, Japan, yaka_m@kochi-u.ac.jp)	7
<b><u>Social pedagogy, ethnography, and theoretical sources of inspiration: Analysis of empirical sequences from the social pedagogical context in Sweden</u></b>	<b>28</b>
Basic, Goran (Linnaeus University, Sweden, goran.basic@lnu.se)	28
Yakhlef, Sophia (Kristianstad University, Sweden, sophia.yakhlef@hkr.se)	28
<b><u>Young Women and NEETs in the Mediterranean Area: looking for emerging opportunities in a context of socioecological crisis</u></b>	<b>49</b>
Barros*, R.; Duarte*, A.; Fragoso*, A. Pernice**, A. & Freitas*, M.B.	49
*University of Algarve (Portugal)	49
** ARCES University College of Merit (Italy)	49
<b><u>Creating hope in an uncertain world: An Antipodean approach to social work, social pedagogy and social education.</u></b>	<b>64</b>
Sarah Fraser	64
<b><u>Interactive advantage, cementing of positions, and social pedagogical recognition – a narratively inspired analysis of professional actors’ oral representations of health promotion, prevention, and remediation efforts targeting young people who use alcohol and narcotics</u></b>	<b>78</b>
Greve, Rikke (Central Student Health and Diversity, Ljungby, Sweden, greverikke@gmail.com)	78
Andersson, Caroline (Rydebäck Primary School, Helsingborg, Sweden, caroline-andersson@hotmail.se)	78
Basic, Goran (Linnaeus University, Sweden, goran.basic@lnu.se)	78
<b><u>The role of social pedagogy in Slovakia during the pandemic</u></b>	<b>98</b>
Dana Hanesová, Faculty of Education, Matej Bel University	98
Miriam Niklová, Faculty of Education, Matej Bel University	98
<b><u>Social Pedagogy and Readiness for School in German Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)</u></b>	<b>121</b>
Onno Husen (Leuphana University Lüneburg, Germany, husen@leuphana.de)	121
<b><u>(Portuguese) Morte e Vida: A experiência ética de educadores sociais no âmbito de uma política de segurança pública de controle de homicídios em favelas no Brasil</u></b>	<b>138</b>
Antonio Carlos da Costa Nunes – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais - Brazil	138
<b><u>(English) Death and life: the ethical experience of social educators in the scope of a public security policy on homicide control in Brazilian favelas</u></b>	<b>152</b>
Antônio Carlos da Costa Nunes – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais – Brazil	152
<b><u>Charting a pathway for professional practice: Social Education as Inquiry</u></b>	<b>162</b>
Adrian Schoone (Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand, adrian.schoone@aut.ac.nz)	162

## **Inclusion and obstacles: a social pedagogical analysis of narratives concerning work with unaccompanied young refugees with experiences of war in institutional care in Sweden**

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### **Introduction**

In the Swedish debate on social pedagogy, immigration issues have gotten a lot of attention, and social pedagogy has been seen as a relevant analytical framework for educational programs promoting social integration of immigrants (Eriksson, 2010; Winman & Palmroth, 2010).<sup>1</sup> The practical function of social pedagogy is seen to deal with all kinds of social and psychosocial needs in all phases of life span in all kinds of educational and care institutions. It is about social-pedagogical know-how, which seems to be relevant for working with people in different, sometimes very difficult, life situations (Hämäläinen & Eriksson, 2016).

Since 2015, more than 35,000 children and young people have come to Sweden unaccompanied by a guardian (Swedish Migration Agency, 2018a-c, 2020a-c). Most of these unaccompanied children and young people were boys from war-torn countries, and most were placed in ‘HVB

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<sup>1</sup> Some parts of this text were published earlier in Swedish in the doctoral dissertation in sociology: "When collaboration becomes a struggle. A sociological analysis of a project in the Swedish juvenile care" (Basic, 2012) and in English in the articles "Social pedagogical work with unaccompanied young refugees with experiences of war in institutional care in Sweden: an ethnography-inspired analysis of the narratives of young persons and institution personnel" (Basic, 2018c) and "Inclusion and obstacles in the Swedish social pedagogical context: an analysis of narratives on working with unaccompanied refugee minors with wartime experiences in institutional care" (Basic & Matsuda, 2020).

homes' (residential homes for children and young persons<sup>2</sup>). This major influx of unaccompanied children and young people has been a substantial challenge for the Swedish welfare system, which is fundamentally based on the concept of all individuals being included and integrated into the social community. Unaccompanied refugee minors who arrived having fled war during 2015 now constitute an established group in Sweden. Considerable numbers have been granted permanent residency, others are waiting for a decision from the Swedish Migration Agency, while many are receiving various forms of social care. Against this background, it is crucial to study the social pedagogy of professionals working for the inclusion and integration of these young people into their new society.

Children and young people who have fled from such wars may have been involved in social communities, either directly or indirectly, which is likely to affect them for a large part of their lives. Survivors of wars are often influenced by what is known as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, recurring nightmares, emotional blunting and flashbacks to traumatic moments (Sanchez-Cao, Kramer, & Hodes, 2013; Majumder, 2016; Basic 2018c; Björk, Danielsson & Basic 2019). With that background knowledge, we can establish that the professional work of attempting to help and facilitate inclusion and integration of that client category in the Swedish community is not an easy task.

This study's aim was to provide new understanding about: 1) personal narratives coming out of institutions regarding the day-to-day work of caring for youths who, having experienced war,

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<sup>2</sup> A residential or care home is a form of institution in Sweden that provides treatment, care, support or nurturing. HVB homes can, for example, specialize in substance abuse problems or in unaccompanied children.

fled to Sweden and were taken into care and placed in institutions; and, 2) interactive patterns contributing to constructing and reconstructing the inclusion of the clients and the obstacles to inclusion during practical social pedagogy.

### **General perspective of social pedagogical work and research**

According to Hämäläinen (2012), social pedagogy in the Nordic countries follows two developmental lines: social education for all and pedagogical support for those with special social and/or educational needs. The definitions for these lines of development of social pedagogy, according to Hämäläinen, are respectively: a) a line of social care and welfare activities preventing and alleviating social exclusion, and b) a line of social education supporting growth into membership of society. Hämäläinen means that in the Nordic countries, both of these lines exist in social pedagogical research, discussion and practice (Hämäläinen, 2012; Basic 2018c).

According to Eriksson (2014), Swedish social pedagogy is described in three models which are: adaptive model, mobilizing model and democratic model (Table 1). These models were established from interviews with social pedagogues.



Table 1: Three models of the Swedish social pedagogical meaning (2014)

	Adaptive	Mobilising	Democratic
Tools	Relation	Action	Dialogue
Methods	Treatment methods targeted to the individual	Structural methods targeted to society	Animation targeted to the group
Attitudes/ approaches	Individualistic	Collective, change	Practical wisdom
Concepts	Community	Emancipation, empowerment	<i>bildung</i> , citizenship

In the *adaptive model*, the main goal is adaptation to society, and there is an underlying, sometimes implicit, assumption about an existing ‘good’ society. It means that this society functions as a gathering community for all individuals and that the only way to become a human being is by participating in the community. These statements involve the idea that individuals or groups that have been excluded by society for various reasons may become participants in the ideal ‘good’ society through social pedagogical interventions. This social pedagogical work is based on ‘good’ relationships between the personnel/staff and the client.

The goal of the *mobilization model* is the emancipation of the client. This model illustrates a more radical interpretation of social pedagogy. The social pedagogue wants clients to reflect upon their own situation and to be aware of the impact of societal structures and processes on their everyday lives.

The *democratic model* emerges from statements made in the interviews and is based on humanistic democratic thinking. This model reflects the perspective that individuals can reach some type of ‘citizen *bildung*’ through support and ‘education’ from social pedagogues. This

perspective takes a mobilisation approach, but it is less radical than the mobilisation model. A ‘good’ dialogue is central. The belief holds that if one is involved in a true dialogue, it changes their understanding (Eriksson, 2014). In this article, the adaptive model and democratic model have been focused on more than the mobilisation model. In this study, the processes of empowerment of young people at the institutions and how the personnel care and construct the relationship with them have been highlighted.

The social pedagogical work methods were described as being multifaceted, although the most prominent methods were creative methods, community development, and community work. Community development is understood as a collective method that strives to mobilise groups of people in need of support to play active parts in their own or their group’s lives (Eriksson, 2014).

The social pedagogic perspective is one of the perspectives in social sciences that stresses the importance of including the individual in the community (Eriksson & Winman, 2010; Hämäläinen, 2012; Úcar, 2013; Eriksson, 2014; Kornbeck & Úcar, 2015; Hämäläinen & Eriksson, 2016; Basic 2018c; Úcar, Soler-Masó, & Planas-Lladó 2020). Individuals are given confirmation of their identities by participating in the community, and successful interaction between individuals is a fundamental prerequisite for the successful integration of unaccompanied children and young people in Sweden. Hämäläinen and Eriksson (2016) and Eriksson (2014) highlight the importance of interaction between those already established in the community and the individual who is on the margin. One of the most important dimensions from a social pedagogical perspective is to analytically investigate relationships between individuals

needing help and the professional participants tasked with helping these individuals as part of their professional role (Basic 2018c).

The writings of Úcar, Soler-Masó, & Planas-Lladó (2020), Hämäläinen and Eriksson (2016), Kornbeck and Úcar (2015), Eriksson (2014), Úcar (2013), Hämäläinen (2012), and Eriksson and Winman (2010) provide insight into some expectations that come into play in the various social contexts of the role of a ‘social pedagogue’. A social pedagogue is portrayed as an expert who works toward a specific and defined goal. The goal is to help or guide the client to overcome obstacles that hamper integration and success in the context. Analysis in Basic (2018c) reveals major variations in what is expected of a social pedagogue working in institutional care in Sweden with unaccompanied young refugees who have experiences of war. A common denominator is that the mission of and context in which the social pedagogue operates appear flexible enough to enable an individual to play the role in a variety of ways. Only when the individual social pedagogue adopts an active, assertive, independent, personal and relatively strong posture will there be a chance of being important to other professional categories and for the client. In practice, therefore, only when the individual social pedagogue transcends the expectations of the conventional role will there be a chance to be appreciated by other collaborators.

Hämäläinen and Eriksson (2016) and Eriksson (2014) illustrate four important dimensions of the social pedagogical perspective. The first of these focuses on goals in the context to be achieved by means of social pedagogy. In this dimension, the importance of the participants’ socialisation

is foregrounded in the context by, among other things, integration and mobilisation of all community forces with the aim of helping the individual on the community margins. The second dimension focuses on the social pedagogic approach, especially in the relationship between the professional participants and the individual who needs help. The professional participants working in accordance with the social pedagogic perspective are empathic towards the individual requiring help while also being aware of the specific expectations of the professional role. The third dimension focuses on appropriate social pedagogic methods in working with the individual who needs help. Methods considered to be appropriate are the dynamic methods based on the individual as part of the group and part of a wider social context (such as environmental therapy). The fourth dimension focuses on social pedagogy as a resource for professional work with the individual on the community margin and in need of help. In this dimension, the emphasis is on the importance of the goal of creating progress in the relationship with the individual who needs help by means of well-thought-out dialogue (Eriksson, 2014; Hämäläinen & Eriksson, 2016; Basic 2018c).

If we borrow analytical glasses from researchers above, we can read the following from this study: 1) *social pedagogic target groups* – as represented by a personnel at HVB homes who work with young people in care who have experiences of war and who were subsequently placed in HVB homes in Sweden; 2) *social pedagogical arenas* – as represented by various contexts that are brought to the fore in the study's empirical material (migration context while fleeing to Sweden, migration context during integration into Sweden, institution context and school context, among others); and 3) *social pedagogical roles* – as represented by various roles that are

brought to the fore in the study's empirical material (such as empathic personnel, competent personnel, incompetent personnel).

### **Theory and method**

The study's general theoretical points of departure are interactionist, though influenced by an ethnomethodological perspective of how people present their social reality (Blumer, 1969/1986; Garfinkel, 2002; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Goffman, 1959/1990). Beyond this general starting point, the concepts of social comparisons, stigmatisation processes and collaboration are especially relevant components in the specific narratives we have analysed (Simmel 1908/1965; Goffman 1963/1990; Snow and Anderson 1987; Scheler 1992; Merton 1996; Willumsen 2007; Lotia & Hardy 2008; Åkerström & Jacobsson, 2009; Hesjedal, Hetland, & Iversen 2015; Sundqvist, Ögren, Padyab, & Ghazinour 2016; Oppedal, Guribye, & Kroger 2017; Basic 2018c; Sirriyeh & Raghallaigh 2018; Majumder 2019; Ryen, & Reinertsen 2019).

The study was conducted based on inspiration from ethnographic tradition (Becker, 1970, 1998; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Gubrium & Holstein, 1999; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 156). During an interview, those involved communicate based on day-to-day knowledge of the social context (Riessman, 2008; Silverman, 2015). During the fieldwork in this study, an effort was made to give interviewees space in the discussions so that they could talk about topics of immediate interest that they themselves considered to be important (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The objective was for the interviewer to adopt the role of an interested listener who wanted to find out more about young people who had experienced a war and who had taken refuge in

Sweden<sup>3</sup>, and also about the professional participants who work on a daily basis with these young people in care in Sweden. Conducting interviews in this way created the variation in empirical material required to differentiate – and in the next stage to analyze – those phenomena that are relevant to achieving the study purpose.

The interview material consists of qualitatively oriented interviews with nine employees at HVB homes who work with young people in care who had experiences of war and who were later placed at HVB homes in Sweden. Those interviewed in this study are not trained social pedagogues. Field work has revealed that five out of nine respondents have studied or are still studying at university – three as social workers, one as a social psychologist and one as a teacher – while the other four respondents are educated to upper-secondary level. One of these four has undergone a short training course – an Integration Consultant/Pedagogue Diploma (an online distance course arranged by a company in Sweden) – in conjunction with working at a HVB residential care and family home. During field work on the comparative study, the following job designations for staff at HVB homes working with young people with wartime experience were encountered: “housing support officer”, “coach” and “supervisor”. In the Swedish context, there is an expectation that, just like staff working in other contexts intended to assist and facilitate the individual’s inclusion and integration into society, all staff at HVB homes base their work on the presuppositions that characterize a special-needs education perspective. During the interviews,

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<sup>3</sup> The interview material of this study consists also of qualitatively orientated interviews with six young people in care (from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria) who had experiences of war and who were later placed at HVB homes in Sweden (Basic, 2018c). This part of the study's empirical material is not analyzed within the framework of this study.

an effort was made to obtain detailed descriptions of professional work with these young people, and to find out whether special ideas and/or working methods have been developed.

The following topics were discussed during interviews with personnel at HVB homes: 1) work with young people with experiences of war; 2) treatment (advantages, expectations, results, drawbacks or difficulties); 3) suggested improvements – resources; 4) cooperation with other authorities/authority personnel; and 5) the young people's accounts of the contributions of social services, the Swedish Migration Agency, the custodian and the school.

The interviews lasted from about 1 to 2 hours and were recorded because the interviewees gave their consent. An interview guide designed around the above analytical interests was used as a basis before and during the interviews. In the course of the interviews, an effort was made to achieve a conversational style, known as 'active interviewing' (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), with an emphasis on openness and follow-up questions rather than the question-and-answer model. All interviews were transcribed from speech to text prior to the analysis work (Potter, 1996/2007; Jefferson, 1985).

Most of the interviews were conducted individually, although one was completed in a group of two interviewees. A dictation microphone was used at all interviews. The collected material was not directly transcribed but was transcribed a few weeks or a few months later. Interviews were conducted from June 2016 to May 2018.

The interview material was analysed based on traditions in qualitative methodology (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Silverman, 2015). In interviews with institution personnel, the following themes were crystallised: a) previous chaos in reception centres in Sweden that are now more orderly; b) young people singled out and stigmatised by society; c) importance of empathic attitudes and humanity; d) no treatment is offered or given in the institution; e) main task: to help young people to integrate in society; f) there is collaboration with other professional categories, but it is limited (no more than what is essential); g) young people's age as a problem; h) young people are described as greedy (reason for coming to Sweden); i) maltreatment in institutions; and j) (in)competence of personnel.

Empirical sequences presented in this study were categorised in the material as: 'young people singled out and stigmatised by society', 'importance of empathic attitudes and humanity', 'young people's age as a problem', 'young people are described as greedy (reason for coming to Sweden)', 'maltreatment in institutions', '(in)competence of personnel'. The choice of empirical examples was based on the study's purpose and the ability of the examples to elucidate the analytical points.

The interviewees were informed of the purpose of the study and were guaranteed confidentiality and the opportunity to withdraw at any time. In publications and presentations of the results of the investigation, names of people and places and other information that could be used to identify the interviewees were changed or omitted. During the work on the empirical material, not only were the names of individuals omitted or changed but also the names of regions, municipalities,



institutions and districts, as well as means of transport and anything else that could link individuals (the institution) with various cases. The interest of the study relates to experiences as general social phenomena, so there is no reason to document personal data (Ethical vetting, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

In the Swedish debate on social pedagogy, immigration issues have received a lot of attention, and social pedagogy has been seen as a relevant theoretical framework for educational programs promoting social integration of immigrants. The practical function of social pedagogy is seen as a way to deal with all kinds of social and psychosocial needs in all phases of life span in all kinds of educational and care institutions. It is about social-pedagogical know-how, which seems to be relevant for working with people in different, sometimes very difficult life situations.

This study purpose was to provide new understanding about: 1) personal narratives coming out of institutions about the day-to-day work of taking care of young people who experienced a war, fled to Sweden, and were cared for and placed in institutions; and 2) interactive patterns contributing to constructing the category 'social pedagogue'. The material was gathered through interviews with personnel who work with these young people at residential or care homes.

The general perspective on social pedagogy and research emphasises the importance of recognising the various identities that are actualised and re-actualised during interpersonal interactions in the various social contexts in which the individual acts or is expected to act.

According to Eriksson (2010), historically, the principal use of social pedagogy in Sweden was as a method and attitude for personnel working with children and young people in various institutions.

This study demonstrates that recognition, or the lack thereof, of the young peoples' various identities may impact on their opportunities for inclusion in Swedish society. The recognition and loss of identity that occurs in various contexts in which young people act or are expected to act is crucial to integration into the new society.

This study shows that success in the inclusion dynamic can be achieved with a 'good' dialogue between young people and staff (something that in previous research was highlighted as being central to social pedagogy). In this context, a 'good' dialogue is one characterised by intimacy, an interest in the other person's perspective, openness, and downplaying the power dynamic between the participants in the dialogue. It appears that a 'good' dialogue improves the staff member's empathy and lays the foundations for success in the collaboration with other stakeholders that is an important point of departure for facilitating the inclusion of these young people in their new society.

The study also shows that success in the inclusionary dynamic is not easy to achieve. Stigmatisation and the exclusionary dynamic at a personal, organisational, and societal level, as well as the incompetence of staff, has a negative impact on the young peoples' self-image that in the next stage may risk crushing their self-esteem. The young peoples' wartime experiences and

sometimes precarious situations in the new society may also lead to a lack of self-esteem. When there is a failure to facilitate mutual interaction between young people, staff, and the community and the young people lose social recognition from others, this can undoubtedly present an obstacle to self-fulfillment, a stable identity, and integration into the new society.

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## **Social pedagogy, ethnography, and theoretical sources of inspiration: Analysis of empirical sequences from the social pedagogical context in Sweden**

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### **Introduction**

The social pedagogic perspective stresses the importance of including the individual in the community (Eriksson & Winman, 2010; Hämäläinen, 2012; Úcar, 2013; Eriksson, 2014; Kornbeck & Úcar, 2015; Hämäläinen & Eriksson, 2016; Basic 2018a; Úcar, Soler-Masó, & Planas-Lladó 2020; Basic & Matsuda 2020)<sup>4</sup>. Individuals are given validation of their identities by participating in the community, and successful interaction between individuals is a fundamental prerequisite for the successful integration and reintegration of people who are marginalized in society (e.g., unaccompanied young refugees with experiences of war in institutional care in Sweden, and young people with drug and crime-related problems in institutional care in Sweden). Hämäläinen and Eriksson (2016) and Eriksson (2014) highlight the importance of interaction between the individual who is on the margins and those already established in the community. From a social pedagogical perspective, one of the most important

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<sup>4</sup> Some parts of this text were published earlier in Swedish in a doctoral dissertation in sociology ('When collaboration becomes a struggle. A sociological analysis of a project in the Swedish juvenile care'; Basic, 2012), and in English in the articles 'Social pedagogical work with unaccompanied young refugees with experiences of war in institutional care in Sweden: an ethnography-inspired analysis of the narratives of young persons and institution personnel' (Basic 2018a) and 'Inclusion and obstacles in the Swedish social pedagogical context: an analysis of narratives on working with unaccompanied refugee minors with wartime experiences in institutional care' (Basic & Matsuda 2020).



dimensions is to analytically examine relationships between individuals needing assistance and the professional participants tasked with helping these persons.

However, there is a limited possibility in social pedagogy to analyze all social phenomena that are represented in the work with diverse client categories who receive help with inclusion and integration in the community from different professional actors (Eriksson & Winman, 2010; Hämäläinen, 2012; Úcar, 2013; Eriksson, 2014; Kornbeck & Úcar, 2015; Hämäläinen & Eriksson, 2016; Basic 2018a; Úcar, Soler-Masó, & Planas-Lladó 2020; Basic & Matsuda 2020). Common theoretical points of the study involve terms that help facilitate analyses of the context in which social pedagogues operate.

In this study, we focus on the experiences and stories told by: 1) young people who have experienced war, fled to Sweden, and been taken into care and placed in special youth homes, and 2) young people who have experienced drug- and crime-related problems. In addition, we focus on the accounts of members of staff at the institutions working with these young people. Employees at special youth homes in Sweden who work daily with youths who have undergone war, drug, and crime-related problems are engaged in several different identifications alternately or at the same time, such as their work-related identity, gender identity, or ethnic identity (compare with the concept of "intersectionality").

The current article underlines how these intersecting and corresponding identifications operate through a range of interactions in which the individual claims or is appointed identity categories

in various ways. Therefore, the study shows when, how, and by whom identities are created and how it occurs in relation to institutional care placement. When analyzing these ethnographic examples, we integrate the social pedagogical perspective with interactionism by focusing on the accounts, language, action, and gesticulations of the narrator. The purpose of this study is thus to expand on previous theory regarding ethnomethodology and interactions by integrating a social pedagogical perspective to the examples.

