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Article

Social pedagogy, social education and social work in Spain: Convergent paths

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Abstract

The rise of social pedagogy in recent years has led to a revival of discourses and practices in the fields of social work and pedagogy. Both fields have seen a renewed way of interpreting social and educational relationships and professional practice. This, in turn, has resulted in ongoing analysis and debate regarding the academic and professional affiliation of social pedagogy in recent decades. The aim of this article is to provide an outline of how these disciplines and practices have evolved in Spain. This study adopts a comparative perspective to present a descriptive analysis of the history, training and areas of professional intervention of social pedagogy, social education and social work. The first section discusses the complexity of the relationships between them. In the following two sections, the historical evolution of these disciplines is analysed, highlighting their fundamental milestones. This is followed by a comparison of their respective professional profiles and initial training. The next section then reveals shared professional intervention areas and those that are specific to each professional practice. By way of conclusion, a critical reflection is provided on the way in which the relationship between social pedagogy and social work is usually approached, and also the positioning of the relationship between these disciplines and practices.

Keywords: social pedagogy; social education; social work; social assistance; history of social education; history of social work; social professions; Spanish social professions

The rise of social pedagogy in recent years has led to a revival of discourses and practices in the fields of social work and pedagogy. Its widespread development in Latin America, English-speaking countries and other parts of the world since the beginning of the new century shows the versatility, applicability and usefulness of this theoretical-practical approach when it comes to addressing the situations and problems facing today's complex societies.

In the field of social work, and particularly in English-speaking countries, the social pedagogy approach has brought with it a renewed way of tackling and experiencing relationships with clients, among other things. This has resulted in humanised socio-educational relationships that take as a starting point for action not so much the uncritical application of institutional regulations as the life perspectives experienced by the participants themselves regarding their situation in the world (Kirkwood, Roesch-Marsh and Cooper, 2019).

In the field of pedagogy, it has meant giving visibility and weight to all those learning processes that have existed outside the school environment and not been institutionally regulated. With this, we refer to processes that were marginalised and frequently invisible, taking place outside the national curricula and were for many years implemented by agents with a professional status that was either non-existent or, at best, ambiguous.

Nowadays, there is a consensus that pedagogy exists beyond the institutional teaching-learning relationships present in the school setting, and social relationships occurring outside school are or can be learning relationships mediated by education.

Social pedagogy is pedagogy in the broad sense (Moss and Petrie, 2019; Petrie, 2005). The meaning of this statement becomes clear if we consider that all pedagogy became school-related during the twentieth century. Caride (2004) points out that, in general, 'much more emphasis was placed on the "social" of education than on the "educational" of the social' (p. 64). Today we can confidently state that, beyond fixed and predetermined school spaces or timetables, this expanded pedagogy completely permeates and mediates individuals' contexts and life-paths (Kornbeck and Rosendal Jensen, 2011, 2012).

Given these renewed perspectives, it is not surprising that authors in both the disciplinary and professional spheres, that of social work and that of pedagogy, wish to claim social pedagogy as their own. It is well known that ways of relating to one another vary considerably between different European countries with regard to the characteristics of both initial training and professional practice (Janer and Úcar, 2017, 2019, 2020).

The aim of this article is to provide an outline of how these disciplines and practices have evolved in Spain. To this end, a comparative perspective has been adopted to present a descriptive analysis of the history, training and areas of professional intervention of social pedagogy, social education and social work.

The complexity of the relationships existing between social pedagogy and social work is discussed in the first section of the article. In the following two sections, the historical evolution of both disciplines is analysed, highlighting their fundamental milestones. This is followed by a comparison of their respective professional profiles and initial training. Shared professional intervention areas and those that are specific to each professional practice are addressed in the next section. To conclude the article, a critical reflection is provided on the way in which the relationship between social pedagogy and social work is usually approached, and also our position on the relationship between these disciplines and practices.

Social pedagogy and social work: a complex relationship

The rise of social pedagogy has also brought to the fore questions over its academic and professional affiliation and its relationships with social work. This is an issue that has garnered controversy since its first appearance in Germany more than a century and a half ago, but which has been exacerbated in Europe in recent decades.

Many different views have been expressed on the topic: that pedagogy is more theoretical and general and that social work is a more practical and applied science (Mátel and Krejčí, 2016); that social work falls under the umbrella of the social sciences while social pedagogy comes under that of pedagogy (Llena, 2018); that social work is more bureaucratic and that the social educator works more closely with people (De Leon, 2014); that social work focuses on solving problematic situations while social pedagogy

is more focused on prevention (Kraus and Hoferková, 2016); that social education is oriented towards intellectual development and forming citizens, while social work seeks to improve quality of life through the coordination of social resources (Ponce de León and Castro, 2014); that social pedagogy can be distinguished from social work in that it is not oriented only towards deficits (Hämäläinen, 2003a; Lorenz, 2008); and, lastly and among many other affirmations, that social work adopts a broad perspective towards problem solving, while social pedagogy specifically seeks pedagogical remedies (Stephens, 2009).

Many classifications have also been devised for the relationships that have emerged between them. Perhaps the simplest and best known is the one that identifies them (*convergence theory*), distinguishes them or connects them in different degrees (Hämäläinen, 2003b). One of the most extensive is that provided by Schilling (1999), which identifies the historical relationships that have occurred between them in the German context: ‘subordination, substitution, identity, alternative, convergence and subsumption’ (quoted in Mátel and Krejčí, 2016, p. 82).