The connections between social pedagogy, ethnographic methods, and interactionism with regards to human interaction are analyzed through actions, language, gesticulations, and documents influenced by an ethnomethodological perspective on human narratives. The analysis primarily correlates with the discursive traditions of sociology, social work and social pedagogy in which descriptions are considered both experience-based and a narrative. Focused on the context of practical social and pedagogical work, the analysis is aided by empirical elements.

Firstly, the text accounts for the study's typical analytical centers, with special importance given to the numerous symbols used in relational interaction, how individuals present themselves, and how individuals form and preserve their identities in the analyzed circumstances. Secondly, classifications and the moral content and contextual limitations of the classifications are analyzed. Thirdly, an account is given of the significance of the numerous theoretical concepts in ethnographic studies that frequently characterize one or more sweeping social pedagogical phenomena analyzed all the way through analytical chapters. Ultimately, there is a debate

regarding the levels of analysis in ethnographic studies and the link to empirical data, as well as the constraints of ethnographic analyses.

### **The social pedagogical perspective**

In the Nordic countries, social pedagogy follows two developmental lines according to Hämäläinen (2012): pedagogical support for those with special social and educational needs (a line of social education supporting growth into membership in society) and social education for all (a line of social care and welfare activities preventing and alleviating social exclusion). The writings of Eriksson and Winman (2010), Hämäläinen (2012), Ucar (2013), Eriksson (2014), Kornbeck and Ucar (2015), Hämäläinen and Eriksson (2016), Basic (2018a), and Basic & Matsuda (2020) provide understanding of some of the expectations that come into play in the numerous social situations involving the role of a ‘social pedagogue’. A social pedagogue who works toward a specific and defined goal is described as an expert in the practical work with clients. The objective is to help or guide the client in conquering difficulties that hinder integration and achievement in the context in which they are working.

Eriksson (2014) and Hämäläinen and Eriksson (2016) demonstrate four crucial aspects of the social pedagogical perspective. The first aspect focuses on the ambitions to be achieved in the context by means of social pedagogy. The importance of the participants’ socialization in this dimension is foregrounded in the context by the integration and mobilization of all community forces with the aim of helping the individual on the margins of the community. The second aspect is a focus on the social pedagogic approach, especially the relationship between the

individual who needs help and the professional participants. Working in accordance with the social pedagogic perspective, while also being aware of the specific expectations of the professional role, the professional participants are empathic towards the individual requiring help. The third aspect focuses on suitable social pedagogic approaches when working with the individuals who are in need of assistance. Approaches thought to be suitable are the dynamic methods centered on the individual as an element of the group and part of a broader social context (e.g., environmental therapy). The last aspect focuses on social pedagogy as a resource for professional work together with the individual on the margins of the community and in need of help. The emphasis is on the significance of the aim in establishing an improvement in the relationship with the individual needing help by means of well thought-out dialogue (Eriksson, 2014; Hämäläinen & Eriksson, 2016, Basic 2018a; Basic & Matsuda 2020).

Using the analytical tools from Eriksson (2014) and Hämäläinen and Eriksson (2016), we can determine the following: 1) *social pedagogic target groups*, as characterised by youngsters in care and employees at special youth homes in Sweden who work with youngsters in care who were involved in war, drug, or crime-related problems and were later placed in special youth homes in Sweden; 2) *social pedagogical arenas*, as represented by numerous contexts that are brought to the fore in the study's empirical material (e.g., war context, drug context, crime context, migration context while fleeing to Sweden, migration context during integration into Sweden, institution context, school context, and meeting context); and 3) *social pedagogical roles*, as characterised by many roles that are brought to the fore in the study's empirical material (e.g., empathic social pedagogue, competent social pedagogue, incompetent social pedagogue).

### **An interactionist and ethnomethodological perspective**

The general premise of the study is interactionist, i.e., people create meaning through social interaction. The study is further influenced by an ethnomethodological perspective of how people present their social reality (Blumer, 1969/1986; Garfinkel, 2002). Gubrium and Holstein (1997) indicated that ethnomethodology does not want to clarify what a social world is, but how it arises. With this perspective in mind, the accounts of unaccompanied young refugees and young persons with drug- and crime-related problems and the analysis of these accounts can be viewed as meaning-creating activities to be used in the development and improvement of social pedagogical activities important for including the individual in the community (Scott & Lyman, 1968; Basic, 2012; Björk, Danielsson, & Basic, 2019; Johnsson, Blivik, & Basic, 2021).

According to interactionists, to create an identity, the self (or the I) is a fundamental construction. An interactionist description of the self is centered around two essential ideas: *self-reference* and *role-playing*. Self-reference is a subject portraying oneself and describing objects of all kinds in a broader context, such as people in different groups, ideas, opinions, and attitudes (Blumer, 1969/1986). Being recognised in our roles is to be acknowledged in our identities. People in a society play a number of different roles over the course of their lives for different audiences; consequently, the self is shaped and changed in each social situation (Goffman, 1959/1990).

A symbolic interactionism perspective focuses on how the individual would define a situation, how the individual presents themselves in different circumstances, how various situations are

combined with other situations to create social rituals, and how the individual's identity is created, preserved, and re-created. The interactionists also investigate how symbols, such as language, documents, pictures, and films, contribute to the creation of a cultural context.

According to Blumer (1969/1986), symbols are social objects that are given a certain significance, which does not need to be the same for everyone. Various individuals understand each other's symbols and try to give them meaning. Although various symbols can incite conflicts, they can also create cultural communities. Not only can the symbols be seen as building blocks for ongoing existence and advancement of the context, but also as fuel for conflict (Blumer, 1969/1986).

The actors analyze the individual's identity not as something static, but as a dynamic field. The identity is not well-defined; it can be discussed and be at the borders between various categories. A single individual can use several different identities at the same time (e.g., gender identity, professional identity, and ethnic identity). The identity can be viewed as the name we give ourselves, and it can change because it is socially constructed (Blumer, 1969/1986; Snow & Anderson, 1987). The interactionist perspective has encouraged us to pay attention to and analyze how the individual creates and re-creates identities in the discussion of the social pedagogical context.

Ethnomethodology is a perspective with a strong interest in the everyday and practical aspects of social life (Garfinkel, 2002). As an ethnomethodologist, the researcher is not primarily interested

in what a social world is, but rather in how it comes about and is designed. The ethnomethodologists, in other words, believe that speech and interaction create the social world instead of simply being examples of social reality. In particular, ethnomethodologists highlight the importance of the world's creation centered around its members' communication, as well as drawing interpretations about those interactions. The ethnomethodologists also point out that people in any position try to comprehend and use this comprehension when they put together their own actions (Garfinkel, 2002). According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), people interacting with one another attempt to make their social reality comprehensible and, in doing so, construct their identities. Here, typification fulfills an important function. Dividing and categorizing individuals and events into types – identifying them – is necessary if we are to navigate myriad everyday interactions. Typification is not a static process but changes from one situation to the next. One person's actions (such as various exercises of power) provide a motive for and an answer to the actions of others, thereby shaping, modifying, and validating the allegiances and self-images of those involved.

For the purposes of present study, this implies that wartime and refugees' experiences, drug- and crime-related problems, institutionalization, and various types of power dynamic in interaction are less interesting in terms of static baggage and more so in terms of institutional and material interactions in the here and now. Agreeing with the ethnomethodologist's perspective, the members' statements develop separate meanings depending on the context in which things are expressed and depending on which individual is speaking. This perspective has stimulated us to focus on analyses of descriptions of reality that members provide concerning the social

pedagogical context and about participation in the practice by the other members in the context (eg., young refugee/young person, personnel/social pedagogue, social pedagogical context/social community).

For this study, this context means that experiences with war, drug, and crime-related problems and being placed under care are investigated as interactions in which a person's behavior constitutes a motive for and a reaction to the other people's behavior. Provided by the social community (Swedish society), perceptions of the treatment are also studied as a cause of an interplay between the participants involved. In this study, 'role' is used not only as an unambiguous analytical instrument, but also as an ethnomethodological spirit, an investigation of how the interviewees themselves use role and identity when expressing their own and other's living conditions and experiences.

### **Ethnographic methodology and variation in the empirical material**

As the theoretical focus of this study is social interaction and how people present their social reality (Blumer, 1969/1986; Garfinkel, 2002) the analysis is based on two empirical studies that are qualitative in nature (i.e., recorded conversational interviews, ethnographic observations, and documents). Methodological and analytical inspiration for these studies is found in ethnographic research (Bryman, 2015; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Ethnographic research is characterized by a variety of analyses of different types of empirical material such as for example observations, photographs, interviews, and/or documents (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983;



Gubrium & Holstein, 1999; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Silverman, 2015; Yakhlef, Basic, & Åkerström, 2016, 2017; Basic, 2012, 2018a,b,c; Basic & Matsuda 2020).

The conversational interviews and ethnographic observations for these studies were obtained at several special youth homes in Sweden during two research projects: ‘Youth with war experiences in institutional care. A sociological study of young immigrants’ stigma and social comparisons’ (Basic, 2018a; Basic & Matsuda 2020) and ‘Conflicts in youth-care - accounts, comparisons and alliances’ (Basic, 2012, 2018b, 2018c, 2019). The empirical materials for this analysis consist of recorded conversational interviews with 162 project participants (youngsters and various professional categories) and 134 observations of meetings, informal get-togethers, and visits to special youth homes in Sweden, Social Services offices, and the head office of the National Board of Institutional Care in Sweden. In addition, we analyzed media reports and documents produced by the National Board of Institutional Care concerning the unaccompanied young refugees with experiences of war in institutional care in Sweden, and the young persons with drug- and crime-related problems in institutional care in Sweden (Government Offices of Sweden, 2006; Swedish National Board of Institutional Care, 2006, 2009; Aftonbladet 2016, 2018; Sveriges Television 2016, 2017a,b; Upsala nya tidning 2016; Nyheter 24 2017; Expressen 2018).

The analytical starting point of the research project, ‘Youth with war experiences in institutional care. A sociological study of young immigrants' stigma and social comparisons’, was that, in situations of war, civilians are often a direct target of, and sometimes even participants in, acts of

war. Young people who have come to Sweden after fleeing a war zone have been directly or indirectly involved in the war, and will most likely be affected by this for a substantial part of or the rest of their lives. The aim of the project was to analyze the stories told by young people who have experienced war, fled to Sweden, and been taken into care and placed in special youth homes (“HVB homes”)<sup>5</sup>; as well as analyzing the stories told by staff at the institutions working with these young people at special youth homes. The research project’s empirical material consists of eight conversational interviews with nine members of staff at special youth homes; five conversational interviews with six young people in care (from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria); 15 ethnographic observations during visits to special youth homes in Sweden; and eight media reports in the form of newspaper articles and televised reports. The empirical material was collected between 2016 and 2018 (Basic, 2018a; Basic & Matsuda 2020).

The research project, ‘Conflicts in youth-care - accounts, comparisons and alliances’, analyses a collaborative project/intervention in Swedish institutional care of young persons. The intervention was initiated by the Swedish Government through a commission to the Swedish National Board of Institutional Care (NBIC), or Statens institutionsstyrelse (SiS). The intervention was dubbed ‘Counteract Violence and Gangs’ (‘MVG project’), and its goal was to improve the collaboration between social services and the NBIC in order to streamline the interventions for young people taken into care and their families. The intervention took place between 2007 and 2008. The process and the effects of the intervention were reviewed externally

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<sup>5</sup> Residential homes for children and young persons in Sweden. A residential or care home is a form of institution in Sweden that provides treatment, care, support or nurturing. HVB homes can, for example, specialize in substance abuse problems or in unaccompanied children.

by two research groups at Lund University and Stockholm University in Sweden (Basic, Thelander, & Åkerström, 2009; Lundström, Sallnäs, & Vogel, 2012). The overall goal of the research project at Lund University (which was not part of the practical intervention) was to analyse conflicts that have been described and observed, alliances and explanatory comparisons observable during interviews, observations, and documents collected as empirical material as part of and following the process evaluation of the intervention. Lastly, analytical discoveries are put into a more general collaborative context, which is represented by earlier research as the societal phenomenon ‘collaboration’. The research projects’ empirical material consists of conversational interviews with 147 project participants (young persons in care, their parents, and different professionals from social services, the NBIC, and the project); 119 ethnographic observations of organized meetings, informal encounters before and after interviews and meetings, and visits to institutions, social service offices, and the main offices of the NBIC; and 10 documents published internally and on the Internet by the NBIC as part of an intervention (Basic, 2012, 2018b,c, 2019).

Empirical sequences presented in this study were categorized in the empirical material as social pedagogical work-interviews, social pedagogical work-observations, and social pedagogical work-documents. Our choices of empirical examples for analysis were guided by the study’s purpose to analyze the analytical connections between social pedagogy, ethnographic methods, and interactionism with regards to human interaction through language, action, gesticulations, and documents influenced by an ethnomethodological perspective on human oral narratives. Furthermore, the choice of empirical example was guided by the *analytical quality of the*

*sequence* (i.e., the extent to which the example clarified the analytical point we wanted to highlight).

The empirical material for both studies was collected and analyzed based on ethical aspects important for planning and implementing research projects. The informants were notified of the intent of the studies and were assured confidentiality and the opportunity to leave at any time. The names of people and places and other information that could be used to identify the informants (municipalities, regions, institutions, districts, or methods of transportation) were altered or excluded throughout the work on the empirical material, and in publications and presentations of the results of the studies. There was no reason to document personal data, as the interest of the study relates to experiences as general social phenomena.

## **Conclusion**

Ethnographic studies are characterized by the researcher's active pursuit to create a variation in the empirical material, which is necessary to discern and subsequently analyze social phenomena. For example, the researcher poses open questions that cannot be answered with a 'Yes' or 'No' answer during interviews and/or communicates with informants during fieldwork in order to stimulate narratives. Another way of creating variation in the empirical material is the collection and analysis of different types of qualitative empirical data, such as interviews, observations, documents, photos, videos, media reports, and blog communications.

This study considers the analytical connections between social pedagogy, ethnographic methods, and interactionism with regards to human interaction through language, action, gesticulations, and documents influenced by a ethnomethodological perspective on human oral narratives. The analysis mainly relates to the discursive traditions within sociology and social pedagogy in which descriptions are regarded as both experience-based and narrative. The analysis is aided by empirical elements focused on the context of practical social and pedagogical work.

Accounts of unaccompanied young refugees and young persons with drug- and crime-related problems are viewed as meaning-creating activities to be used in the development and improvement of social pedagogical activities important for including the individual in the community. The text accounts for the general analytical basis of ethnographic studies, with an emphasis on the various symbols used in interpersonal interactions, how individuals present themselves, and how individuals create and maintain their identities in the analysed contexts.

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## Young Women and NEETs in the Mediterranean Area: looking for emerging opportunities in a context of socioecological crisis

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### Abstract

The GREENLAND Project is a consortium from the Mediterranean area that seeks to work collaboratively to combat inequalities based on gender, age, education and training, particularly young women, and NEET (Not in Education, Employment, and Training) within the Green and Circular Economy sectors. The project will develop innovative tools (e-learning platform, e-portfolio), capacity building activities, structured meetings, and strategic alliances with the aim of influencing policy long term-solutions and support policymakers to the development of action plans. The key action with a potential high-impact at policy-making level is the job-shadowing experience for the key staff of institutions concerned with the theme of the project.

**Keywords:** socio-environmental education; NEETs and gender inclusion; Green and Circular Economy.

## Introduction

Social pedagogy-education is about relationships, knowledge, and action. The Project “GREEN-skiLLs for a sustAiNable Development - GREENLAND” (2020-2023)<sup>6</sup> is a large consortium from the Mediterranean area (Italy, Portugal, Greece, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Palestine) that seeks to work collaboratively crisscrossing cultural heritages. The Mediterranean area has extremely high rates of youth and female unemployment. Therefore, inequalities based on gender, age, education and training will be addressed as GREENLAND sets out a series of incisive training actions, territorial and market analysis and socio-environmental education for 2900 young women and NEET within the Green and Circular Economy (GaCE).

Emancipatory social pedagogy-education and community sustainable development depend partially on our ability to work together to challenge mainstream strategies that only serve the immediate interest of a few powerful entities, whereas common environmental priorities and globally inclusive citizenship should be a goal. Also, policy innovation is needed to create new measures and mechanisms at the national level to attract NEETs to the public services in a careful and balanced way<sup>7</sup> and to assure long-lasting effects in educational community interventions.

Expanding synergies of an interdisciplinary team, GREENLAND will engage key public and private organizations (such as universities, educational and training systems, small and medium

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<sup>6</sup> See: <http://www.enicbcmmed.eu/projects/greenland>

<sup>7</sup> Activation measures for young people in vulnerable situations, Experience from the ground, EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2018.

enterprises, public authorities, employment agencies and third sector entities) to actively identify and create new opportunities, based on gender and intergenerational justice, which aim to foster social change and hope to achieve a new stage in the planet's life, characterized by a renewed socio-ecological equilibrium.

### **Prioritizing professionalization of young people (NEETS) and women**

Formally speaking, NEET is not a concept, but an indicator used by the statistics agencies to support policy decisions to tackle the problems potentially revealed by the numbers. It is therefore crucial to understand: who is included in the NEET group, what are the characteristics of these youths and adults, and what are the determining factors for being a NEET. The fluidity of the NEET designation also creates a paradox. The use of the term is simultaneously widely adopted and widely condemned for its imprecision (Hutchinson et al, 2016).

Almost by definition NEET are young adults and adults at risk as they are economically inactive and not participating in education and training. The risk is not only in reference to their present situation, but also to the fear of its permanence. However, a closer look to the NEET shows a large diversity of the groups included. A considerable number of researchers point out the non-homogeneous character of NEET (e.g., Avis, 2014, Furlong, 2006, Seddon et al, 2013). Tomczyk et al (2018) note that the population of NEET includes the short-term and long-term unemployed, people not available to start education or work for different reasons, young people who are sick or disabled or carers with family responsibilities. It also includes the discouraged

persons; those actively looking for employment but who are only willing to accept a position in line with their skills or ambitions.

According to Eurostat,<sup>8</sup> the number of millennial NEETs has increased since the beginning of the 21st century. Socio-educational research has shown that the determining factors to becoming a NEET and continuing in a condition of social exclusion and poverty, are caused by complex relations between education, training, public policy and employment (Tamesberger and Bacher, 2014). Planning new curricula based on the GaCE's market needs, skills transfer to NEETs and women, media-based training tools, and cultural exchanges among young people, should focus on social class and the degree of discrimination that women face in the territories in which they live, including differences between countries and differences between the social environments, urban or rural (Boix *et al.*, 2015), for example.

Considering the diversity of the population to which the GREENLAND actions are directed, these actions will be diverse aiming the creation of new employment opportunities reinforced by the sector-skills alliances between TVETs (Technical and Vocational Education and Training), SMEs (Small and medium-sized enterprises) and TSOs (range of organizations that are neither public sector nor private sector). These alliances can contribute to improving and increasing the number of jobs, by providing young NEETs and women sustainable, marketable, skills and

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<sup>8</sup> For more information see:

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/main/search?p\\_p\\_id=estatsearchportlet\\_WAR\\_estatsearchportlet&p\\_p\\_lifecycle=1&p\\_p\\_state=maximized&p\\_p\\_mode=view&estatsearchportlet\\_WAR\\_estatsearchportlet\\_action=search&estatsearchportlet\\_WAR\\_estatsearchportlet\\_theme=empty&estatsearchportlet\\_WAR\\_estatsearchportlet\\_collection=empty&p\\_auth=Q4F2SfRf&text=NEET+](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/main/search?p_p_id=estatsearchportlet_WAR_estatsearchportlet&p_p_lifecycle=1&p_p_state=maximized&p_p_mode=view&estatsearchportlet_WAR_estatsearchportlet_action=search&estatsearchportlet_WAR_estatsearchportlet_theme=empty&estatsearchportlet_WAR_estatsearchportlet_collection=empty&p_auth=Q4F2SfRf&text=NEET+)

qualifications to prepare those Mediterranean millennials for skill-based occupations within the GaCE sectors, and to reduce skill mismatches in rural areas particularly affected by climate change and socio-ecological crisis.

In particular, there is a prominent skills mismatch in these areas between job requirements and workers, i.e., an insufficient number of job seekers to fill the available jobs (quantitative aspects) or the level of available skills of workers which is lower than the required level to perform the job (qualitative aspects)<sup>9</sup>.

### **Training of NEET women - innovative action for socio-environmental education**

Under the GREENLAND research project scope, we are also interested in understanding the direct and indirect effects of global governance, particularly European governance. For that goal we will use a pluri-scalar model of analysis (Dale, Kazepov, Rinne & Robertson, 2016) to grasp the complexities and contradictory trends in seven participating countries regarding their public policies in the field of young adult women NEET.

Therefore, in the transnational Mediterranean policy context, the European structured educational agenda in the field of policies targeting NEETs acts as pivotal for establishing policy priorities that impacts beyond borders. EU members have been creating several working groups and networks with the aim to adapt European regulatory frameworks to national contexts. This

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<sup>9</sup> For more information see:  
<https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/the-skills-gap-an-economic-burden-for-the-eu/>

is the case of the European Youth Guarantee Programme <sup>10</sup> (YG is a policy instrument launched in 2013) targeting youths and young adults<sup>11</sup>, and its connected Youth Employment Initiative (YEI is a governance mechanism, i.e., a funding programme, launched in 2014). Within that pluri-scalar scenario, in GREENLAND we are interested in examining the case of three European countries' adaptations of Youth Guarantee, as well as the regional governance influences on five non-European countries of the Mediterranean area.

In Portugal there is a growing concern regarding the situation of NEET and unemployed women with low qualifications. Some bridges with other European policy strategies have been built, particularly directed at training and guiding some efforts to sustainable and growth-enhancing investments, namely supporting the green and digital transition in various spheres of socio-economic and educational agendas—as is the case of the framework of the European Green Deal (2019-2024)<sup>12</sup>. The GREENLAND project uses European, national, and local policies based on youth, employment, agriculture and reduction of poverty as a springboard to increase the efficiency of existing relevant policies.

In the social dimensions, the people of the Mediterranean can be characterised roughly by their relatively low standard of living, but family and neighbourhood networks tend to prevent them from falling into absolute poverty (Petmesidou & Papatheodorou, 2006). It is in this general context that the Mediterranean countries suffer the consequences of two consecutive crises that

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<sup>10</sup> See: Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on 'A bridge to employment - Strengthening the Youth Guarantee', and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013, on the establishment of a Youth Guarantee (2020/C 372/01). Available at:

[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1104\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1104(01)&from=EN)

<sup>11</sup> The case targeting active adults is the Upskilling pathways, See: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224>

<sup>12</sup> See: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en)

strongly affected the economy, employability, and the standard of living of populations, especially the poorest. The financial crisis caused by the deregulation of the banking system was not yet over when the crisis caused by the pandemic began.

In the context of today's socio-ecological crises, it is relevant to highlight that agriculture, and especially horticulture, was the sector of economic activity that showed greater resilience in the two crises. Agriculture in the Mediterranean basin is characterized by having a strong component of horticultural crops, which serve as the basis for the Mediterranean diet, and which are associated with the culture and traditions of the peoples who live there (Duarte *et al.*, 2016). This is the case of olive, citrus, wine and carob, almonds, and figs but also many other crops with smaller areas of cultivation.

The development of horticulture should aim to make it increasingly sustainable, to ensure a healthy diet and preserve the environment. Furthermore, the development of agriculture in the Mediterranean should favor, in this region, the production of traditional fruits and vegetables which are part of the Mediterranean diet. In this context of growth and increased sustainability of horticulture, it is necessary to train workers who can help the sector to develop. In return, allowing them to receive a salary and engage in an activity that gives professional fulfillment, personal satisfaction and the creation of new opportunities, based on gender, intergenerational justice, and a renewed socio-ecological equilibrium.

Funds provided to recover the European economy from the crisis caused by the pandemic will include financing the development of a green economy and diversified agriculture. A recent study estimates that applying circular economy principles across the EU economy has the potential to increase EU GDP by an additional 0.5% by 2030<sup>13</sup> creating around 700000 new jobs

<sup>14</sup>.

It is in precisely this context that the training of women and young NEETs should be implemented, so that they can easily find work or develop their own businesses, to create their own green jobs. The term Green Economy (GE) can be defined as one that results in “improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities” (UNEP, 2010). Thus, the use of the term Green and Circular Economy (GaCE) highlights the commitment of the GREENLAND project to sustainable community development. On the environmental side, the project will increase skills for a resource-efficient and inclusive Green Economy that ultimately contributes to combating climate change, and reducing the mismatch between the labour market and skills. On the economic side, GREENLAND will support the engagement of NEETs and women to set up enterprises in the GaCE sectors.

Therefore, to create hope in neoliberal dystopia, here and now, innovative action for socio-environmental education is needed. To reach that aim, scientific research is crucial in the

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<sup>13</sup> Cambridge Econometrics, Trinomics, and ICF (2018), Impacts of circular economy policies on the labor market, European Commission.

<sup>14</sup> Gross domestic product (GDP) is a measure for a country's economic activity.



context of applying the circular economy principles to agriculture as it requires a reduction in pesticide application, an increase in the life of the orchards, the reuse of all residues resulting from the production and processing of agricultural products, and the use of residues from other crops or other agricultural activities.

Agricultural activities occur with people living in rural areas who, as emphasized before, are particularly vulnerable to unemployment and social exclusion. Some of them have skills not valued by formal education, but which are important for new activities related to agriculture and nature, many of which can be considered contributions to a GaCE. Social pedagogical education is about relationships, knowledge, and action; thus, educators under the GREENLAND scope will play a relevant role in building partnerships to activate social employment initiatives by public institutions and civil society organizations, as well as disseminating a widespread socioecological collective responsibility.

### **GREENLAND Methodology**

The methodology should ensure compliance with objectives aiming at the creation of decent work, ending women and youth poverty and other deprivations and spur economic green and sustainable development in the Mediterranean area, mainly to preserve our oceans and forests. Therefore, the Project will reinforce millennials' education and training, with the concern of matching the gap between socio-environmentally responsible companies' needs and employees' green skills demands.

In this sense, the project will develop innovative tools (e-learning platform, e-portfolio), capacity building activities, structured meetings, and strategic alliances with the final aim of directing policy makers towards long term-solutions. GREENLAND will, then, support policymakers in the development of action plans that strengthen the creation of new green jobs for young people and women of seven Mediterranean countries. The inclusion of national and local authorities, as well as relevant associated partners, in the development of training activities and profiling tools will contribute to the development of strategies which will be implemented at local level. The key action with a potential high-impact at policy-making level is the job-shadowing experience for key staff of concerned institutions.

Moreover, cross-border cooperation between the nine partners of the GREENLAND Project provides the opportunity to compare issues of extreme concern regarding NEETs, youth unemployment, business creation and SME's development, by allowing each region/partner to exchange information on current practices and to find a common way forward together.

Debating these kinds of problems on a larger scale rather than just at a local level, helps to evaluate them from different perspectives and to create and build bigger structures that can tackle and reduce these issues. Within this action framework, the methodology encompasses several steps:

The first and second steps were developed during the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021 and encompass the compilation of secondary information about NEETs and the identification of the

relevant social actors, mainly administration and agricultural companies. This compilation was based primarily on the data, reports and statistics available about employment per activity sector. All innovations need new skills to be effective, so the targeted training of NEETs and women supposes a labor market analysis to identify the needs of local companies towards an integration of GaCE into production. In addition, the participation of administrative structures at different levels (policy level, social level, employment level) is essential. According to Hodge (2016) governance, particularly in rural areas, relies on collaborative working amongst partnerships, establishing connections horizontally at a local level and vertically across different spatial scales.

The third step will occur in the second semester of 2021, and NEETs and women will be identified. This identification will be based on secondary sources. Nevertheless, the GREENLAND project also supposes a detailed data collection of livelihood activities, land use, and household situations of potential beneficiaries.

In the fourth step, an e-learning platform will be created, and internships at national, regional, and cross-border levels will be promoted and supported using sub-grants. The e-learning project platform will involve 2900 participants between NEETs and women, of which 840 will continue to on-site training. In that context, 210 participants will also carry out an internship in SMEs operating in GaCE sectors at national and international level.

This process ensures that in the curricula to be built, attention will be paid to climate change and rural development through climate smart agriculture (CSA) and circular economy. The project

endeavors to identify mentors from local areas who are sensitive to environmental issues in management of their enterprises (European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) CSA approach. Distinct consideration will also be given to women NEETs and women mentors from successful local businesses. Particular attention will be devoted to persons suffering from social exclusion because of health conditions. In short, the approach used in the GREENLAND project is a new “Push, Match, Pull” pathway:

“Push”: providing young people with life and business skills;

“Match”: bringing together trained young people with labour market opportunities (internships or on-the-job training);

“Pull”: stimulating youth-friendly business and CSA policies, mentoring young people towards employment and new youth-led enterprises.

Finally, as mentioned before, there will be job-shadowing for key institution staff members and policy/decision makers and the creation of e-portfolios (dynamic documents used to record tasks and give ownership to NEETs of their own results, adding skills as they move from one training module to another).

## **Final Remarks**

The GREENLAND project is in its initial development phase but is encouraged by the acceptance of its objectives and methodology by not only the institutions that deal with young women and NEETs, but also by the companies operating in the agricultural sector with concerns

in the area of environmental issues, and educators concerned on building partnerships to activate social employment initiatives by public institutions and civil society organizations.

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## **Creating hope in an uncertain world: An Antipodean approach to social work, social pedagogy and social education.**

Sarah Fraser

### **Introduction**

The socio-educational techniques employed by Aotearoa New Zealand's government have spearheaded a unique and effective response to the COVID-19 crisis sweeping the world, enabling this country to keep our society within our borders open and functional, minimising the impact of the pandemic on individual lives and community well-being.

Within this unique cultural and social context, the social work profession continues to thrive on responding to the challenges of the social world. A shift from traditional practice approaches to one informed by socio-education theory has the potential to offer a refreshing and positive development for social workers in the South Pacific (Fraser & Briggs, 2019). However, neither the Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ) government in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, nor the social work profession in its everyday practice, has recognised our complementary approaches as being situated within a socio-pedagogical framework.

This article identifies key concepts from social pedagogy that are relevant to our local context, discusses the ways in which these are already being applied and explores future potential for application, both in the social work profession and the country's response to the pandemic.

## **Aotearoa New Zealand**

Aotearoa New Zealand is a South Pacific nation with a population of just over five million, the majority of whom live on our two main islands. Our largest city, Auckland, has been described as one of the most culturally diverse in the world with over 220 recorded ethnic groups. The indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand are Ngā Iwi Māori. ANZ was colonized by the British in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the population is now made up of approximately 70% identifying as NZ European/New Zealanders, 17% identifying as Māori, 16% from a variety of Asian countries and 8% who identify as coming from the beautiful tropical Pacific Islands including Fiji, Samoa and Tonga, our close neighbors here in the south (Stats NZ, 2020). We are thus a fundamentally bi-cultural nation with an increasingly diverse and multicultural population.

## **Key concepts in social pedagogy relevant to the Aotearoa New Zealand context**

Social work and social pedagogy are based in the same humanist traditions and share a commitment to inclusion, equality, and growth (Fraser & Briggs, 2019). In European frameworks however, education and learning are considered to occur in different contexts and are about the whole person—the mind, body, spirit, and feelings in relationship to others.

Social pedagogy is thus considered to be the theory and practice of developing the inherent resources people have within themselves along with creating environments that make connections and support this growth. (Hatton, 2012; Moore, Jakhara, Bowie, & Marriott, 2013). Frønes (as translated and cited in Storø, 2013), defines social pedagogy as “training in, participation in and understanding of social life. Not in any deep therapeutic way but in terms



of skills for the participation in various social contexts, the ability to master different situations” (p. 1). Storø (2013) extends this explanation by saying that social pedagogy is different from other forms of social practice in that it has a pedagogic or learning focus in all interventions.

Several key principles stand out in this context:

- people are always capable of development if they have the resources they need to achieve it. Social pedagogy can thus be seen to have an underlying philosophy which is developmental, adaptive, and fosters growth
- it is different from other forms of social practice in that it is centered not just on the person and their problems or challenges, but also their social understanding
- it is based on values of integration, cohesion and cooperation.

In his most recently published article Úcar (2021) posits that through a process of professional social engagement, social pedagogues work alongside individuals, groups and communities to “equip people with the learning resources necessary to live their lives in a dignified and harmonious way in their territorial and community environments” (p. 2). He acknowledges that in today’s world, the complex and multiple layers of life and social interaction are sited within particular socio-cultural, political and environmental contexts, and argues that an effective social pedagogy must respond to these. Whilst in the past social pedagogy focused on those who are in need, or assumed to be lacking in some aspect of their lives, a new social pedagogy is emerging based in a philosophical position that social lives are complex and thus social pedagogues have a

role in supporting all people to develop the skills and knowledge they need to effectively negotiate their lives (Úcar, 2021).

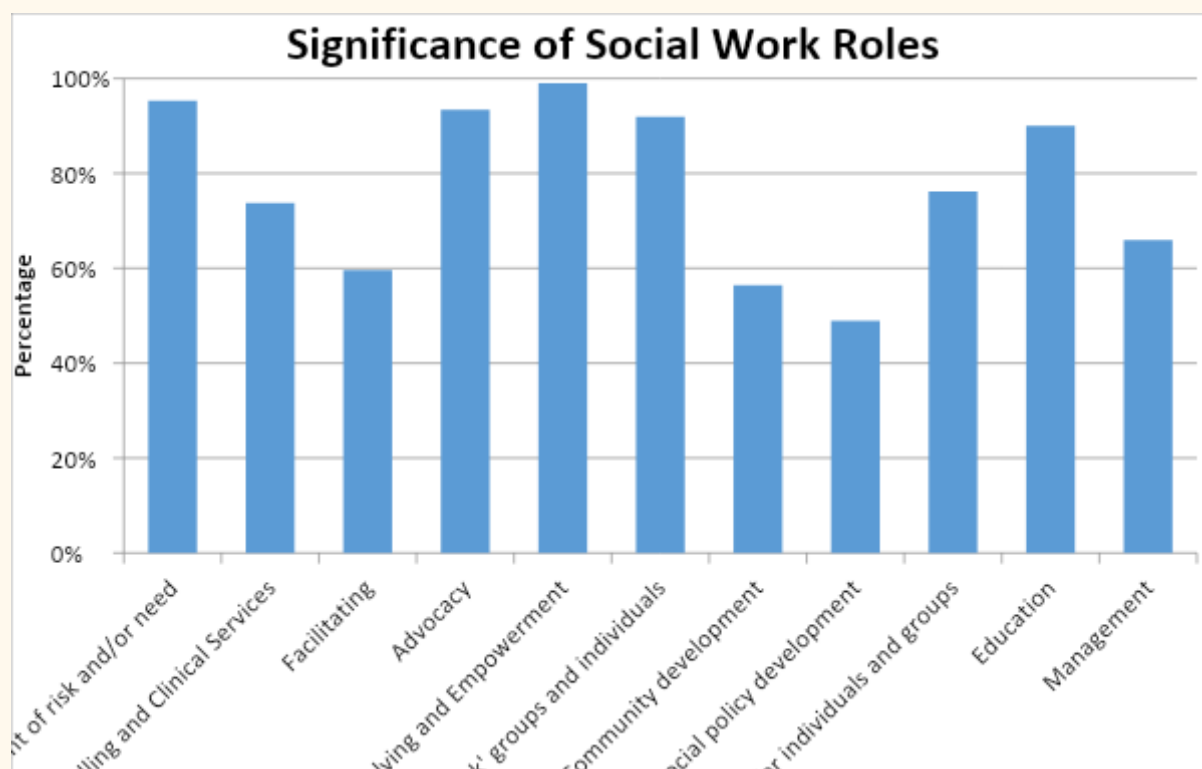
### **Social work and social pedagogy**

In line with other Western countries, social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand have become increasingly concerned that neoliberal policies and managerialist paradigms have contributed to a techno-rationalism of social work practice (Harlow, 2008; O'Brien, 2014). The roles of social work here are now much narrower than previously conceived and more tightly controlled by the organizations within which we work.

In this difficult climate, the profession has attempted to respond with innovative and creative developments in practice frameworks. Māori social workers have continued to expand indigenous practice knowledge and theory (Hollis-English & Selby, 2015), and Māori and iwi-based health and social services are growing and thriving. Cultural and traditional concepts from Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) are widely considered to have given a richness to social work practice and have effectively challenged predominately American and English imported models and frameworks. In addition, social work practices based on the rich variety of cultural traditions from the Pacific Islands are flourishing (Ravulo, Mafale'o & Yeates, 2019).

Strengths-based approaches have become commonplace alongside postmodernist and collaborative models and theories from around the globe (Staniforth, Fouché & O'Brien, 2011). In 2016 a nationwide large-scale mixed methods study exploring the contemporary roles of social work was completed (Fraser, 2017). In particular the role of social worker as educator was

explored, with the results demonstrating that practitioners across the country were extensively engaged in socio-education. As can be seen in the simple graph below, education is considered by 90% of social workers as a key component of everyday practice, alongside assessment of risks and needs, advocacy, problem solving and protection of at-risk groups.



In the second phase of the research, the role of socio-educator was operationalised through fourteen task statements identified from the social pedagogy literature. Over 90% of the participants (from a range of fields of social work practice and working under different job descriptors), considered the following tasks fundamental to their everyday practice: giving service users information and explanations about resources available to them (91.82%), assisting

service users to explore and discover potential choices available to them (91.8%), giving service users detailed information relating to the issue or situation they were dealing with (90.85%), advising service users about their rights and/or responsibilities in their current situations (90.67%), and providing opportunities for service users to reflect on their life experiences and plan for change (90.3%). Over 80% of participants considered all but three of the remaining tasks to be important in their everyday practice. The three remaining tasks were teaching service users techniques for solving problems (76.29%), teaching service users specific skills (e.g. parenting skills, social skills, budgeting skills) (63.66%), and informing/raising public awareness about the adequacy and availability of policies and programmes for meeting service user needs (53.95%). It is of note, however, that even these tasks had over 50% of participants who perceived them as important in their everyday practice.

Unfortunately, the role of social educator and potential of social pedagogy theory remain unrecognized in our literature and in our curriculum for professional social work, in our job descriptions and by our professional bodies. However, we now have an exciting opportunity to embed a social pedagogical framework within a national social work degree currently being developed by our new national Institute of Technology ‘Te Pūkenga’, to be delivered from 2023. I am looking forward to contributing my passion for social pedagogy to this development.

### **Aotearoa New Zealand’s Covid response and social pedagogy**

Aotearoa New Zealand’s response to the pandemic has been considered amongst the best in the world. At the time of the 2021 conference, we had under 2700 cases in total (mostly arrivals

from overseas), and just 26 deaths, many of which sadly occurred in the first wave of Covid amongst our elderly folk living in retirement homes. An international study conducted over the course of 2020 showed that we were one of three countries out of 29 reviewed that did not record excess deaths that year, and the only country that had lower mortality than would normally be expected (Islam et al, 2021)

In reviewing the events of last year, it is possible to identify how a socio-educational (social pedagogical) approach supported and enhanced the government and public health officials' responses. In January 2020 the World Health Organization declared the Covid-19 outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) under the International Health Regulations. A few short days later, on 2 February, New Zealand closed its border to non-citizens traveling from or transiting through China. By the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, the border was effectively closed to all travelers other than New Zealand citizens and residents, and the whole of New Zealand was in what was known here as Alert Level 4, or a hard 'lockdown' (Bloomfield, 2019).

At the time, NZ had just over 100 COVID-19 cases and no deaths, so this "go early, go hard" approach, as it came to be known, was quite unique (Baker et al, 2020). The key drivers of this decision were the desire to protect people from the virus, prevent our health system being overwhelmed, ensure New Zealand was not a route for the virus to be introduced into the Pacific, and to take a short 'painful' hit to the economy but then quickly recover.

Having seen the impact of the virus on Italy and other European countries, New Zealand set out to ‘bend’ the rapidly growing curve of infections, so that numbers remained at a level that our already over-stretched healthcare system could manage. However, it rapidly became evident that a country-wide hard lockdown, imposed at a very early stage, in tandem with a requirement for 14-days managed isolation for all overseas returnees from early April, did not just bend the curve but ‘crushed’ it. This became known as our elimination strategy— keeping the virus out of New Zealand and preventing any community transmission if and when the virus made its way past our border controls. Bloomfield (2019) described the key features of New Zealand’s response key to our success to date as including our strong ongoing evidence-based and science-led approach; the employment of statistical modeling expertise to inform responses, effective and efficient genomic sequencing and analysis, rapid decision making at the political and public health leadership levels; clear and consistent communication with the public through regular and frequent media conferences, an easy and informal but powerful public communications campaign; the introduction and scaling up of testing and contact tracing through innovative information and technology developments; and border management strategies that have included mandatory 14-day quarantine for returning New Zealanders in one of over 30 managed isolation facilities, specially set up in converted international hotels that would have otherwise stood empty as the tourism industry was put on hold.

As Bloomfield (2019) stated, the complexity of the country’s response is easy to underestimate, as is the ongoing challenge of maintaining it. It is the communication and social engagement strategy that we have employed as a country that has been most interesting from a social

pedagogy perspective. Having researched the theory and practice of social pedagogy in relation to social work, it has become apparent to me that our national response has embodied the principles of the discipline, although as with professional social work practice, this has remained unrecognized and un-named as such.

Our Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, talked to the country from a shared base of common humanity every day leading up to, and during our lockdown. She did this in formal settings but also on social media, and consistently took an educational, learning and development approach. She also answered questions from everyday New Zealanders from her home each evening after putting her small baby to bed (The Guardian, 2020).

Each day during our lock down, at 1pm, our political leaders, science experts and statistical public health modelers appeared together on our television networks and updated us on the course of the pandemic - keeping us informed of our current status and the reasons for any change in strategies in response to the changing dynamics of the situation. At every briefing they acknowledged and thanked the people keeping us safe and cared for—the supermarket workers, the carers of the elderly and vulnerable, the border protection people, the medical teams and social protection agencies (New Zealand Government, 2021). Sitting down at 1pm each day with our families and whānau (extended family) to hear the updates quickly became an integral part of our lockdown experience. Having up-to-date information and a clear and consistent message from the scientific and political teams leading our response meant the general public were well

informed and gave a much-needed sense of confidence in an unheralded crisis-response situation.

A set of alert levels was developed right at the beginning of the pandemic. These were clearly articulated, available in different languages and have remained consistent over the last year and a half (NZ Herald, 2020). Scientists such as our New Zealander of the Year for 2020, Associate Professor Dr Siouxsie Wiles, a microbiologist and science communicator, appeared regularly on social media, radio and television to explain the evolving scientific understanding of the virus and vaccines—again using clear, easily understood terminology, with humor and compassion—never patronizing or lecturing, rather informing and guiding (McCallum, 2021).

Public messaging was tailored to fit different groups in the community and tried to use a humorous and fun way to share information and educate people. Dr Ashley Bloomfield, our mild-mannered and quietly spoken Director General of Health, was shown rapping Covid protection messages on the big screens at music festivals post-lockdown much to our collective delight as we entered summer, which begins in December here (Unite Against Covid-19a, 2021). At the same time iwi (extended kinship group) around the country led community responses and education campaigns designed specifically to reflect the values of Māori (Unite Against Covid-19b, 2021). A key message from these and Pacific peoples' communities was to protect ourselves to keep each other safe. They embodied the social pedagogical spirit of cohesion, integration, participation and cooperation.



So, in summary, I believe Aotearoa New Zealand's successful response to the global pandemic has been in part due to our leaders and communities exemplifying social pedagogical principles and strategies—even though they have not been formally recognised as such. We have made many mistakes along the way and at times been lucky, but 'our team of 5,000,000' has continued learning, adapting and responding effectively and cohesively overall.

### **Future development**

Aotearoa New Zealand has demonstrated a creative and effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic and other contemporary crises at both the political and social work professional level. It is hoped that combining socio-educational theory and aspects of the discipline of social pedagogy with indigenous Māori, Pasifika and local practices in Aotearoa New Zealand will contribute to the emergence of a new dynamic approach in social work and public health that is empowering, hopeful, and respectful of the people we work with and alongside.

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## **Interactive advantage, cementing of positions, and social pedagogical recognition – a narratively inspired analysis of professional actors’ oral representations of health promotion, prevention, and remediation efforts targeting young people who use alcohol and narcotics**

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### **Introduction**

Previous research regarding health promotion, prevention, and remediation efforts in upper-secondary school and treatment contexts has drawn attention to the importance of interpersonal collaboration for successful schooling and treatment or success in the practical work of education and treatment<sup>15</sup>. These studies emphasize effective collaboration between various professional occupational groups associated with school and treatment to achieve good outcomes for the young people (students) in these contexts (Koning et al. 2010; Sznitman et al. 2012; Onrust et al. 2015). These collaborations also include students and parents, all with the common goal of working together to help the young person (the student) achieve this success in the social, pedagogical, and educational sense (Foster 2012; Basic 2018a,b; Björk et al. 2019; Basic and Matsuda 2020; Basic et al. 2021; Johnsson et al. 2021).

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<sup>15</sup> Some parts of this text were previously published in Swedish, in the thesis, “When collaboration becomes a struggle. A sociological analysis of a project in the Swedish juvenile care” (Basic 2012) and in the independent work at the second cycle “Achievements and obstacles in senior high school work with students who use alcohol and substances. An interactional analysis of verbal descriptions concerning organizational and practical work in school” (Andersson and Greve 2020).

The context of upper-secondary school and outpatient treatment units can be analyzed as places where social pedagogical recognition can be bestowed, which in turn can strengthen both professional and young people's (students') self-esteem and their sense of belonging, involvement, and inclusion. The social life of professionals and young people is constructed and reconstructed through mutual recognition. The self-realization of professionals and young people in the school and treatment contexts is created and re-created through participation in successful interactions that contribute to the production and reproduction of knowledge, desirable abilities, experiences, and skills. This process is possible, however, only if teachers and students are recognised in the current school context, in close relationships, and in interaction with other actors in that context (Koning et al. 2010; Foster 2012; Sznitman et al. 2012; Onrust et al. 2015; Basic 2018a,b; Björk et al. 2019; Basic and Matsuda 2020; Basic et al. 2021; Johnsson et al. 2021).

The quest for recognition in the contexts of the study is sometimes based on the exclusion of *the other*. Discrimination, insults, and bullying can negatively affect the self-esteem of professionals and young people (students) who are on the receiving end of such conduct. Furthermore, exclusion from the school and treatment contexts risks destroying the actors' self-esteem. This risk applies in particular to exclusion of young people (students) with lower status than professional actors in the study contexts (Koning et al. 2010; Foster 2012; Sznitman et al. 2012; Onrust et al. 2015; Basic 2018a,b; Björk et al. 2019; Basic and Matsuda 2020; Basic et al. 2021; Johnsson et al. 2021).

In the study contexts, professional actors can contribute to the achievement of social pedagogical recognition, school and treatment success, and successful reintegration for young people.

Previous research indicates that achieving these outcomes is more closely linked to active individual action by particular professional actors who volunteer, engage, and help than they are to schools and outpatient treatment units in their capacity as organizational units (Koning et al. 2010; Sznitman et al. 2012; Onrust et al. 2015; Basic 2018a,b; Björk et al. 2019; Basic and Matsuda 2020; Basic et al. 2021; Johnsson et al. 2021).

Knowledge is limited regarding health promotion, prevention, and remediation efforts in the school and treatment contexts and regarding the protection and risk dimensions associated with the category “young people who use alcohol and narcotics”. We know too little about the extent to which various categories of professional actors, young people, and parents really collaborate in these arenas and how the actors’ self-identifications affect ongoing pedagogical processes.

Knowledge needs to be developed about how cultural and social differences contribute to common starting points in the work and thus to success or obstacles in the work of schooling and treating young people. We hope to make a contribution on this point within the framework of this analysis.

The purpose of this study is to present new knowledge about the oral representations of health promotion, prevention, and remediation efforts of professional actors working with young people who use alcohol and narcotics. The research question addressed in the study is, “How are health

promotion, prevention, and remediation efforts represented in relation to the narrative category ‘young people who use alcohol and narcotics’?” (the study’s narrative category).

### **Theory and method**

Symbolic interactionism, social constructivism, and ethnomethodology are some of the theoretic starting points used in the analysis of various types of qualitative empirical material. The goal is that use of these scientific theoretical starting points will lead to a higher level of analysis of the qualitative empirical data and facilitate understanding on two fronts. First is the social reality in various social contexts in which the individual acts, or is expected to act, in myriad interpersonal interactions that characterize these contexts. Second is the significance of interactions for the creation and re-creation of oral representations, verbal portrayals, and represented images that are constructed and reconstructed in interpersonal interactions in these different social contexts (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Garfinkel 1984; Blumer 1986; Gubrium and Holstein 1997; Goffman 2002; Collins 2004; Mead 2015; Burr 2015).

Social reality is not a stable and immutable social phenomenon; rather, it is changeable and characterized by constant interactive processes, changes in interpersonal encounters, and dynamic activities tied to the various situations in the contexts in which they occur (Blumer 1986; Goffman 2002; Collins 2004; Mead 2015). The words *context* (with Collins’ conceptual apparatus) or *region* (with Goffman’s conceptual apparatus) are used to connote the delimited field where a series of interactive activities (situations – interactive rituals) are played out and can be delimited by the actors’ observation and hearing abilities. Empirical examples of these

interactive flows in the myriad interpersonal interactions that occur in a context include the interactive actions of actors in a particular situation, the narrative representations of a particular situation by actors, and the productions and reproductions of important social objects such as, e.g., language, text, documents, laws, news, images, and videos (Gubrium and Holsten 1997; Silverman 2006; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Riessman 2008; Silverman 2015).

In the interactive sense, the delimited field of “context” can be analyzed as consisting of three subregions. *The front-stage context* refers to the subregion where the performance of the actors themselves (as action, reproduction, and/or production of social objects) takes place. *The backstage context* (behind the scenes) is a subregion that actors in the surroundings (the audience) cannot access. In this context, those who are acting, representing, and/or producing can shape their future performances and reflect on their past performances, prepare, or relax (Blumer 1986; Goffman 2002; Collins 2004; Mead 2015). Some contexts can be both backstage and front-stage. For example, upper-secondary schools, outpatient treatment units, classrooms, treatment rooms, and various offices (e.g., of the head teacher, school nurse, counselor) can act as one or the other. The designation of front stage or back stage depends on the actor’s particular performance and the function of the contexts at the time.

The third context is *outside/off-stage* (the outsider/exclusion region). This subregion represents everything that does not belong to the front- or back-stage contexts. The actor who acts, reproduces, and/or produces on the outside is an outside actor. In their relationships with actors established in the front- or back-stage contexts, the performance of outsiders risks creating and

re-creating conflicts in the interaction. An outside actor who steps onto the front-stage or back-stage by acting, reproducing, and/or producing important social objects in these subregions creates temporary confusion by disrupting the social order and forcing a redefinition of the situation in the context (Blumer 1986; Goffman 2002; Collins 2004; Mead 2015).

The contextual reasoning of theorists on this subject made us curious about what might be occurring in various represented situations in the school and treatment contexts. With this question as a starting point, we found that the study informants, when constructing and reconstructing their professional identities, typify actors from both the front and back stage subregions, as well as from the outside (off-stage). Just as the nurse's office can be both a front-stage and a backstage, the typified actor can be both a professional actor in these subregions and an actor outside the organization, such as a young person and/or a parent.

When actors interact, they try to make social reality comprehensible, and in doing so construct and reconstruct their identities. Typifications thus fulfill an important function in interactive creation and re-creation. The division into categories and typification of individuals, professions, and events into types – their identification through categorisation – is necessary for navigating the myriad of everyday interactions. Typification is not a static process; rather, it changes from one interactive flow (situation) and context to the next. The actions, representations, and productions of one actor constitute a motive for and a response to the actions, representations, and productions of the other. In this process, the affiliations and self-esteem of the involved actors, their creation and re-creation of various social and pedagogical identities, and their



recognition in these identities take shape and are modified and confirmed (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Garfinkel 1984; Blumer in 1986; Gubrium and Holstein 1997; Goffman 2002; Collins 2004; Mead 2015; Burr 2015). In light of these perspectives, the stories and practical actions of both young people and professionals in the school and treatment contexts, as well as their analysis, can be regarded as meaning-making activities. These activities can contribute to the development of knowledge that can promote the involvement and success of both young people and professionals in situations that characterize these contexts.

An important starting point in analyses rooted in the above scientific theory is that actors in all social contexts are grouped and typified in relation to their interactive positioning in a given context, in which certain actors/types have the advantage in relation to *the others*. Thus, certain actors/types in the context will have greater authority and higher social status than others. As a result, they have an interactive advantage in defining and redefining how society, contexts, groups, types, and actors should act and be represented, produced, and reproduced (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Garfinkel 1984; Blumer in 1986; Gubrium and Holstein 1997; Goffman 2002; Collins 2004; Mead 2015; Burr 2015). In its most severe form, this advantage may lead to the oppression of individuals with lower social status.

The fact that certain actors/types command an advantage in relation to others is important in the analysis of the present study in two ways: first, in the representation of relationships between professional actors (here, informants from school and treatment contexts), and second, in the representation of the relationships of these professionals to the category “young people who use

alcohol and narcotics”. For this study, therefore, the representation of working with young people (students) is analyzed less in terms of static typifications and more in terms of situational and context-bound (institutionally and materially positioned) interactions in the here and now.

In the spirit of interactionism, constructivism, and the ethnomethodological approach, the study analyses how the informants themselves use identity-related and cultural resources (e.g., narratives, metaphors, vocabulary, roles, status symbols) in the day-to-day of the study context, such as when they talk about advantages in the interaction, describe working conditions, formulate criticism, and process their experiences. Working practically with this category of young people can inspire sympathy and build a distinct typification related to the category. This typification may be associated with mental health problems, traumatisation, medication needs, and victimhood. This work also, however, is associated with a certain status: The professional actor possesses personal knowledge and competences that others do not. In the present study, we analyze both the content of informants’ identity formation and its dynamic: how professional and student identities are used, managed, reinforced, or challenged.

The professional actors in these situations can include special educators, special education teachers, school counselors, study and career counselors, head teachers, school nurses, treatment workers, section managers in social services, and heads of outpatient care units. Interactional, social constructionist, and ethnomethodological perspectives capture the content of professional experiences and their social design, as well as the substantive and constituent aspects of personal accounts. The study thus adheres to the scientific theoretical and methodological traditions of the

social sciences, in which verbal representations are regarded as both discursive and experiential (Gubrium and Holstein 1997; Potter 2007; Riessman 2008).

The study's empirical material is collected and analyzed with inspiration from qualitative methods and narrative research (Gubrium and Holsten 1997; Silverman 2006; Riessman 2008; Guest, MacQueen, and Namey 2012; Silverman 2015). The empirical material of the study is based on 36 qualitative interviews with professional actors working with the study's narrative category of "young people who use alcohol and narcotics", within the study contexts of upper-secondary school activities and outpatient treatment units in Sweden (several of the study's informants have work-related experiences from both school and treatment contexts)<sup>16</sup>. All interviews were collected in 2020 and 2021 within the framework of the research project "School as a protection factor. An analysis of achievements, obstacles, collaboration, and identities in senior high school work with students who use alcohol and drugs" (Linnaeus University 2021), following the issuance of an advisory opinion from the Regional Ethical Review Board (Ethical vetting 2018).

### **Previous research: health promotion, prevention, and remediation efforts in upper-secondary school and treatment contexts**

Onrust et al. (2015) portray the importance of paying particular attention to the various stages of development (in the developmental psychological sense) when designing alcohol and narcotics prevention efforts in schools. These researchers argue that prevention efforts in schools should be

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<sup>16</sup> The interview material of this study consists also of qualitatively orientated interviews with 13 young people (students) who use alcohol and narcotics. This part of the study's empirical material is not analysed within the framework of this study.

planned based on the mental and cognitive needs and capacities of children or young people.

Their study constructs and reconstructs an understanding of the importance of starting prevention work in primary school because children at this age are assumed to be impressionable and quick to learn what constitutes normatively right and wrong behaviour. Their study also dramatises the ability of children in primary school and intermediate level compulsory school to highly value the opinions of parents and teachers regarding normatively right behaviour in relation to alcohol and narcotics. This attitude enables the expert's (teacher's) professional work to influence the child in refraining from using alcohol and narcotics.

These authors further point out that alcohol and narcotics use is rare in primary and intermediate level compulsory school. They therefore highlight the relevance of teaching children about the risks of alcohol and narcotics during that developmental period. The role of professional actors during this time is to encourage children to practice skills for more easily handling the challenges of later developmental phases based on the risks they have learned to associate with alcohol and narcotics. The point of that study is that prevention efforts and collaboration among various professional actors, young people, and parents should not be delayed to a time when young people are coming into contact with alcohol and narcotics. Instead, these authors argue, prevention work and collaboration should be designed and implemented considerably earlier. They emphasize that during senior level compulsory school and the start of upper-secondary school, a psychological and cognitive separation begins. Young people free themselves from their families, become more independent, often reject the normative values of their parents, and value the normative values of their friends over those of parents and teachers. During this phase

of development, young people are dramatized as being more aware of the benefits of using alcohol and narcotics while also caring less about the inherent risks. Because young people in this developmental phase are constructed as being resistant/unreceptive to the parent and teacher perspective in relation to values and norms of alcohol and narcotics use, young people also are characterized as difficult to influence and change when it comes to this use.

Onrust et al. (2015) present creation and re-creation of several explicit and implicit portrayals of protection and risk dimensions in relation to the category “young people who use alcohol and narcotics”. The protection dimensions are as follows: prevention efforts aimed at school-age children, carried out in collaboration among different professional actors, children, and parents; collaboration and prevention efforts already implemented during primary school; parent and teacher actions based on perceptions of *normatively right* behavior in relation to the use of alcohol and narcotics (not using alcohol and narcotics); and actions of friends based on perceptions of normatively right behavior in relation to the use of alcohol and narcotics (not using alcohol and narcotics). The risk dimensions portrayed are as follows: common obstacles to collaboration among various professional actors, children, and parents; the age of the young person, because older age makes it more difficult to influence young people to follow the “right” norms; young people’s rejection of perceptions that adults and teachers have of normatively right behavior in relation to the use of alcohol and narcotics (i.e., young people think it is OK to use alcohol and narcotics and reject these “right” norms); and the behavior of young people in relation to friends who have rejected the “right” norms and use alcohol and narcotics.

Sznitman et al. (2012) investigated links between schools with environments considered “good and safe” and a reduction in the use of drugs in the form of tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis. Their study paints a picture of students who are in a good and safe school environment and thus using drugs less than students in schools with unfavorable environments. These authors stress that merely conducting various drug tests in school does not reduce the use of drugs or function as a deterrent to students. Their study dramatizes the importance of analyzing and evaluating the school environment as practical and organizational work before implementing the preventative measure of testing students for drugs. The authors implicitly argue that targeted efforts to improve the school environment have a greater effect on reducing drug use than, e.g., testing students for drugs. In addition, they emphasize that targeted programmes, policies, and preventive drug measures directed by professional actors do not appear to reduce drug use among young people. Instead, Sznitman et al. stress the importance of working to create, re-create, and learn a professional approach that encourages the young people to participate in prevention efforts. They also emphasize professional competence development that allows professional actors to interact with young people (students) in a way that accounts for the individual knowledge and skills of each student. With this emphasis, the study implicitly underscores the importance of collaboration among young people, parents, and professional actors.

In this way, Sznitman et al. (2012) present the risk dimension inherent in the practical actions of professionals in the school context (in the form of targeted prevention programmes, drug testing, policies, and preventive drug measures). These actions are presented as ineffective: Not only do

they not seem to reduce young people's drug use but also they can contribute to the stigmatization of students and the strengthening of young people's rejection of perceptions of normatively right behavior in relation to the use of alcohol and narcotics (i.e., not using alcohol and narcotics).

Koning et al. (2010) note the importance of collaboration among professional actors, parents, and (implicitly) young people with the aim of involving young people and parents in prevention efforts to combat youth drug use. The study suggests that prevention efforts yield better results if parents are involved in the work. For example, parents are portrayed as being able to influence young people's initial exposure to alcohol use. This portrayal reinforces the importance of the production and reproduction of targeted prevention programmes by professional actors.

In keeping with Sznitman et al. (2012) and Onrust et al. (2015), Koning et al. (2010) also highlight collaboration among professional actors, parents, and young people as an important protection dimension in relation to the study's narrative category ("young people who use alcohol and narcotics"). In the school and treatment contexts, parents and young people are not professional actors and can thus be perceived as outside the context, actors whose performance can create and re-create conflicts (Blumer 1986; Goffman 2002; Collins 2004; Mead 2015). The exclusion of parents and young people in these contexts is a risk dimension in relation to the study's narrative category.

The predominant everyday declarations about the category “young people who use alcohol and narcotics” seem to focus on psychiatric or medical needs, whereas competing explanations seem relatively toned down. The latter include established inequalities in overall society as well as in schools and treatment; material and institutional difficulties in social, school, and treatment contexts; bureaucratic barriers in schools, outpatient and inpatient treatment units, and the rest of society; monitoring and social control in society, schools, and outpatient and inpatient treatment units; the humiliated identities of actors in social, school, and treatment contexts; victimisation in relation to other young people in social, school, and treatment contexts; demeaning categorisations in schools, outpatient and inpatient treatment units, and the rest of society; and discrimination in school, treatment, and overall social contexts (Bhopal and Preston, 2012; Basic 2015; Basic 2018a,b,c; Basic 2019; Björk et al. 2019; Basic and Matsuda 2020; Basic et al. 2021; Johnsson et al. 2021). Additional competing explanations that appear to be relatively muted in relation to the diagnostic aspect are the interpretations of young people (students) of their experiences with using alcohol and narcotics, such as: “I have unique experience that I can benefit from in the future”, “I have learned to cope with difficult things”, and “I am strong now”. With numerous interactive points of entry to the social pedagogical recognition of both professionals and young people in school and treatment contexts (Foster 2012; Bhopal and Preston, 2012; Basic 2015; Basic 2018a,b,c; Basic 2019; Björk et al. 2019; Basic and Matsuda 2020; Basic et al. 2021; Johnsson et al. 2021), no one single recipe always or most commonly applies. The actors’ mutual recognition is produced and reproduced through a series of interactions in which actors both cite and are involved in various identity-building processes in



different ways and use or suffer from their own identification streams or those of others in the myriad of interactions in school and treatment contexts.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study is to present new knowledge about the oral representations of the health promotion, prevention, and remediation efforts of professional actors working with young people who use alcohol and narcotics. The narrative empirical material is based on 36 interviews with professionals working with this population of young people within the context of upper-secondary school activities and outpatient treatment units in Sweden.

Trends from professional practice that permeate some of the previous research include an emphasis on the young person's (student's) personal responsibility for interactive choices and achievements carried out in the school and treatment contexts. The “problems” of young people — with the use of alcohol and narcotics, exclusion, health, school failures — are framed as personal and individually located. This framing can negatively affect young people's (students') self-esteem, self-image, sense of belonging, identities, and patterns of action. These negative effects can in turn contribute to a lack of social pedagogical recognition in the school and treatment contexts. Previous research tends to argue for different categories of professional actors who risk individualizing the problems of young people (students) in terms of the background, behavior, and physical, mental, and medical well-being of young people (students) and parents. This argument in turn ignores other important social pedagogical aspects that can, e.g., explain dimensions in the organization and pedagogical structure of the practical work of

upper-secondary schools and outpatient treatment units with that category of young people (students). When problems are individualized, this individualisation singles out a young person, excludes them, and hinders their success in schooling and treatment.

In their oral representations, professional actors depict themselves as having an interactive advantage in relation to the verbal category of “young people who use alcohol and narcotics”. These verbal patterns seem to cement the professional actor as a superior who sets the agenda for placing these young people within a prevailing normative order.

The analysis indicates that an inclusive approach by professionals is crucial to achieving several important aims. An inclusive approach also imposes demands, however, on how upper-secondary schools and outpatient treatment units collaborate with each other in this work with young people. This approach also plays a role in determining the support and room for maneuvering that professional actors have relative to normatively right and deviant actions and to laws and policies that to some extent govern this practical work.

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## The role of social pedagogy in Slovakia during the pandemic

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### **Abstract:**

The aim of this article is to describe the role of social pedagogy in Slovakia and especially to answer the following questions: What are the social challenges that children and their families, schools and social pedagogues are facing during the COVID-19 pandemic? How do social pedagogues in Slovakia perceive the present situation and what can they do to help their students face these challenges? In the first part, the development and the current state of the pandemic and the role of social pedagogues in Slovakia are described. In the second part, the authors analyze the reflections of thirty-one Slovak social pedagogues on current educational problems and the role of social pedagogy during the pandemic, answering the question: “In what sense does social pedagogy bring hope for various needy communities?” Their analysis presents some of the challenges social pedagogues are facing amid the chaos of social relations due to social distancing and pandemic lockdowns.

**Keywords:** social pedagogues, Slovakia, pandemic, challenges, prevention, activities

## **1. Introduction: A brief overview of the COVID-19 pandemic state in Slovakia**

The COVID-19 pandemic which started in 2019 has had an impact on the education system around the world. In Slovakia, the first case of the COVID-19 disease was confirmed on March 6, 2020, after which the Slovak government issued a set of regulations concerning restricting measures on various school activities, such as school competitions, excursions and trips, and all sporting events held in the system of schools and school facilities. Gradually, children's playgrounds, outdoor and indoor sports fields, children's corners and all leisure facilities where children could meet together were also closed. As of March 16, 2020, the educational institutions were completely closed. The Ministry of Education ordered the suspension of all full-time study and replaced it with distance learning, which affected the education of all more than 988.000 pupils and students in Slovakia.

With a relatively very low number of infections in the first wave, the general closure of schools in our country lasted until the end of May 2020. Until 25 May 2020, almost one million pupils and students, ie, a fifth of the population, were being educated at a distance. The second wave of the pandemic, with much larger numbers of infected people, began to rise dramatically in the Slovak Republic in October 2021. Gradually, lower and higher secondary education institutions and universities were being closed. Primary schools were more or less open until December 2020. All schools were closed during the 2nd lockdown in January–March 2021. According to Our World Data (Johns Hopkins University 2021), Slovakia had the highest number of deaths from COVID-19 per million inhabitants worldwide in the last week of February 2021. By the

beginning of June 2021, more than 12,300 people had died per 5.45 million (Slovak Government statistics 2021).

During the third pandemic wave that struck Slovakia in the fall of 2021, schools remained open or were closed on a case-by-case basis, depending on outbreaks in individual classes, school buildings, or districts. In cases of suspected or actual occurrences of the disease, the specific classes of students remained in quarantine on the basis of the so-called pandemic traffic light. The Minister of Education ordered the extension of the winter holidays from the second half of December 2021. The schools reopened after the 3rd lockdown on January 10, 2022.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic has been trying to control the situation in schools since the beginning of the pandemic. Gradually, they tried to compensate for missed classes in various ways (e.g. via several new TV programs), but their efforts were of limited use, as they depended on the willingness and abilities of teachers and school principals. Various non-profit organizations also tried to provide assistance to students independently or in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. They have focused mainly on the impact of the pandemic measures, not only on cognitive educational outcomes, but on the overall development of all children in different living conditions. In cooperation with the schools, these non-profits found out that most classroom teachers considered distance learning to be less effective than full-time education on the school campus. They struggled to involve all students in distance learning due to various problems with the processes and quality of online teaching. According to the estimates of school principals and class teachers, 52.000 primary and

secondary school pupils (7.5% of the student population) were not involved in distance education during lockdowns. Almost 128.000 pupils (18.5% of the student population) did not learn via the Internet; most of them were, at best, educated through other forms of distance learning, e.g. by teachers sending them some printed worksheets (Ostertáková & Čokyna, 2020). The most prominent group that did not participate in distance education was socially disadvantaged children and youth. Up to 23.4% of socially disadvantaged children from the lower grades 1-4 and 35.2% students from the upper grades 5-9 did not participate in distance education. Pupils who did not regularly attend distance learning lagged behind the majority of students, as administrators and teachers discovered in the post-adaptation period after these children returned to mainstream schooling (TASR, 2021).

The overall reduction in children's level of educational achievement was influenced by at least three significant factors:

- Internet and smartphone availability. The absence of an Internet connection was an obstacle to education for 23.000-32.000 students – 60% from Roma households, 45% from poor households, 5% from ordinary households. Another problem was the absence of a smartphone device: 40% of children from poor households do not own a smartphone.
- Economic situation: Due to the deteriorating economic situation, there was an increase in the number of socially-disadvantaged children (by 110,000 children).
- Educational environment and conditions for studying:
  - unsuitable conditions for distance education - due to the crowded household and the absence of private space for study (increase of 44% for children aged 6 to 11);



- inadequate reflection of pandemic education by the state. The Slovak Chamber of Teachers pointed to the fact that schools were closed for too long a period of time. The Slovak Chamber of Teachers also noted that difficulties of re-establishing appropriate learning conditions when schools reopened. time, if and also noted the chaos in setting the conditions for the reopening of schools (Dráľová, 2020);
- failure to adapt the form of teaching to distance teaching.

In Slovak conditions, there were similar tendencies of distance education as abroad.

According to Foster, for many students, distance learning during COVID-19 did not include any of the beneficial features of online learning. Instead, students were required simply to connect at a set time to listen to teachers' lectures via Zoom or other platforms (Foster in Weir, 2020).

## **2. The current purpose and role of social pedagogy in Slovakia**

Regardless of the spread of the coronavirus, in Slovakia the role and the need of social pedagogues are both intensifying. Since the passage of the *Act on Upbringing and Education* in 2008, social pedagogue became an officially recognized educational profession within the list of professions in Slovakia. Social pedagogy in Slovakia is a study field which participates in transformation of people and society through education. It is a process of upbringing and educational care and protection leading to an integrated and stable personality.

Bakošová (2008) describes the new paradigm of social pedagogy as progression from needing someone else's help to being able to help oneself become educated and socially, personally and pro-socially developed, and, finally, to being able to lead others so that they can succeed in life.

So, the meaning of social pedagogy is to empower people to help themselves and to restore their human normality. Social pedagogues in Slovakia are being prepared to intervene positively in the socialization process of children, youth, and adults. Their main task is to prevent, solve, and eliminate social problems and undesirable social phenomena in society, to strengthen positive social and educational influences, and to create optimal living conditions and harmony between the individual as a bio-psycho-social being and the social environment. They have to find optimal ways to help people in their careers in various environments, to create educationally valuable stimuli in the social environment, and to compensate for the shortcomings in various environments (Niklová, 2021).

At this time, the most urgent role of social pedagogy in Slovakia is to promote the prevention of socio-pathological phenomena in children and adolescents, especially to attend to aggressive behavior. According to the Slovak social pedagogy expert, Határ, the essence of socio-pedagogical prevention lies in the stimulation of positive social and educational influences and the elimination of negative influences (Határ, 2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2010).

Besides prevention, social pedagogues carry out intervention and counseling, especially for children and pupils endangered by various socio-pathological phenomena, and socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Social pedagogues consider it their role to accompany marginalized children and youth struggling with overcoming life's obstacles and problems to acquire stability, to facilitate the development of their prosocial behavior and to share pedagogical optimism about their character development.

Since September 2019, the activities of social pedagogues in schools and educational facilities have been regulated by the new *Act on Pedagogical Employees and Supportive Professional Staff No. 138/2019*. According to this *Act*, a social pedagogue “performs preventive activities, provides counseling to legal representatives, pedagogical staff and professional staff, performs socio-pedagogical diagnostics of the environment and relationships, educational activities and other activities in the field of social education” (27/3).

On 1st January 2022, an amendment of the above-mentioned Act under the No. 414 came into force. According to this amendment, the role and functions of social pedagogues in the current situation in Slovakia are as follows:

- “to carry out preventive activities aimed at preventing and eliminating risky behavior of children and pupils and at preventing and eliminating socio-pathological phenomena;
- to provide counseling and intervention aimed at children and pupils with risky behavior, who are at risk of socio-pathological phenomena, and at children and pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds;
- to provide counseling and consultations to children’s legal representatives (e.g. parents, foster parents, etc.), pedagogical staff and professional staff;
- to perform socio-pedagogical diagnostics of the environment and relationships, educational activities, and other activities in the social and educational sphere;
- to support the cooperation of pedagogical staff and supportive professional staff with legal representatives, and employees of social and legal protection facilities for children...”.

In recent years, Hroncová – the founder of the Banskobystrická School of Social Pedagogy – has emphasized the importance of continuing in these established trends of social pedagogy because social pedagogy gives hope to Slovak society (2014). Before the pandemic started, she expressed her dream of further development of social pedagogy through an eloquent metaphor: “I would consider it a real miracle in social pedagogy if we finally moved from the position of ‘social firefighter’ and ‘emergency pedagogy’, which were typical for social pedagogy of the 19th and 20th centuries, to the position of ‘pro-active’ social pedagogy, able to prevent social and educational problems in children and youth, and helpful in their holistic development” (Hroncová, 2014, p. 125).

The thesis we want to emphasize in this article is that the legitimate role and meaning of the work of a social educator in the creation of social welfare has rapidly intensified because of the recent pandemic. Its second and third waves significantly affected the education and healthy development of the young population as, in total, the children could not enter their schools for 41 weeks during the pandemic (UNESCO 2020). The problem was exacerbated by the fact that instead of social educators being able to deal with the consequences of a pandemic in this situation, they were severely restricted from performing their work by the pandemic. Social pedagogues could not meet the children and youth and work with them face to face. In March 2021, children had to return to school. One primary school social pedagogue said: “After the second wave, many children were returning to school with great concern about how they would manage after spending more than 8 months at home. Not all of them had good online learning facilities in their families. They have been emotionally and socially deprived. Thus, the span of

the problems that we, as social educators, have to deal with has expanded considerably. Is it possible for the children to return to normality after hearing so much horrible news?” This and other explicitly formulated worries by social educators led us to the decision to conduct deeper research into the current needs of social pedagogues in Slovakia and into their views on the role of social pedagogy in schools.

### **3. Quantitative survey**

The aim of the empirical research was to identify and analyze the problems of social pedagogues during the Covid 19 pandemic in schools and educational and prevention counseling facilities. We chose a self-designed questionnaire as the main research method, which was designed for social pedagogues working in schools and school facilities. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items. At the beginning of the questionnaire, we aimed to find out basic demographic information as well as identifying the specifics of methods and forms of work and the problems social pedagogues encountered during the Covid 19 pandemic. The questionnaire was sent via emails and social networks to all registered social pedagogues in Slovakia; 31 (15%) of them responded and became actively involved in the questionnaire research. The closed items of the questionnaire were evaluated using descriptive statistics. The open items were evaluated via qualitative content analysis with partial subsequent comparison (social pedagogues working in schools and social pedagogues working in school facilities).

### *Research questions*

To what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the focus and working methods of Slovak social pedagogues? What has been their role in the currently challenging times?

### *Method and sample*

In April 2021, after the greatest pressure during the second wave of the pandemic in Slovakia had subsided and schools had re-opened, all in-service social pedagogues in Slovakia were sent an anonymous electronic survey with open and closed questions. Thirty-one completed questionnaires were returned. The respondents aged 28 – 56 years worked at primary schools and centers of pedagogical-psychological counseling and prevention. Their longevity in the profession ranged from 1 to 24 years.

### *Results*

During the pandemic, social pedagogues had to focus predominantly on these **categories of children and youth**: those from socially-disadvantaged backgrounds (18% of their working hours); missing online lessons for various reasons (15%); breaking school rules (13%), those with a tendency toward violent behavior and victims of violence at school (10%); smoking, using alcohol, and other drugs (10%); children stealing or causing vandalism (8%); gifted and talented children (8%); 18% of their time they spent in preventive and counseling activities for all children at school.

**The most common problems** social pedagogues had to deal with were as follows: family issues; group dynamics and communication (working with the whole class); problems of children whose parents worked in critical infrastructure; problems of physically and mentally disabled but also stressed and frustrated children and their family members. The respondents described some of the problems in more details:

- Deteriorating psychological state of the children and youth: mental and personality problems, especially anxiety, depression, lack of motivation, shutting down, decreased or exaggerated self-esteem, fear, stress, hopelessness, apathy, frustration and loss of self-worth, social skills, and interest in social interaction;
- Problems with learning: inability to focus, concentrate, loss of learning habits (Children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds had learning difficulties because their families did not have any internet access).
- Problematic behavior at school: increased aggressive behavior, ignoring teachers and disregarding their instructions (non-fulfilment of home assignments, refusal to undertake activities and tasks), ridiculing classmates and teachers, non-compliance with rules in the classroom, late arrival at school, lying and finding excuses to avoid distance learning (due to bad internet connection, lying about problems with technology, cheating), inconsistency in daily routine and hygiene (Roma children needed additional pandemic hygiene training (wearing masks, washing hands, using disinfectants etc)).
- Problematic behavior at home: frequent playing computer and mobile games, excessive amount of time with social networks, making recordings or videos where family members drank alcohol and self-harm.

**The most problematic behavior at school** during the pandemic was the lack of discipline (14.5%), disrespectful and provocative behavior (13.5%), intentional violation of school regulations (11%), then truancy (13%), lying (12%), , cyber-bullying (10.5%), aggression towards teachers (9%), gambling (6%), sexting (6%), and stealing (5%).

In **their preventive activities**, the respondents focused on many **socio-pathological phenomena**, such as bullying (21%) and cyber-bullying (18%), truancy (18%), addictions (17%), criminality (13%), and thefts (13%). In their interactions with children, social pedagogues had to develop their social skills and pro-social behaviour, their knowledge about social media and its pitfalls (cyber-grooming, online gaming, cyberbullying); mental health (dealing with loneliness, quarrels with parents, lack of motivation to study, responsibility, coping with difficulties, eating disorders), pandemic hygiene and healthy lifestyle, sexuality and early-pregnancy; time management; critical thinking skills; consequences of truancy, violence, non-fulfilment of school duties, aggression, racism, discrimination, addictions, stress, and inappropriate classroom behaviour. The social pedagogues realized much more intensely the need of the formation of children, not just teaching them. In their counseling activities, they had to pay more attention to grief situations, children's apathy and depression, but also practicalities such as providing technology to disadvantaged children and big families, arranging hygiene kits and masks, and delivering worksheets etc.). The majority of these activities could only be done online.



The number of children in need of acute care rose sharply. The learning conditions of children with educational needs deteriorated and they required increased attention of social pedagogues. The number of addicted children, abusing alcohol and cigarettes, has increased too. The level of segregation of children from Roma settlements has deepened but also other children from dysfunctional families found themselves ‘trapped’ in pathological environments. Some social pedagogues had to deal with completely new professional situations such as new kinds of family problems or providing online training for parents on helping children with their homework and daily routine.

The significance of social pedagogy and thus also of social pedagogues during the pandemic was seen by the study’s respondents in the following areas (Figure 1):

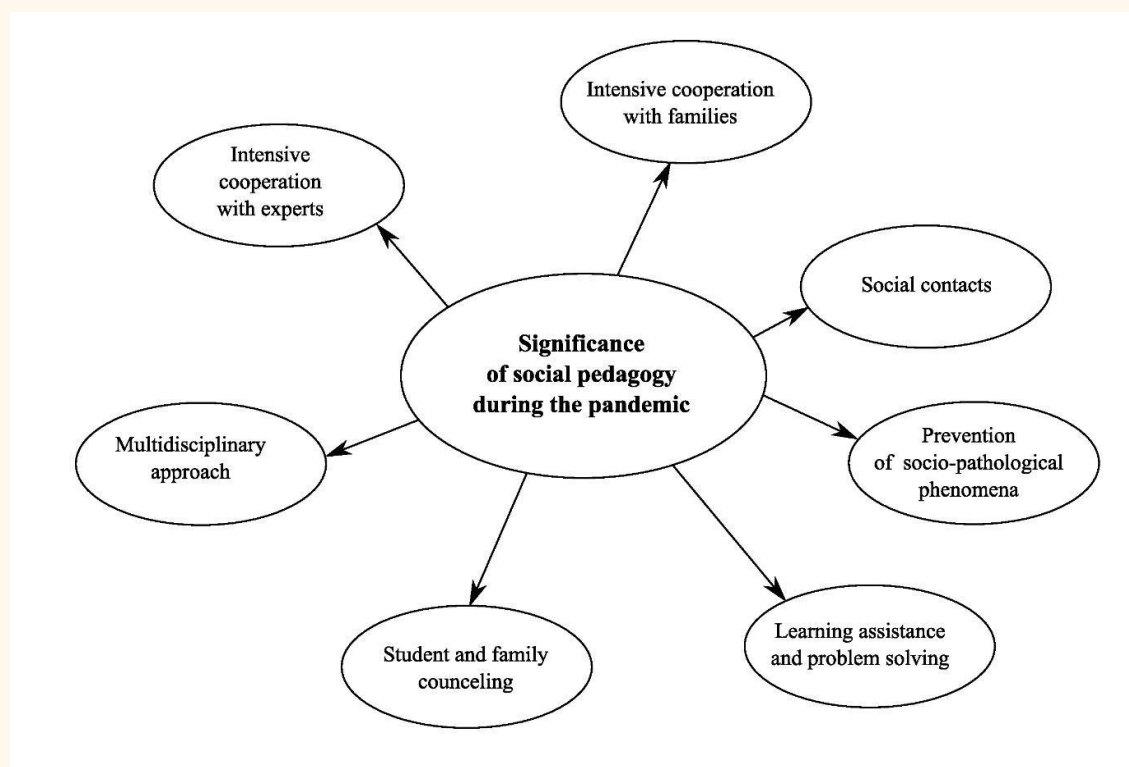


Figure 1: The significance of social pedagogues in Slovakia during the pandemic (own research)

According to social pedagogues in the survey, their school principals and teachers gave very positive evaluations of the social pedagogues' work during the pandemic, noting that they supported students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, helping them to participate in school activities, providing them with lunches, distributing homework, worksheets, and so on. Due to the length of the pandemic, the schools were especially challenged to prevent problem behavior at a distance. During the second wave, new problems arose for the students, which were the result of long-term isolation, and it was important to start solving them. Psychiatric problems (self-harm, depression, suicidal tendencies) began to increase in pupils, which was related to social isolation during the pandemic. For many students, there was an absence of daily habits, a loss of the school regime, which were associated with a loss of motivation to study and to the neglect of school duties. Many teachers and parents pointed to a worsening of students' behavior. Social pedagogues provided parents and teachers with telephone or online counseling and provided diagnostics and solutions to problem behaviors. It was necessary for social pedagogues to develop prosocial and empathic behavior in students, to teach students to manage and overcome stressful situations. It was also extremely important to address the issues of a healthy lifestyle and psycho-hygiene, for both students and for teachers. It was necessary to implement many preventive activities with students, especially related to the extensive use of the Internet and social networks. But the respondents - social pedagogues - pointed to the fact that not all preventive activities could be implemented online because of the limitations of their own tools or characteristics of the online environment itself.

How did the **social pedagogues' professional activities change in relation to parents**? Most of the social pedagogues who participated in our study confirmed that they had lost contact with the majority of parents. If they still had consultations, these took place totally online. Some had next to no personal contact with parents when solving problems or addressing situations. In several cases, though, they had more frequent contact regarding the fulfillment of school duties and changes that took place when students returned to school. Some social pedagogues offered counseling to parents on how to motivate their children to learn, how to involve them in homework, how to determine and monitor compliance with the rules in the family, daily routine, etc. So they had to focus on deeper interpersonal relationships.

Survey participants noted several priorities as students return to school. During the pandemic and after the return of students to the school environment, it is very important to help students in the process of adaptation, to work on the renewal and development of their social skills and to try to understand their emotional experience. Also, it is important to work with students, either individually or in groups, and to provide them with some form of guidance. For students, but also for parents, it is necessary to provide counseling in managing the isolation and fulfillment of school tasks and support for relaxation and positive thinking. In group counseling, it is important to work with the whole class and to maintain and promote good relationships between students. In schools, it is extremely important that social pedagogues ensure and support close cooperation with the pupils' parents and, in the event of a problem, contact experts from other institutions (social services, field social workers, community centers, prevention and counseling centers).

#### 4. Discussion

The statements by the responding social pedagogues in Slovakia showed that during both pandemic waves their task was to communicate – mainly online – and provide multi-dimensional care for children and their parents. Prevention came to the fore. New technologies enabled a new way of developing relationships and “a growth in empathy between parents and schools” (Breslin, 2012, p. 28). There is an evident positive shift in teachers’ relationships with social pedagogues and their professional roles during the pandemic.

According to the social pedagogues (in April 2021), their role was to ensure that transition to school after the lockdown ended is smooth, that students feel safe, valued and listened to. Social pedagogues tried to create opportunities for open discussions with the pupils, to listen to their stories, and to try to understand them. After their students' return, rather acute problems had to be solved, which emerged during the pandemic. The lesson from this experience is that the role of social pedagogues during pandemic times should be on “simply being there”, “slowing down and connecting individual students as well as whole classes”, “listening to them and showing them empathy and kindness”, “opening up honest discussions that matter to students”, and “tailoring preventative projects to their particular needs”.

The pandemic has affected many families, but children have been suffering the most because they are much more vulnerable to various societal changes. Many families (especially large families or families from socially disadvantaged backgrounds who were at greater risk), did not have adequate technical equipment for distance education and did not have access to online

education, either because they did not have an internet connection at home or did not own or have access to a computer at home). In addition to the lack of material possessions and access to technology, these families faced other obstacles, including a non-supportive educational environment or various kinds of increased pressures at home. Many children have been at increased risk of domestic violence or other forms of abuse or online bullying by other children. Many parents were left without a steady income during the pandemic due to job loss, which caused an increase in poverty. According to Nikopoloulou and Maltezou (2021), many children have been facing repeated school closures related to new coronavirus variants. Consequences of continuous school closures include loss of learning skills, mental disorders, and an increased risk of early school leaving.

Some experts, such as Wang et al., 2020, Lades et al., 2020, Tomšik et al, 2020, and others draw attention to the psychological effects of the closure of educational institutions and the subsequent measures that have resulted in the social isolation of children and young people. Children and young people had to cope with the loss of personal contact with loved ones and peers, but also with the reduction of communication with teachers. Negative emotions, frustration, boredom, a lack of personal space, and a loss of routine were also noted. There has also been an increase in the number of experiences among pupils of anxiety and uncertainty about school, the teaching process, the fear of assessment, and the fear of mastering new ways of teaching.

The interruption of physical school attendance for such a long time reduced the ability of children to adapt again to the social environment they had previously known. The school is not

only an educational institution for children, but also an opportunity to create social competencies without the presence of parents. The school allows students to communicate with peers, make new friends or resolve disputes. The deficit of development opportunities cannot be restored overnight, as our behavior has a tendency toward inertia. From a social point of view, social isolation represents an irreversibly lost period, which will affect not only pupils' performance and behavior at school, but also their ability to fit in and live in the same environment as their peers (Gardoňová, Rybanská, 2020).

Bieleszová and Koreňová (2021) point to the fact that the long-term loss of social contact during the pandemic caused some students to feel ambivalent. Ambivalence can be a discrepancy, a contradiction between some currently experienced emotional states. Ambivalent feelings also connect to ambivalent behavior, the inability to decide to act in accordance with current feelings, because those feelings are always changing. Students often experience anxiety and fear, both of which affect their ability to concentrate. In response, they tend to avoid schooling or go outside; they need more reassurance. This is where the support of teachers and professionals, including social pedagogues, is extremely important. In this case, the social pedagogues can teach students to exercise their feelings through examples from stories. It is also necessary to involve pupils gradually in school classroom activities. It is important for social pedagogues to reassure children that they are there for them when they need them.

As of September 2021, the third wave of the pandemic has begun to intensify. New problems are emerging with which social pedagogues have no prior experience. In particular, there is a

significant polarization within society due to vaccination rates, even at the level of school classes. Children judge, criticize, and refuse to enter into relationships with a classmate who is or is not vaccinated. This poses a further threat, leading to unhealthy social development of a young generation, and the new 2021/22 school year will pose an unpredictable challenge for social pedagogues as well as for entire school teams.

So, where is the key for meaningful social pedagogy today? According to one survey participant,

“The heart of social pedagogy in Slovakia is in having healthy relationships, which start with conversations, trust, empathy, skills, and social contacts. Social pedagogy is role-modeling to students how this could happen, even within their families. Social pedagogues are motivated by the hope that they can give children an example of how to manage their own needs and difficulties, by offering them more frequent supervision, by learning from the pedagogues, by being open and more mindful of others, respecting them. The vision of social pedagogy, as hope for education and the nation, is to bring this positive culture to each educational institution in Slovakia, and not only that, but also to organize or participate in international conferences in order to learn from others and implement their good practice into Slovak social and educational life.”

## **Conclusion**

Social pedagogy in Slovakia is defined to be a positive pedagogy (Bakošová, 2008), the aim of which is the transformation of people and society through education, it is a process of educational care leading to the integration and stabilization of society. The most urgent role of

social pedagogues has been to carry out prevention of socio-pathological phenomena among children and youth and to provide support in educating students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, especially students from marginalized Roma communities (Niklová, 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the problematic behavior of pupils in school environments and school facilities has increased. Teachers teaching online on a daily basis have minimal capacity to diagnose the educational and developmental problems of individual students, or to intervene in or seek solutions to the situations of the students and families of concern. It is in this area that social pedagogues should work and offer assistance to many negatively affected children. For this reason, strengthening the position of social pedagogues in schools and school facilities should be considered, especially in the area of prevention and solution of these phenomena.

Although social pedagogues in Slovakia during the current pandemic are continuing to carry out all their professional activities, the research showed that when schools are closed they do not have as much capacity to deal with students compared to when the schools are open. That is why it is necessary at the pandemic time – the end-date of which we cannot yet estimate – to call for an increase in the number of social pedagogues who would be able to work on individual basis with more students than it is possible currently.

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## Social Pedagogy and Readiness for School in German Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

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### Abstract

This Article will argue that despite a long and deeply embedded social pedagogical tradition that fostered an independent pedagogical mandate in ECEC in Germany, a ready-to-school approach gained importance over the past two decades. The implementation of school readiness follows a new mode of governance: While social pedagogical approaches, for instance the situational approach, are embedded in the conceptual framework of ECEC centers, school readiness implements through framework plans on federal state level. However, the framework plans still inherit social pedagogical ideas while at the same time school readiness becomes an issue. In this article the situational approach to ECEC and the framework plan of the federal state Lower Saxony are described and compared. The article intends to give an insight on the tensions in the field of ECEC in Germany and is based on the round table discussion *Social Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education and Care* that was organized by Elina Nivala, Teresa Katherine Aslanian and Onno Husen at the *Social Pedagogy International Online Conference 2021*.

## Introduction

Pedagogical Approaches to curriculum in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) can differ substantially from one country to another and show differing cultural approaches to young children's education. According to an OECD report, Nordic and some Central European countries ECEC inherit a social pedagogical tradition (2006, p. 13). This can be differentiated from a "readiness to school" approach that is found for example in France and large parts of the English-speaking world (OECD 2006, p.14; OECD 2014; Wall et al. 2015, 23). Broadly speaking a social pedagogical approach "stresses content and quality of practice rather than assessing children's achievement levels. It highlights the importance of dialogue between adults and children, as well as creative activities with discussions and reflections" (OECD 2021, p. 65). In contrast, readiness-for-school "emphasizes preparing children for primary school, e.g. by developing children's early literacy and mathematics development. The pedagogy is aligned with primary schooling" (OECD 2021, p. 65).

In the past years, many countries have been moving more frequently towards combining the readiness for school and the social pedagogy approach (Wall et al. 2015, 24). Despite a long social pedagogical tradition and an independent pedagogical mandate in ECEC, this is also the case in Germany. The discussion about school readiness is not new, in fact the relation of school and ECEC has regularly been debated in the history of Germany ECEC (Reyer 2006). A critical juncture for the establishment of an independent educational mandate that differs from the educational mandate of schools was taken in the time of the Weimar Republic by integrating ECEC as a part of the youth welfare act (Reichsjugendwohlfahrtsgesetz) in 1922. The debates

about ECEC exemplify that, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there are two main rationales that have led to the establishment of ECEC in the past and still drive the effort to increase the number of children attending ECEC in Germany: the education of children and the reconciliation of family and working life (Thiersch 2015).

After the second world war West Germany took up the developments of the Weimar Republic and East Germany developed an extensive ECEC system following socialist values and integrating ECEC into the system of education. Until the 1970s education in ECEC was not at the top of the agenda of West German policy makers and scholars (Fölling-Albers 2013, 39). This changed in the light of a larger education reform in which not only higher education but also the goals of ECEC were debated. This led to the development of the situational approach that is considered a social pedagogical approach to ECEC. The situational approach has shaped German ECEC in the past five decades (Thiersch 2015, 820).<sup>17</sup> However, rather weak performances of German students in international benchmarking studies like PISA and TIMSS have fuelled a new discussion about readiness for school and the independent (social) educational mandate in ECEC. The growing importance of school readiness mirrors in the orientational frameworks that have been developed since 2004 in every federal state. In this way, the school readiness approach gains ground through educational frameworks on federal state level. However, these educational frameworks still emphasize a distinct educational mission from school like the situational approach.

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<sup>17</sup> In the process of the reunion the western concept was transferred to eastern parts in the 1990s.

In sum, ECEC in Germany is a high-tension field with an independent notion of education that emphasizes the concept of self-education and, at the same time, faces multiple expectations in regard to targeted (compensatory) education, prevention, (Fölling-Albers 2013) and school readiness. From a legal perspective ECEC is part of the child and youth welfare system and the “development of the child into a self-reliant and socially competent person” is defined as the overarching goal (§ 1 SGB VIII). At the same time ECEC falls into the competence of the ministries of education on the federal state level which developed orientational frameworks that guide the work in ECEC and introduced school readiness.

In the following the situational approach is sketched as a social pedagogical approach to ECEC in Germany. After that the framework plan of the federal state Lower Saxony is described as a step towards “school readiness” in ECEC. The final discussion will take up commonalities and differences of the two and develop first ideas for a social pedagogical approach to school readiness.

## **The Situational Approach**

The societal context during the development of the situational approach in the 1970s mirrors in some points today's situation. Haberkorn (2009) points out that the (West) German debate was influenced by international comparative studies and current neurobiological studies that underlined the significance of early childhood development. First Training programs (language training, set theory) were introduced to ECEC and at the same time the values in education were brought into debate by the student movement with the goal to break with traditional educational concepts incorporating an authoritarian character that was associated with German fascism.

In 1971, Jürgen Zimmer as the leader of the “working group on preschool education” (Arbeitsgruppe Vorschulerziehung) of the German Youth Institute engaged in developing an educational concept that would legitimize ECEC as an important educational space for young children. Together with kindergarten teachers and parents from kindergartens in different regions, they developed the situational approach that understood itself as a countermovement to isolated training programs and a pedagogy oriented towards adaptation (Haberkorn 2009, 77). In general, “the pedagogical work is based on the goal to enable children of different social backgrounds and with different learning histories to think and act as autonomously and competently as possible in their present and future life” (Arbeitsgruppe Vorschulerziehung 1976, p. 15). Learning is understood as a “process of shared experience and communication, in which all participants can be both teachers and learners,[and] in which educators no longer have the role as the sole expert” (Arbeitsgruppe Vorschulerziehung 1976, p. 198). Over past decades the situational approach has been developed further, adapting to societal changes and new requirements for a professional

practice in ECEC. For a description of the developmental process and philosophical roots see Haberkorn 2009.

Today, “the situational approach pursues the goal of supporting children from different social and cultural backgrounds in understanding their living environment and in shaping it in a self-determined, competent and responsible way. The stimulus for learning and education is the diverse and contradictory lives of the children, their observations and questions, their immediate experiences and the challenges they encounter” (ista 2021).

Three guiding principles are considered central for the (social) pedagogical work: Autonomy, Solidarity and Competence.

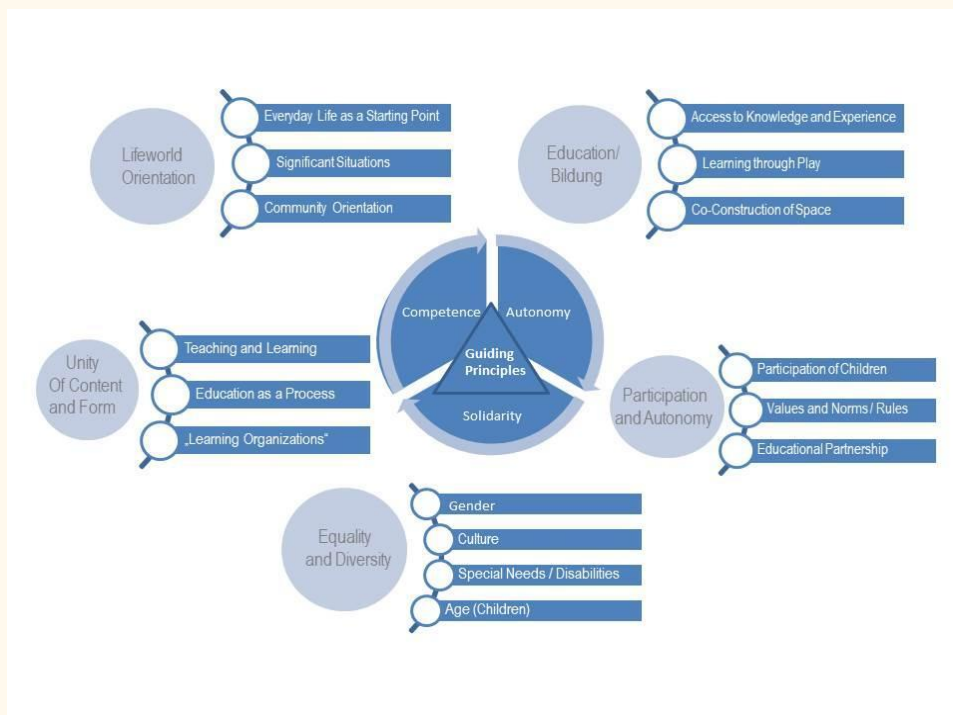


Figure I: Principles of the situational approach (Own figure, Source: ista 2021.)



According to Preissing and Heller (2009) 16 conceptual principles are central to the situational approach:

#### Lifeworld Orientation:

- 1) The educational work is based on the social and cultural environment of the children and their families.
- 2) Educators/ ECEC teachers identify significant situations in children's lives through continuous discourse with children, parents and other adults.
- 3) The day care centre develops close relationships with the community and the surrounding environment.

#### Education / Bildung

- 4) Educators analyse what children are capable of and what they want to experience. They facilitate access to new knowledge and new experiences that are important while growing up.
- 5) Educators support children in unfolding their imagination and creativity in play and in approaching the world in a way that is appropriate to their development.
- 6) Rooms and their design facilitate the children's own active and creative activities in a stimulating environment.

### Participation and Autonomy

- 7) Educators support children in their development of independence by enabling them to play an active role in shaping life in the day care center.
- 8) In daily life together, there is a conscious examination of values and norms. Rules are agreed upon together with the children.
- 9) Parents and educators are partners in the care, education and upbringing of the children.

### Equality and Diversity

- 10) Educators support girls and boys in their gender identity development and oppose stereotypical role assignments and assumptions.
- 11) The work in the day care center is oriented towards the requirements and opportunities of a society that is characterized by different cultures.
- 12) Educators enable younger and older children to relate their diverse experiences and competencies to each other in joint activities and thus support each other in their development.
- 13) The child day care center integrates children with disabilities, different developmental prerequisites and support needs, and opposes exclusion.

### Unity of Content and Form

- 14) Educators are teachers and learners at the same time.
- 15) The pedagogical work is based on situation analyses and follows a process-oriented planning. It is continuously documented.
- 16) The ECEC center is a learning organization.

In sum, the situational approach can be described as a child-centered educational approach that sees the child as part of the community. Autonomy, solidarity and competence are the guiding principles of this approach. “The acquisition of knowledge and skills takes place through participation in real life, in which children play a role as acting subjects, in which the acquisition of knowledge and skills has a meaning and is significant for them” (ista 2021). Educators are not supposed to teach a certain curriculum but facilitate access to new knowledge and new experiences that are important for children. In doing so, educators have to be experts on the social and cultural life of children and see their families as partners. Thus, the situational approach is a conceptual framework for ECEC centers that sees children, educators and ECEC centers in the process of learning.

### **The orientational Framework for ECEC in Lower Saxony/Germany**

In the following I will focus on the orientational framework of the federal state of Lower Saxony/Germany that was issued in 2005. The framework was later substituted with a framework for language development (Sprachbildung und Sprachförderung) in 2011 and with an orientational framework for the work with children under three years of age (Die Arbeit mit Kindern unter drei Jahren) in 2012. The orientational Framework is understood as a state-wide framework for center-specific pedagogical concepts. It was developed in light of the discussion about the performance of the education system in general and it intends to clarify the educational mandate of ECEC to parents and staff working in organizations related to ECEC, including elementary schools (MECA 2005, p. 8). The overarching goal is to foster the development of children into a self-reliant and socially competent persons (§ 1 SGB VIII) and, in general, it

defines ECEC facilities as part of the child and youth welfare system with independent educational mandate to which elementary school relate in their work (MECA 2005, p. 8).

The orientational framework in Lower Saxony is structured in four sections: Principles and general aims, educational objectives in learning areas and fields of experience, working with children in day-care, and quality development and assurance. The principles and general aims consist of an introduction, a short section on fundamental values in a democratic society, and a section on understanding education - how young children learn. The educational objectives in learning areas and fields of experiences define nine areas in which children should learn:

Emotional development and social learning, development of cognitive skills and the joy of learning, body - movement – health, language and speech, practical life skills, basic mathematical understanding, aesthetic education, nature and living environment, and ethical and religious questions/basic experiences of human existence. The section working with children in day-care has three subsections: Methods and tasks of the professionals, educational partnership with parents, and the cooperation between the day care center and the elementary school. In the following, I will concentrate on the principals and general aims and the appearance of school readiness in two of the learning areas: language and speech, and basic mathematical understanding.

The principles and general aims emphasize democratic values and stress the role of ECEC as foundation for a democratic society:

“In day care facilities, the basic democratic values can be experienced. These include respect for human dignity, tolerance, equality of opportunity and solidarity, which are

essential for our society. This is political education in an elementary sense. The day care center lays the foundation for the growing into a democratic society.” (MECA 2005, p. 10).

The principles and general aims describe children as active, motivated, and competent actors that are capable of self-education (MECA 2005, p. 11). However, children are also in need of guidance and adult role models, “to grow into an already socially and culturally shaped environment” (MECA 2005, p. 12). The process of education is understood as a social and communicative process that is co-constructed between peers and between children and adults (MECA 2005, p. 12). The framework emphasizes the role of play as the most important and preferred method of learning during that age.

Besides principles and general aims, the educational framework defines educational objectives in nine learning areas/fields of experience. The introduction to this section states that the content of the learning areas cannot be taught in the manner of school subjects. This would contradict the understanding of education for the phase of early childhood, developed in the principles and general aims. “The point is to enable children to engage with their environment in a self-directed and active way” (MECA 2005, p. 13). Further the educational framework states:

“The development of cognitive skills in ECEC has in the past often been confused with knowledge acquisition in the form of school lessons and had therefore no priority.

However, there is no contradiction between the concept of holistic learning and cognitive challenges. Children, for example, benefit from the opportunity to explore

logical-mathematical phenomena such as quantities and sizes in the kindergarten or look for explanations of natural phenomena, without appearing overstrained. It is important that the children's own activities are supported and that the learning process is open-ended - without time pressure and in a self-paced rhythm.” (MECA 2005, p. 16).

The quote exemplifies that the educational framework emphasizes a distinct educational mandate in ECEC and supports a self-directed learning process. At the same time, objectives in nine learning areas/fields of experience are defined. In this way school readiness in ECEC becomes a subject and ECEC is conceptualized as the fundamental stage for the entire educational career of children (MECA, 2005, p. 32). Further the nine learning areas can be easily understood as curriculum that guides educational processes in ECEC centers.

Two quotes from the learning areas *language and speech* and *basic mathematical understanding* exemplify how school readiness becomes a subject in the educational framework:

*Language and Speech:* “Day care facilities for children have a responsibility to develop structures and concepts to realize the central educational mission. Insufficient language development and a lack of mastery of the German language limit children's ability to communicate and their learning opportunities in the long term in elementary school and in all further educational and socialization processes” (MECA 2005, p. 20).

*Mathematical understanding:* “In day-care facilities, it is not the priority that children count as quickly as possible and learn complex geometric shapes. It is rather important for the basic understanding of mathematics, that the girls and boys learn mathematics in a

variety of situations in everyday life and in play, grasping and comparing quantities in various everyday situations and space-location relations. Concepts such as more/less, above/below, large/small, high, highest point, corner - center, etc. should be introduced and consolidated to describe the child's experiences and observations. When children grow older the process of counting is introduced and practiced through games or counting rhymes” (MECA 2005, p. 24).

The first quote highlights the responsibility and relevance of language learning in ECEC for the process of education and socialization. Direct references are made to elementary school. This fits very well to the perception of ECEC as the fundamental stage for an educational career. In the second quote, the tension between an independent mandate and at the same establishing a (minimum) standard in regard to mathematical understanding before entering primary school displays.

In sum, the educational framework is a good example for the tensions that shape ECEC in Germany. On the one hand the framework takes up the traditionally independent mandate of ECEC in Germany and on the other hand it conceptualizes ECEC as the fundamental stage of an educational career. It is a new form of governance that overrides the independence of ECEC centers and establishes a curricular structure through defining educational objectives in nine learning areas/fields of experience.

## Discussion

The debate about school readiness after the unexpectedly weak performance of German students in international benchmarking studies has led to a new form of governance in German ECEC. With the establishment of a framework the federal states have established an agenda for education in ECEC above the individual concepts of the facilities. In this way social pedagogical concepts, like the situational approach, have to adapt to a framework that can partly contradict their own approach to ECEC. Despite the changes in governance, the educational framework shows that the idea of an independent educational mandate in ECEC is still eminent. However, contradictory constructions (e.g. ECEC as fundamental stage for an educational career or the definition of learning objectives in learning areas) display the tensions between a social pedagogical approach and school readiness that shape the field of ECEC in Germany.

The comparison of the situational approach with the educational framework in Lower Saxony/Germany, shows that the OECD notion of social pedagogy fits very well to the situational approach: it “stresses content and quality of practice rather than assessing children’s achievement levels. It highlights the importance of dialogue between adults and children, as well as creative activities with discussions and reflections” (OECD 2021, p. 65). Many of these characteristics can as well be found in the educational framework but at the same time “preparing children for primary school, e.g. by developing children’s early literacy and mathematics development” (OECD 2021, p. 65) is relevant here. Differing from an OECD notion of school readiness, the education in ECEC described in the framework is not aligned



with primary schooling in a strict sense but ECEC is constructed at a fundamental stage for an educational career.

In regard to commonalities and differences of the situational approach and the educational framework, it is apparent that the basis for both is the commitment to fundamental values in a democratic society. Further both conceptualize children as active, motivated, and competent actors in their learning, and describe the pedagogical work as child-centered. However, differences can also be found: while the educational framework defines learning areas that are considered central for children in ECEC, the situational approach emphasizes the lifeworld orientation of children's learning. Another difference is that the situational approach has a strong community orientation in which children are seen as part of the community, whereas the educational framework underlines the socialization and the need to grow into society.

In general, it can be argued that despite a long and deeply embedded social pedagogical tradition in German ECEC, a ready-to-school approach gained importance over the past two decades. This led to further tensions in conceptualisation of ECEC: On the one side ECEC is described as a separate educational field with an independent educational mandate and on the other side ECEC is seen as the foundation for a further educational career where the attainment of objectives in certain learning areas is an important task. The displayed tension and the observation that school readiness is gaining importance leads in my perspective to two questions that should be debated in the future: First, how is social pedagogy fostering readiness for school without limiting it to academic knowledge. And second, what can (elementary) school learn from social pedagogy?

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## **(Portuguese) Morte e Vida: A experiência ética de educadores sociais no âmbito de uma política de segurança pública de controle de homicídios em favelas no Brasil**

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### **RESUMO**

A proposta deste artigo é apresentar alguns elementos de uma pesquisa de doutorado em andamento, que tem por objetivo investigar a experiência ética de educadores sociais que atuam com jovens de 12 a 24 anos em uma política de segurança pública de prevenção à criminalidade no estado de Minas Gerais-Brasil. Parto da hipótese de que o trabalho com jovens envolvidos com a criminalidade requer da parte do educador uma condução ética que entrelaça o cuidado de si e a coragem como elementos essenciais para a intervenção em contextos de violência e criminalidade. Ao final defendo que esse educador é capaz de realizar uma experiência que atravessa a gramática moral do estado, das comunidades e a lei do tráfico de drogas.

**Palavras-chave:** Experiência, educador social, prevenção à violência.

### **Introdução**

Apresento neste artigo algumas problematizações de uma pesquisa de doutorado em andamento, a qual tem o objetivo de investigar a experiência ética de educadores sociais que trabalham em uma política de segurança pública de prevenção ao crime no Estado de Minas Gerais, Brasil.

Nesse sentido, tomo como sujeito de pesquisa os educadores do Programa de Controle de

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Homicídios (Fica Vivo!), desenvolvido pela Secretaria de Estado de Justiça e Segurança. Meu interesse por esses profissionais emerge a partir da minha prática profissional desde o ano de 2007. Durante essa trajetória tive a oportunidade de trabalhar em projetos e programas de prevenção à violência nos temas do tráfico de pessoas, mediação de conflitos em comunidades periféricas, o uso de penas alternativas como outra forma de lidar com a aplicação penal, dentre outros temas. Em especial no Programa de Controle de Homicídios, encontrei nas práticas desses educadores um conjunto de intervenções capazes de salvar a vida de jovens envolvidos com a criminalidade e impactar na dinâmica social e criminal das comunidades que residem. Meu interesse nesta pesquisa vai além da compreensão das práticas pedagógicas operadas nas oficinas de esporte, cultura e aprendizagem. Busco compreender o quanto as intervenções de alguns desses profissionais impacta na prevenção da violência. Defendo a hipótese de que essas intervenções só são possíveis a partir de uma experiência profissional guiada pelo cuidado e pela coragem. Tomo as noções de cuidado de si e de coragem da verdade presentes na obra do filósofo Michel Foucault. Destaco que a intervenção com pessoas envolvidas com a criminalidade e, sobretudo, em momentos de tensão, só é possível porque esse educador está constituído de um cuidado de si que o permite ser referência na comunidade em que vive, que o autoriza falar, mas que exige deste que fala coragem para fazer uma mediação entre campos morais distintos, quais sejam: o comunitário, a moral do tráfico e a moral do Estado.

Na primeira parte faço uma contextualização histórica de fatores sociais que são atravessadores do trabalho da educação social. Na segunda parte apresento uma caracterização desse educador

social, passo por uma breve explanação teórica das escolhas conceituas e finalizo com algumas considerações finais.

### **O contexto histórico desafiador para a educação social no Brasil**

Faço neste tópico uma breve contextualização histórica sobre os cenários de violências, os quais se apresentam como desafios aos educadores sociais envolvidos no trabalho com jovens no contexto das periferias brasileiras:

1. Embora o Brasil seja um dos maiores produtores de alimentos do mundo, foi apenas em 2014 que o país saiu do mapa da fome, mas no contexto da COVID19 e nas questões políticas, o Brasil sofreu um revés e registrou mais de 27 milhões de pessoas abaixo da linha da pobreza em 2020<sup>19</sup>.
2. O Brasil foi o último país do mundo a acabar com a escravidão. Esse fenômeno produziu grandes efeitos nos pobres e na forma como essas pessoas ocupam o espaço. Foi nesse momento que começou a construção das favelas. As favelas são uma espécie de habitação para os pobres, construídas em condições sanitárias precárias e localizadas em áreas isoladas nas maiores cidades do interior. Apresentam-se assim, como processo da precariedade da moradia, questões de saúde pública, de segurança e de estigma social contra determinados públicos.

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<sup>19</sup> Fundação Getúlio Vargas. Qual foi o Impacto Imediato da Pandemia do Covid sobre as Classes Econômicas Brasileiras? (2020). Disponível em: <https://www.cps.fgv.br/cps/CovidEClasses/>.

3. O Brasil registra mais de 50.000 mortes violentas (homicídios) a cada ano. Essas pessoas mortas têm classe social e raça. São na sua maioria negra, rapazes entre os 15 e 29 anos e residentes na periferia. Porém, a demografia tende a mostrar que o envelhecimento da população brasileira mudará o contexto nos próximos anos. Hoje, a morte de jovens entre 15 e 29 anos representou 53,3% dos homicídios em 2018 (Ipea, 2020). O gráfico 1 apresenta o número de registros de homicídios no período de 2008 a 2018.

GRÁFICO 1 – NUMERO DE HOMICÍDIOS NO BRASIL DE 2008 A 2018



Fonte: Elaborado pelo autor a partir de dados do Atlas da Violência 2020

4. O Brasil é o terceiro maior país do mundo em relação a população carcerária (Fica atrás apenas dos EUA e China). O perfil das pessoas assassinadas é o mesmo das pessoas presas e 34,7% não foram julgadas (Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research, 2018). O Brasil, como outros países, tem uma guerra contra as drogas, mas com localização em pequenos consumidores e pequenos traficantes, essas práticas têm demonstrado pequenos

efeitos no uso e no tráfico, mas produzem incremento incontrolável da massa carcerária e amplificam os problemas sociais.

Estes quatro pontos supramencionados se inter cruzam, ou seja, a herança de um país escravocrata que ainda não conseguiu reduzir os efeitos históricos desse problema, fica evidente no que tange a miséria, no crime e na forma como o Estado pretende resolver esses problemas sociais através do encarceramento em massa.

### **Um educador singular**

Em virtude do aumento das taxas de homicídio no Estado de Minas Gerais, foi criado no ano de 2002 o Programa de Controle de Homicídios – Fica Vivo, com o objetivo de “reduzir a incidência de homicídios dolosos, mediante ações de prevenção e repressão, nas áreas de risco da Região Metropolitana de Belo Horizonte e outros municípios do Estado [...]” (MINAS GERAIS, 2003). Dentre um conjunto de intervenções o Programa prevê no seu escopo a atuação de educadores com jovens de 12 a 24 anos residentes em áreas com altas taxas de criminalidade violenta.

De modo geral esses educadores não necessitam ter uma formação específica para executarem esse trabalho em um espaço denominado “oficinas”, as quais “são estratégias de aproximação e atendimento ao público do Programa” (GOVERNO DE MINAS, p.19, 2015) que “extrapolam a dimensão do ofício” (ibidem, p. 19). Porém há um conjunto de demandas por parte do Estado do que se espera desse profissional, das quais cito algumas abaixo:

- Criar vínculo entre os jovens e o Programa a partir de suas diferentes formas de atendimento;
- Possibilitar espaços para discussões e fazer mediações de conflitos entre os jovens;
- Potencializar a autonomia dos jovens;
- Promover discussões sobre segurança pública, cidadania e direitos humanos;
- Permitir aos jovens o conhecimento, a valorização e apropriação de elementos culturais (GOVERNO DE MINAS, pgs. 88-89, 2009).
- Transmitir um ofício;
- Acolher os adolescentes e jovens, independente de suas habilidades para com as atividades desenvolvidas na oficina;
- Dar abertura para a expressão de diferenças e singularidades sem julgamentos morais e preconceituosos;
- Trabalhar temáticas a partir daquilo que os adolescentes e jovens manifestam na oficina;
- Favorecer a reflexão de adolescentes e jovens sobre formas de prevenção e redução de rivalidades violentas (GOVERNO DE MINAS, p.20, 2015).

Como é possível verificar nas caracterizações apresentadas acima, espera-se desse educador muitas habilidades além da transmissão de um ofício ou de um conhecimento qualquer. De maneira geral, muitos desses educadores foram atendidos pelo Programa, muitos apresentam



histórico de envolvimento criminal, e boa parte destes são reconhecidos como lideranças comunitárias. Porém não há um perfil unívoco. Talvez a singularidade desses educadores esteja na possibilidade ética que cada um é capaz de estruturar para que seja possível realizar intervenções em contextos complexos.

É sobre as possibilidades de intervenção desse educador o elemento central desta pesquisa. Trata-se de um tipo singular de educador social que a partir da aproximação com os jovens e a das suas práticas pedagógicas podem construir novos tipos de experiência para esses jovens. Em geral, o mecanismo de aproximação é com as práticas culturais, esportivas e trabalhistas. Mas, o mais interessante é como esses educadores abordam os jovens envolvidos na violência e no tráfico de drogas. Assim, minhas primeiras perguntas são: a) como essas práticas podem ser eficazes na prevenção de crimes violentos, especialmente homicídios ?; b) qual a experiência ética que pode ser construída por esses educadores sociais nessa relação pedagógica ? Por que é meu interesse pesquisar esses educadores? Em primeiro lugar, em geral, esses educadores são pessoas que nasceram no território onde atuam; Em segundo lugar, muitos deles tinham antecedentes criminais, foram atendidos pelo Programa e podem ter mudado de vida; Em terceiro lugar, eles parecem estar comprometidos com os jovens mais do que em um contexto educacional, mas em um tipo de conexão que necessita de forte vínculo e confiança. Apesar disso, parece que para prevenir a morte ou fazer viver, esses educadores possuem um saber específico para dialogar com esse contexto cultural e impactar na história de vida desses jovens.

Contudo, há um elemento do risco da intervenção. Intervir em situações de ameaça a vida, propor alternativas no meio dos conflitos de gangues requer algo maior do que a demanda pela intervenção do Estado. Isso porque há toda uma operação de uma gramática moral comunitária e do crime nas quais muitas vezes o Estado não é chamado a intervir e, caso fosse poderia ser ainda mais desastroso. É nesse sentido que esse educador apresenta outra singularidade: a capacidade de mediar gramáticas morais diversas, quais sejam: a) aquilo que o Estado prescreve como lei ou como intervenção do sistema de justiça criminal, b) aquilo que se encontra na ordem moral das comunidades e c) uma outra dimensão de justiça e lei preconizada pelo crime. Daí emerge a pergunta central da pesquisa: O que permite a este educador adentrar nesses campos diversos e propor intervenções dirigidas à problemas específicos? Minha aposta é que existe em alguns desses educadores o entrelaçamento de dois elementos éticos. O primeiro é o de um cuidado de si, do desenho de uma estilística própria que modela sua forma de vida, gerando uma condução profissional e de vida que o legitima na comunidade que vive, no trabalho que o contrata (pela via do Estado) e diante das pessoas envolvidas com a criminalidade. O segundo ponto é o elemento da coragem. Intervir nesses cenários requer mais do que a execução de um trabalho de transmissão de um ofício. Para aqueles educadores que se propõe intervir em processos de conflitos é preciso que esteja munido da coragem de expor a própria vida ao risco. Caberá no desenvolvimento da pesquisa demonstrar como essa experiência singular se constitui.

### **Pressupostos teóricos**

Embora a opção escolhida pelo Estado para denominar esses profissionais seja pelo termo “oficineiro”, opto por nomeá-los como educadores ou educadores sociais. Na teorização sobre

educação social, é muito comum serem apontadas as múltiplas competências desse educador<sup>20</sup>, que poderiam ser “arte-educadores”, oficineiros, artistas populares, artesãos, mas também são professores, advogados, sociólogos, cientistas sociais, psicólogos, pedagogos, assistentes sociais, historiadores, geógrafos [...]”(Gadotti, 2012, p. 12). O Programa espera que esse educador tenha a “capacidade de trabalhar com jovens envolvidos em crimes” (Minas Gerais, 2009, p. 88), que, preferencialmente, more na comunidade onde trabalha, que saiba “como medir os conflitos entre esses jovens”(ibidem, p.88) e ainda, que desenvolva um conjunto de atividades formativas nessas oficinas.

Considerarei a noção de experiência, tomada a partir de Michel Foucault, como central na pesquisa. Este conceito agrega três elementos na constituição ética do sujeito, quais sejam: Poder, saber e o si. Trata-se da “a correlação de um domínio do conhecimento, um tipo de normatividade e um modo de relação com o self” (Foucault, 333, 1990). Em outras palavras, a experiência serve para “arrancar o sujeito de si mesmo” (O’Leary, 2008, p.8).

Parece-me interessante estudar esse educador social nas favelas por vários motivos, mas principalmente por dois aspectos que suponho estarem de acordo e que têm melhor possibilidade metodológica. A primeira é a dica de que é possível encontrar o cuidado de si práticas na vida desses educadores, uma vez que esse “trabalho” parece ultrapassar o limite de um simples

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<sup>20</sup> Como afirma Daniel Struzemberg (2018) os conceitos de educação social recebem diferentes significações no contexto Anglo Saxão e na Ibero América. Com a noção de educador social não é diferente. No contexto brasileiro, o campo da educação social se desenvolveu antes na práxis do que no campo teórico. A emergência dos educadores sociais vem com a necessidade de trabalho nas ruas, comunidades, presídios e outros espaços e públicos em condições de vulnerabilidade social (Silva , 2009; Gadotti, 2012).

trabalho (esse projeto precisa ser aprovado) ou do ato pedagógico ou do transferência de um saber ou um ofício. Além de realizar esta oficina, me parece que a possibilidade de orientar esses jovens para evitar o “descaminho” exige uma certa estilístico da existência desse que fala, que orienta, que é referência. Portanto, há uma pista de que o cuidado de si é uma pré-condição para a atuação desse educador junto aos jovens das favelas. Por isso, no percurso de alguns educadores há indícios de uma certa conversão da visão, uma espécie de “ocorrência do pensamento” (Foucault, 2010b), que não funciona na solidão, mas agrega o outro como parte da auto constituição. Esse outro que pode ser o guia da maestria, mas também pode ser o objeto dos cuidados.

Meu segundo ponto de interesse é o quanto e, de que maneira, essas práticas educativas (de “salvar” vidas) podem estar estritamente correlacionadas a uma relação do educador com a verdade, colocando-o na posição de vida ou morte. Em muitas ocasiões, como aquele que quer “jogar” certo jogo de *parrhesia* para salvar a vida de outrem (agressor ou vítima), mas em grande escala colocando em risco a própria vida. Nas práticas cotidianas também é possível encontrar a fala destemida (*parrhesia*) como elemento constitutivo do trabalho desses educadores. Em minhas notas anteriores, verifico a possibilidade de encontrar, nesse educador, a constituição de uma certa “virtude moral” (Foucault, 2004b, p. 450) que difere de um ato retórico ou pedagógico de compartilhamento de conteúdos. Busco a possibilidade de encontrar uma vontade verdadeira, mesmo com todos os riscos que ela acarrete, ao passo que, se os *parresistas* realmente existem neste caso, “são eles que” falam a verdade por um preço indeterminado, que pode até levar à própria morte ”(Foucault, 2010, p. 56). Vejo a possibilidade de investigar o processo de

construção de um sujeito-forma (Ortega, 1999), de uma sujeito-obra (Fisher & Marcelo, 2014).

Com o cuidado de si e da narração da verdade, penso em juntar a “verdade falada e os pensamentos de quem a falou” (Foucault, 2011, p. 12).

Vendo esses elementos, explico que minha pergunta está em compreender qual experiência ética é possível ser moldada por um educador social, que trabalha para um Programa de Controle de Homicídios. Minha aposta é que, na condução das práticas pedagógicas desses educadores, que atuam na segurança pública em comunidades violentas, é possível encontrar uma experiência ética formulada na interlocução entre o cuidado de si e o falar da verdade para conduzir este trabalho entre a vida e a morte de jovens em risco social.

### **Observações Finais**

Mais do que conclusões, gostaria de apresentar algumas questões que ajudarão na minha pesquisa: a) Buscarei alguns elementos nas práticas desses educadores. Para mim, é fundamental reconhecer como esses educadores constroem suas práticas pedagógicas. Para começar sei que não vou encontrar um currículo único, pois a gestão deste Programa não constrói reuniões, indicadores de impacto, orientações ou outras formas de elaboração de um guia sistemático para estes trabalhadores. Em geral, sua prática é dar uma prática esportiva ou cultural. Mas quando as práticas esportivas e culturais encontram as relações afetivas? Como é possível intervir em uma situação de violência? b) Mas, o mais importante na pesquisa é entender como se constroem os laços de amizade e quais situações são possíveis de intervir e quais são impossíveis. Em minha observação, vi muitos casos em que a intervenção pode salvar uma vida. Às vezes, essas ações chamam a uma rede local e instituições locais. Outras vezes, essas experiências precisam do auxílio de uma força policial. Mas na maioria dos casos o mecanismo de intervenção vem com um diálogo ou uma espécie de mediação com partes. É muito importante ressaltar que grande parte desses conflitos podem estar vinculadas ao tráfico de drogas e, em muitas situações, assassinatos e violências são formas de resolução de conflitos em que o governo (Estado) não é chamado a atuar ou, se o faz, chega após o fato. Com isso quero dizer que em certas favelas existe um tipo de gramática moral que regula as formas de comportamento, justiça e controle social. Nesse sentido, esses educadores são um híbrido de presença do Estado e mediador comunitário.

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## (English) Death and life: the ethical experience of social educators in the scope of a public security policy on homicide control in Brazilian *favelas*

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to present some elements of an ongoing doctoral research project, which aims to investigate the ethical experience of social educators who work with youths aged 12 to 24 in a public security policy on crime prevention in the state of Minas Gerais – Brazil. I start from the hypothesis that the work with youths involved in criminality requires from the educators an ethical conduction that intertwines the care of the self and courage as essential elements for the intervention in contexts of violence and criminality. In the end, I defend that this educator is capable of developing an experience that surpasses the moral grammar of the state, communities and the drug trafficking law.

**Keywords:** Experience, social educator, violence prevention

### Introduction

In this article, I present some problematizations of an ongoing doctoral research project, which aims to investigate the ethical experience of social educators who work in a public security policy of crime prevention in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. In this regard, I take, as a

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research subject, the educators of the Homicide Control Program (Fica Vivo!) developed by the State Secretariat of Justice and Security. My interest in these professionals arises from my own professional practice, starting in 2007. Down this road, I had the opportunity to work in violence prevention projects and programs in the themes of human trafficking, conflict mediation in peripheral communities, the use of alternative penalties as another form of dealing with convictions, among others. Especially in the Homicide Control Program, I found in the practices of these educators a series of interventions capable of saving the lives of youths involved in criminality and impacting the social and criminal dynamics of the communities in which they live. My interest in this research goes beyond the comprehension of pedagogical practices developed in sport, culture and learning workshops. I aim to comprehend how much the interventions of some of these professionals' impact on violence prevention. I defend the hypothesis that these interventions are only possible coming from a professional experience oriented by care and courage. I take the notions of care of the self and courage of truth from the work of philosopher Michel Foucault. I highlight that the intervention with people involved in criminality, especially in moments of tension, is only possible because these educators maintain a care of the self that allows them to be a reference in the community in which they live and authorizes them to speak, but demands from those who speak courage to mediate between distinct moral fields: the community, the trafficking morale, and the state morale.

In the first part, I present a historical contextualization of social factors that cross the work of social education. In the second part I present a characterization of this social educator, go

through a brief theoretical explanation of the conceptual choices, and end with some final considerations.

### **The challenging historical context for social education in Brazil**

In this topic, I give a brief historical contextualization on violence scenarios which present as a challenge to social educators involved in the work with youths in Brazilian peripheral areas:

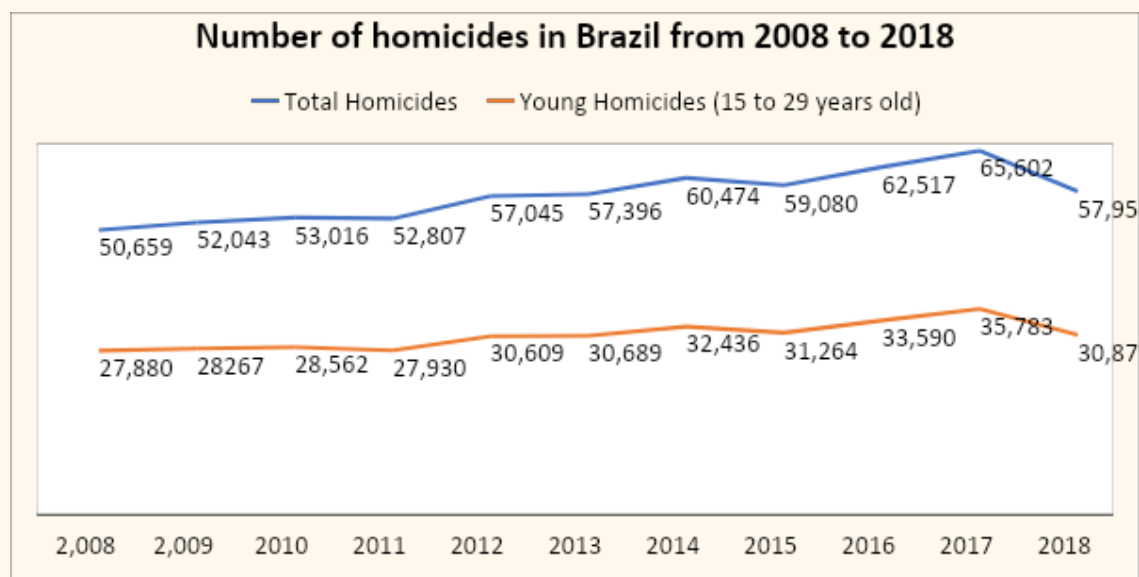
1. Although Brazil is one of the biggest food producers in the world, it was only in 2014 that the country left the hunger map. But in the context of COVID-19 and the political scenario, Brazil suffered a setback and registered more than 27 million people below the poverty line in 2020<sup>22</sup>.
2. Brazil was the last country in the world to end slavery. This phenomenon produced great effects in poor people and the way these people occupy spaces. It was at this moment that the construction of *favelas* began. *Favelas* are a type of habitation for the poor, built in precarious sanitary conditions and located in isolated areas in the biggest cities of the interior. Therefore, they are a process of precariousness of habitation and matters of public health, security, and social stigma against determined audiences.
3. Brazil registers more than 50,000 violent deaths (homicides) each year. These killed people are primarily of a particular social class and color. They are, in the majority, young black men between the ages of 15 and 29, living in the peripheral areas of large cities. However, demography indicates that the aging of the Brazilian population tends to

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<sup>22</sup> Fundação Getúlio Vargas. Qual foi o Impacto Imediato da Pandemia do Covid sobre as Classes Econômicas Brasileiras? (2020). In: <https://www.cps.fgv.br/cps/CovidEClasses/>.

change the context for the next years. As of 2018, the death of youths between 15 and 29 represents 53.3% of homicides (Ipea, 2020). Graph 1 presents the number of homicides registered between 2008 and 2018.

GRAPH 1 – NUMBER OF HOMICIDES IN BRAZIL FROM 2008 TO 2018



Source: Developed by the author with data from the 2020 Atlas of Violence

4. Brazil is the third highest country in the world in numbers of prison population (only behind USA and China). The profile of assassinated people is the same of the prison population and 34.7% did not go to trial (Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research, 2018). Brazil, like others countries, declared war on drugs, but focused in small consumers and small dealers. These practices have demonstrated little effect on consuming patterns and trafficking, but also uncontrollably increasing mass incarceration and amplifying social problems.

These four aforementioned points intertwine, meaning that the heritage of a slavocrat country which is still unable to reduce the historical effects of this problem becomes evident when it comes to misery, crime, and how the state aims to solve this problem through mass incarceration.

### **A singular educator**

Due to the rise of homicide numbers in the state of Minas Gerais, the Homicide Control Program, *Fica Vivo*, was created in 2002, aiming to “reduce the incidence of premeditated murder with actions of prevention and repression in risk areas of the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte and other municipalities in the state [...]” (MINAS GERAIS, 2003). Among a selection of interventions, the Program foresees in its scope the work of educators with youths aged 12 to 24 inhabiting areas with high numbers of violent crime.

In general, these educators do not need to have specific formal education to perform this work in spaces called “workshops”, defined as “strategies of approach and service to the Program’s target audience” (GOVERNO DE MINAS, p. 19, 2015) which “go beyond the dimension of craft” (ibidem, p. 19). However, there are a number of demands from the state in what is expected from these professionals, which I cite some below:

- Create a relationship between the youths and the Program from their different service forms;
- Enable spaces for discussion and mediate conflicts between the youths;
- Potentialize the autonomy of the youths;

- Promote discussions on public security, citizenship and human rights;
- Provide the youths with knowledge, value and appropriation of cultural elements (GOVERNO DE MINAS, pgs. 88-89, 2009);
- Convey a craft;
- Welcome teenagers and youths, independent of their abilities with the activities developed in the workshops;
- Give space to the expression of differences and singularities without moral and prejudicial judgements;
- Integrate themes brought by the teenagers and youths in the workshops;
- Favor thought of teenagers and youths on prevention and reduction of violent rivalries (GOVERNO DE MINAS, p. 20, 2015).

As it is possible to see from the aforementioned characterization, a lot of abilities are expected from this educator beyond the teaching of a craft or conveying any type of knowledge. In general, a lot of these educators were helped by the Program, have a history of criminal involvement, and are recognized as community leaders. However, there is not a universal profile. The singularity of these educators may be in the ethical possibility that each one is able to structure in order to make interventions in complex contexts possible.

The central element of this research is the possibilities of intervention of these educators. It is a singular type of social educator that, starting from their closeness with the youths and their pedagogical practices, are able to construct new types of experiences to these youths. In general,

the mechanism of closeness is cultural, sporting, and work practices, but the most interesting part of the relationship is how these educators get close to the youths involved in violence and drug trafficking. Therefore, my first questions are: a) how can these practices be effective on violent crime prevention, especially homicide?; b) which ethical experience can be built by these social educators in this pedagogical relationship? and c) why am I interested in researching these educators? First of all, in general, these educators are born in the territories in which they develop their actions. Second, a lot of them had criminal records, were welcomed by the Program, and changed their lives. Third, they seem to be compromised with the youths in more than an educational context, but in a type of connection that demands a bond and trust. In spite of that, it seems that to prevent death or make (a more productive, happier) life, these educators have specific knowledge to relate to this cultural context and impact these youth's lives.

However, there is an element of the risk of intervention. Intervening in life-threatening situations and proposing alternatives in the scope of gang conflicts requires something bigger than the demand for state intervention. That happens because there is a whole community and crime moral grammar operation in which most of the time the state is not called to intervene, and if it did, it could become disastrous. In that sense, the educator presents another singularity: the ability to mediate diverse moral grammars, be it a) what the state prescribes as law or criminal justice system intervention, b) what lies in the moral order of communities and c) another dimension of justice and law favored by the crime. The central question of the research emerges from that: what enables this educator to come inside these diverse fields and propose interventions directed to specific problems? My bet is that two ethical elements intertwine inside

some of these educators. The first is the care of the self, the design of a particular style that constitutes their lifestyle, generating a professional and life conduct that legitimates them in the community in which they live, the job that hires them (through the state) and in the eyes of people involved in criminality. The second point is the element of courage. Intervening in these scenarios requires more than the execution of the work of transmitting a craft. To those educators that intend to intervene in conflict processes, it is necessary to have the courage of exposing their own lives to risk. The development of the research demonstrates how this singular experience is constituted.

### **Theoretical assumptions**

Although the state opts to call these professionals by the term “workshop instructors”, I opt to nominate them as educators or social educators. In theorization on social education, it is very common to highlight the multiple competencies of these educators<sup>23</sup>, who could be “art-educators, workshop instructors, popular artists, craftsmen, but are also schoolmasters, social workers, historians, geographers [...]” (Gadotti, 2021, p. 12). The Program expects these educators to be “capable of working with youths involved in crimes” (Minas Gerais, 2009, p. 88), preferably live in the community in which they work in, know “how to measure the conflicts between these youths” (ibidem, p. 88), and develop a set of formative activities in these workshops.

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<sup>23</sup> As affirmed by Daniel Struzemberg (2018), the concepts of social education receive different significations in the Anglo-Saxon context and in Ibero-America. It is not different when it comes to the notion of social educator. In the Brazilian context, the field of social education developed first in praxis, and then in the theoretical field. The emergence of social educators comes with the necessity of work in streets, communities, prisons and other public spaces in social vulnerability conditions.

I considered the notion of experience, taken from Michel Foucault, as central in the research. This concept aggregates three elements in the ethical constitution of the subject, which are: power, knowledge, and the self. It is about “the correlation between a dominion of knowledge, a type of normativity and a form of relationship with the self” (Foucault, 333, 1990). In other words, the experience is worth it to “rip the subject out of themselves” (O’Leary, 2008, p. 8).

Studying this social educator in *favelas* seems interesting to me for several reasons, but especially because of two aspects that I suppose to be in accordance, and that have better methodological possibilities. The first is the indication that it is possible to find the practical care of the self in the lives of these educators, given that this “work” seems to trespass the limit of a simple job (this project needs to be approved) or the pedagogical act or the conveying of a knowledge or craft. Besides making these workshops, it seems to me that the possibility of orienting these youths to avoid the “detours” demands a certain stylistic existence of those who speak, who orients, who acts as a reference. Therefore, there is an indication that the care of the self is a precondition to the performance of these educators with the youths in the *favelas*. That is why, in the experience of some educators there is a certain conversion of sight, some kind of “occurrence of thought” (Foucault, 2010b) that does not work in solitude, but aggregates the other as part of self-constitution. This other can be the guide of mastery, but can also be the subject of care.

My second point of interest is how much and in what way these educational practices (of “saving” lives) can be strictly correlated to a relationship of the educator with the truth, putting them in a position of life or death. On several occasions, as someone who wants to play a certain



game of parrhesia to save another's life (perpetrator or victim) in great scale, endangering their own lives. In day-to-day practices it is also possible to find fearless speech (*parrhesia*) as a constitutive element of these educators' work. In my past notes, I verify the possibility of finding, in this educator, the constitution of a certain "moral virtue" (Foucault, 2004b, p. 450) that differs from a rhetorical or pedagogical act of content sharing. I search for the possibility of finding a true will, even with all the risks that it may contain, whereas if the *parrhesists* really exist in this case, they are those who speak the truth for an undetermined price that can even lead to their own deaths" (Foucault, 2010, p. 56). I see the possibility of investigating the construction process of a subject-form (Ortega, 1999) and a subject-work (Fisher & Marcelo, 2014). With the care of the self and narration of the truth, I think of mixing the "spoken truth and the thoughts of the one who spoke it" (Foucault, 2011, p. 12).

Seeing these elements, I explain that my question is in comprehending which ethical experience is possible to be molded by a social educator who works for a Homicide Control Program. My bet is that in the conduction of the pedagogical practices of these educators, who work on public security in violent communities, it is possible to find an ethical experience constituted on the dialogue between the care of the self and the speech of the truth to conduct this work between life and death of youths in social risk.

### **Final observations**

More than conclusions, I would like to present some questions that will help my research:

a) I will search for some elements in the practices of these educators. To me, it is fundamental to recognize how these educators build their pedagogical practices. At first, I know I will not find a

singular curriculum, because the management of this project does not build meetings, impact indicators, orientations or other forms of elaboration of a systematic guide to these workers. In general, their practice is to construct sporting or cultural activities. But when do sporting and cultural activities meet affectionate relationships? How is it possible to intervene in a situation of violence?; b) But the most important thing in the research is to understand how friendship ties are built and which situations are possible or impossible to intervene in. In my observations, I found cases in which intervention can save a life. Sometimes, these actions call for local networks or institutions. Other times, these experiences need the help of police forces. However, in the majority of cases, the mechanism of intervention comes with dialogue or some kind of mediation with the parts. It is important to highlight that many of these conflicts can be related to drug trafficking, and in many situations, murder and violence are forms of resolution in which the government (state) is not called to act, or if it does, arrives after the fact. With that, I want to say that in certain *favelas* there is a type of moral grammar that regulates patterns of behavior, justice, and social control. In that sense, these educational situations are a hybrid of state presence and community mediators.

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## Charting a pathway for professional practice: Social Education as Inquiry

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### Abstract

Social education is thought-filled labor. The social educator/pedagogue responds to the person or persons they work with according to the specific socio-cultural context, the aspirations and presenting needs of the person or persons, their own lived experiences, and theory that informs practice. This complex layer of knowledge and experience means there is no one way to work with others. In the end, “it depends.” Notwithstanding heuristic practices innate to social education, there are frameworks that can aid thoughtful practice. The Teaching as Inquiry model is one example. In this paper I modify one of these models, the Spiral of Inquiry, to fit the values, approaches and focus of social education practice. The Spiral cycles around six key questions: 1) What is going on for this person or group? 2) Where are we going to concentrate our energies so that we can change the experiences and outcomes for those we work with? 3) What are we doing that is leading to the specific situation? 4) How and where can we learn what to do? 5) What can we do differently to make enough of a difference?, and 6) Have we made enough of a difference?. Each question requires sustained and considered engagement in order to craft responsive approaches when working with others. The article concludes with suggesting that thought-filled labour is only made possible by thoughtfulness, which embraces a caring and compassionate work ethic.

**Keywords:** *inquiry, social education, alternative education, Teaching as Inquiry, pedagogy*

## Introduction: Thinking about Social Education

German philosopher, Martin Heidegger once observed that what is most thought provoking, is that we “are still not thinking” (Heidegger, 1954/1968, p. 4). While you might rightly consider education providers and schools as bastions of thinking, where curiosity in the pursuit of knowledge is encouraged, in many instances education is reduced to managerialist approaches that magnify measurement, outcomes, performance and competition (Fielding & Moss, 2011). Teaching is reduced to delivering a world already named and packaged, rather than inviting students to “name their world, to change it” (Freire, 1970, p. 88). These technocratic notions have impacted upon broader roles in education that I found plainly recognisable in the title of a guide available on the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s website, *Making best use of teaching assistants* (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018). Teaching assistants, or aides, work relationally and holistically with students with additional needs. The document title suggests that as a teacher you can “make use” of teaching assistants, rather like how you would use a photocopier. The implication is that the work of teacher aides reduces to a series of standard operational procedures. This belies the notion that teacher aides can think, and can think professionally in ways that are informed by experience and theory in order to shape their everyday approaches for particular students, who are in particular circumstances at particular times.

Social education, on the other hand, challenges technocratic notions of teaching. There is no standard approach or response in social education, because as Smith (2020) puts it, “It really does depend.” My own research with alternative education tutors working within students marginalised from conventional secondary schools in New Zealand, revealed that tutors are a thoughtful workforce that responds to the individual and collective needs of their students and families (Schoone, 2016). The students attend an alternative education centre that is usually situated within the community. Tutors are responsible for providing a holistic programme to meet the educational and social needs of students. An instance of thoughtful practice I observed was when one tutor drove the students home at the end of the day. If there was a certain student he needed to talk with about some issue or matter, he would drop them home last so they could have a conversation. The tutor remarked “it was a random conversation for him, but for me I thought about it, because I’m intentional” (Schoone, 2016, p. 95). Unfortunately, there is a perception held by some education officials that tutor practice is “random” and not based upon any specific theories of practice. “All young people do in alternative education is play table tennis” was a phrase that “did the rounds”, reportedly reaching to the highest levels of government.

A challenge facing social educators, particularly in countries like New Zealand where the discipline is emerging, is how to articulate practice that seems random. In this article, I propose that the practice of social education can be imagined as thought-filled and thoughtful inquiry. Modifying a Teaching as Inquiry model, the Spiral of Inquiry, I am hopeful this approach can aid

reflection upon practice, and/or guide practice, or at least give some language in terms of how we can think about social education practice.

### **An inquiry approach**

The genesis of an inquiry approach to practice can be attributed to Kurt Lewin's work as a social psychologist during the late 1930s to 1940s. Situated in factory and neighborhood settings in the United States, Lewin and his students undertook experiments with democratic participation giving credence to "the development of powers of reflective thought, discussion, decision and action" as an alternative to autocratic coercion and "Taylor's 'scientific management'"

(Adelman, 1993, p. 7). Tipping conventional work practice and research methods on its head, Lewin (1946) proposed that people could undertake action research collaboratively to lead them out of the feeling of being in a fog, unaware of their present situation, the dangers and most importantly, "what shall we do?" (p. 36). Significantly, the proposed methodology bridged the gap between theory and action, opening a way to make scholarship immanent to practice.

Applications of action research have been made to teaching practice through Teaching as Inquiry models. Teaching as inquiry "helps teachers improve their practice through cyclic processes of identifying outcomes, planning and implementing strategies for improvement, monitoring progress in relation to outcomes, and asking the important question: What do students need to learn next in order to learn?" (Stringer & Jhagroo, 2019, pp. 39-40). The Spiral "asks you to engage in a process that will be full of surprises and also deeply satisfying, because you will make tangible progress in addressing real learner-related challenges" (Timperley et al. 2014, p.

6). However, the pitfalls of the Spiral of Inquiry are that it tends to position educators as having

agency over students rather than inviting students into the inquiry itself and there is a propensity for the inquiry to focus on problem solving rather than taking a strengths-based approach.

In this paper I reimagine the Spiral of Inquiry within social education practice. This includes renaming the phases to fit within a more phenomenologically oriented ontological frame (see Schoone, 2020b). I will describe each phase of the Spiral and give examples of how each part has been reflected in my own work with tutors in aAlternative eEducation settings in New Zealand.



Figure 1. Spiral of Inquiry (Timperley et al., 2014)



## 1. Scanning/ Being-with

The first phase of the inquiry process is scanning. This involves taking a wide view of the person or group of people you are working with to ascertain, “What is going on for this person, or group?” “Scans provide the overview. They are not the main event in the inquiry spiral” (Timperley et al., 2014, p. 9). Scanning is being curious. In social education this curiosity develops through being present with others and showing interest.

Heidegger’s (1954/1968) etymological analysis of interest is instructive: “Interest, *interesse*, means to be among and in the midst of things, or to be at the center of a thing and stay with it” (p. 5). As the social educators establish and develop relationships they are in a privileged position to share and partake in the knowing of others. This knowing is reciprocated between the social educator and those they work with. In my own study with tutors, I found one hallmark of practice was that tutors were, “students of their students” (Schoone, 2016). From my conversation with tutors:

the tutor knows the students  
who went to bed at 3am in the morning  
she knows the stoners, and the ones who watch telly all night  
doing maths at 9am ‘aint gonna work  
(Schoone, 2020a, p. 75)

The knowledge the tutor holds does not have power over students but informs their practice and may well form the basis for the sustained inquiry.

In scanning/being-with others the social educator can ascertain funds of knowledge. Funds of knowledge acknowledges, “People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (González, et al. 2005, p. ix-x). This home knowledge is not often recognised in a school curriculum, and may encompass family, cultural and religious practices, languages, or other practical skills (such as, car mechanics or gardening). In 21<sup>st</sup> century life we must also acknowledge new funds of knowledge that derive from technology, such as social media (e.g Instagram and TikTok), gaming, Twitch streaming or being a YouTuber. These funds of knowledge may provide the social educator with clues to inform a responsive approach that begins with validating the life-worlds of those they work with.

## **2. Focusing/Beholding**

The next phase into the inquiry involves standing back from all the information gained about a person or group of people, to ask “Where are we going to concentrate our energies so that we can change the experiences and outcomes for our learners”? (Timperley et al., 2014, p. 10).

Heidegger (1954/1968) might ask, “What is most thought provoking”? (p. 4) and in a social education context, we might ask, as Petrie (2015, p. 90) does, “What will promote further independence, or interdependence?” In all cases, this phase is about creating a focus for practice.

In working with tutors in a professional capacity, I would encourage them to not only develop “relationships” but develop “working relationships.” This requires putting some learning or developmental task or tasks in the center of the relationship. In most settings, the ethical course of action is to invite the student, client, or group of people the social educator is working with, to

co-construct the learning or development focus together. The social educator would have an open discussion, “Where are we at?” “What’s on your mind?” “I have noticed...” “What could be a focus?” Some areas of focus for tutor practice could form from within one of these domains:

- Students being present and engaging in education in its broadest sense
- Students becoming healthy, prosocial and having positive attitudes
- Students engaging in academic learning, and
- Students having a sense of identity and vision for their lives.

(Schoone, 2016, pp. 108-111)

In other terms, the focus is finding the “chief” area to work with. That area which is top of mind. Etymologically, the English word “achieve” has Latin roots literally meaning “to come to a head” (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.) so I suggest here that the social educator’s role facilitates a process where “chief” or “head things” can be faced.

### 3. Developing a hunch/Burdening

Hunches are, “A feeling or guess based on intuition rather than fact” (Lexico, n.d.). In the previous phase, the social educator, drawing from being-with others, and informed by professional knowledge, has arrived at a provisional area of focus. This current phase is twofold. Firstly, the social educator must surface their hunches, and test them, and secondly, must reflexively inquire into, “What are we doing that is leading to the specific situation for our learners?” (Timperley, et al., 2014, p. 12). I have imagined this as burdening. Burdening is an unusual word that can evoke negative connotations of being oppressed by some force, weight or anxiety. However, in this context, the sense is that the social educator is sharing in the burden of knowledge gained. It rejects a dispassionate approach to knowledge that would position the social educator as neutral, objectifying those with whom the social educator works. It recognizes Palmer’s (1997) assertion that, “...any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our ways of being together” (p. 15).

One goal for students attending alternative education centers is to develop their independence. A practice in some centers, however, is that a van collects the students from their home each morning, brings them to the center, and returns them home at the end of the day. In one center, as the tutors reflected on the need to develop independence, they interrogated their own practices that were creating dependency. The center decided to reduce the number of van pick-ups, and tutors worked with students on how they could make their own way to the center, by walking (if close-by), biking, or catching public transport. In further examples, perhaps those the social

educator works with have a goal to learn to play an instrument. What if the social educator considers themselves “unmusical” and therefore steers away from pursuing this opportunity? Perhaps there are deep-seated prejudices against those with disabilities, those from the LGBTQI communities or those from certain religious and ethnic backgrounds that are inadvertently influencing practice in some way. Ultimately, this phase is a chance for the social educator to reflect upon one’s *Haltung*, the “moral compass that guides every action taken in every area of an individual’s life” (Charfe & Gardiner, 2020, p. 3) and surface assumptions in order to deeply reflect on practice before moving ahead with the inquiry.

#### **4. New Learning/Broadening knowledge**

The Spiral includes an in-built phase of professional and/or personal learning and development. “How and where can we learn more about what to do?” (Timperley et al., 2014, p. 14). Here the social educator broadens their professional knowledge in relation to the area of agreed focus. In some instances, it may involve learning more about working with people with additional or special needs. It could include collegial discussions in which there is a sharing of practices. It may be about learning a particular skill or searching for those who could be called upon to assist (for example, finding that music teacher!). It could involve investigating within research articles. The list goes on. Overall, the social educator is developing their professional knowledge and skills to facilitate an informed approach to the task at-hand.

## **5. Take Action/Becoming**

Taking action is an opportunity for a new becoming. Here, we recognize that each person is in process, we can never say we have “arrived.” Taking action involves determining, “What can we do differently to make enough of a difference?” (Timperley et al., 2014, p. 17). With reference to the area of focus ascertained in Phase 2, specific actions are planned. Ideally, the social educator works together with those they are in care of in developing a shared course of action. This would reflect the upper rungs of Hart’s (1992) ladder of empowerment where young people and adults share the decision making. The experience and professional knowledge of the social educator, including insights and skills gained in the previous phase, can help shape those actions.

By-and-large the focus for learning and development should adhere to principles of SMART goals: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. Each of the goals is an opportunity to facilitate a new becoming. And as the social educator and those they work with enact the goals, each new becoming beckons a celebration.

## **6. Checking/Beginning again**

In research with tutors, I found their students made incremental or sporadic development rather than rapid or wide-reaching life transformation. As one tutor put it, it’s “little steps of epiphany all the time” (Schoone, 2016, p. 114). Timperley et al. (2014, p. 22) have observed that “Momentum for substantive transformation builds from multiple inquiries.” Reflecting on goal achievement, therefore, is an opportunity to review achievement to discover, “Have we made enough of a difference”? (Timperley et al. 2014, p. 19). With the earlier example, of students making their own way to the alternative education centre, the tutors inquire as to whether

students have independently and consistently made their way to the center in the mornings. If so, the inquiry has been successful and a new inquiry can be started. If not, it may mean cycling back through the inquiry. Perhaps independence as the focus area could be changed to another aspect, rather than transport (Phase 2). Perhaps there are other tutor practices that are creating dependency (Phase 3). Perhaps more knowledge is required (Phase 4). Perhaps the action points need revising, to provide further scaffolding for students (Phase 5). Perhaps a new inquiry needs to begin with only a selection of those students. In any case, the social educator, along with those they work with, decides if the inquiry has been successful. Overall it is the satisfaction of learning that accompanies fulfillment of an inquiry. This is because the chief area of focus has been faced.

## **Conclusion**

I conclude this article with a reflection on the notion of being a thoughtful practitioner. The inquiry approach provides one side of the thinking coin, a logical/cerebral process. The other side of the coin makes possible the first side, thoughtfulness. Thoughtfulness is imbued with compassion and caring. And as van Manen (2002 p.5) contends “Thoughtfulness is a special kind of knowledge.” Running through an inquiry process without thoughtfulness would invoke professional distance. Van Manen (2002, p. 25) cautions, “There is an acute danger in thinking professionally about students [others].” Social education, therefore, is a thoughtful and thought-filled labor, a way of being with others that can facilitate and inspire new becomings.

The point of this article was to provide a scheme for “thinking about thinking” in social education practice: being-with, beholding, burdening, broadening knowledge, becoming and beginning again. This alliterative version revises the Spiral of Inquiry for social educators. In working within any caring professions it can be easy to, as Lewin (1946) puts it, be lost in the fog. The presentation of successive phases in the Spiral provides a pathway forward and backwards. For example, solely being-with others, with no impulse for developing with others, can lack purpose. Being able to detect issues, challenges or opportunities and not implement some change process, can be demotivating and/or overwhelming. A focus on developing a philosophy of approach along with continual acquisition of knowledge not directly relevant to practice, keeps the social educator at a theoretical level. But then again, social educators can be caught up “doing, doing, doing” and as Freire (1970) points out, action without reflection can become activism. Freire (1970) calls for praxis, which is action with reflection. Finally, without a growth mindset that invites a beginning again, the social educator and those they care for may fall back into old habits and routines. I agree with Timperley et al. (2014, p. 22) that inquiry is “not a ‘project’, an ‘initiative’ or an ‘innovation’ but a professional way of being.” Inquiry provides a language and a way of thinking about social education practice that stimulates curiosity, learning and creative pathways forward when working with others.

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