A debate also arose around the relationships between them in Spain in the 1980s and 1990s (see Alfonso, 1988; Barney, 1995; Riera, 1996). The question was: ‘Complementary or opposed?’ (Alfonso García, 1993, p. 215). It was a debate brought about by circumstance, given that social work, a more or less consolidated profession in the field of social services at the time, had witnessed the appearance of new professionals – social educators – who sought to act in what had previously been their exclusive territory (Alfonso García, 1993; Benito Martínez, 1997; Quintana, 1994).

Janer Hidalgo (2016) has pointed out that professions in the social sphere are intrinsically linked to the historical, political and social development of each country. This naturally means that the relationship between social pedagogy, social education and social work differs according to each context. In the next section, we will see how they have historically related to one another in Spain and the current situation in this context.

From social assistance to social work

In Spain, the state began to regulate aspects related to poverty, charity and aid from the nineteenth century onwards (Morales, 2010), this constituting the earliest manifestation of the social assistance that would end up becoming the current profession of social work.

Table 1 shows the main milestones in the history of social work in Spain.

Table 1. Milestones in the history of social work in Spain (Source: Author, 2021).

Political Context and Year	Milestone
Reign of Ferdinand VII 1822	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charity Law. Creation of ‘social assistance’ centres.
2nd Republic 1932	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of the School of Social Assistance for Women in Barcelona. Institutionalisation of social work in Spain. The Catholic Church plays a fundamental role.
Dictatorship 1964 1966	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of the School of Social Assistants. The Ministry of Education approves the curriculum for social assistants. The government of the National-Catholic dictatorship and the Female Falangist Section has a decisive say in the academic content.
1967	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of the Official School of Social Assistants in Madrid. Constitution of the Spanish Federation of Social Assistants (FEDASS).
1968	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1st National Congress of Social Assistants. Considered to be the founding act of the discipline. It refers to social work rather than social service or social assistance.

Table 1. *Cont.*

Political Context and Year	Milestone
1969	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M. Marchioni publishes <i>Community and development</i>. He is the main promoter of the majority of community development plans that are carried out in Spain. He has a great influence on both social work and social education.
1970	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'The first version of the <i>Pedagogy of the oppressed</i> [by Paulo Freire] that circulated in Spain was a pirated edition, multi-reproduced, that someone took care of translating, reproducing and clandestinely distributing by certain pedagogical circles' (Ayuste and Trilla, 2020, p. 3, author's translation). Freire has been a great influence on social education and social work.
1971	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> J. M. Vázquez publishes the <i>Situation of the social service in Spain</i>, the first sociological study on social work at the national level.
1972	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the 2nd National Congress of Social Assistants, held in Madrid, G. Rubiol raises the need to research social work for the first time.
Democracy	
1978	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approval of the Spanish Constitution. The State of Autonomies is created.
1980	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of a decentralised structure of welfare services. The profession plays a fundamental role in creating and consolidating the social services systems to be employed by the autonomous communities.
1982	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of the Official Colleges of Graduates in Social Work and Social Assistants.
1983	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of the Spanish General Council of Official Social Work Colleges. The Official School of Social Assistants in Madrid becomes the Complutense University of Madrid's University School of Social Work.
1985–6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First graduation year of Diploma students in Social Work.
1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of the area of knowledge 'Social Work and Social Services' at university. The Official University Qualification of Diploma in Social Work is established (three-year training course, first cycle).
1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approval of the profession's code of ethics. Subsequently modified six times, the last being in 2015.
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> White Paper on Social Work defining professional profiles, functions and competences.
2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approval of the Law for the Promotion of Personal Autonomy and Care for People in Dependency, which recognises the social rights of people in situations of dependency. It provides a broad boost for the profession of social workers and for the social services.

Note: Compiled from the works conducted by Ayuste and Trilla, 2020; Barahona, 2016; Barbero, 2002; Del Río Mulas, 2014; Fullana, Serra and Pallisera, 2011; Gil Parejo, 2014; Gómez García and Torices Blanco, 2012; Gómez Gómez and Herrador Buendía, 2009; Matos-Silveira, 2013; Mendioroz Goñi, 2014; Morán Carrillo and Díaz Jiménez, 2016; Paniagua Fernández, Lázaro Fernández and Rubio Guzmán, 2010; Pérez-Eransus and Martínez-Virto, 2020; Quintana, 1996; Riera Romaní, 1998; Sanz Cintor, 2001; Vázquez, 2004.

From a more general point of view, based on a content analysis of the 13 congresses held until 2013, Morán Carrillo and Díaz Jiménez (2016) define four major stages in the discipline's development:

- Gestation* stage (1968–71). Which aimed to define the discipline's professional status and clarify professional semantics. This stage was characterised by a low profile of ideology and social criticism.
- Ideological* stage (1972–6). These were the years prior to the dictator's death. The content of the congresses had a strong ideological focus, with participants calling for awareness of the current situation and proposing the role of social workers as agents of political change.
- Technical/Ideological* stage (1977–87). The beginnings of democracy. It was a time when the social service systems were developed in Spain. 'Technical debate merges with political debate'

(Morán Carrillo and Díaz Jiménez, 2016, p. 201), which led professionals to consider the functions they had to fulfil in the social services and the strategic configuration of said public system in Spain. One of the conclusions of the congresses during this stage was that ‘a solid base cannot be constructed for social work outside the auspices of social policy and the Social Services’ (Morán Carrillo and Díaz Jiménez, 2016, p. 203).

- (d) *Professionalising stage* (1988–2013). Where the aim was to clarify the relationships and differences between social work and social services. Social workers began to look to Europe and what was being done in other countries.

Morán Carrillo and Díaz Jiménez (2016) conclude that ‘social work in Spain moves from critical conformity (dictatorship) to reactive criticism (pre and post-transition) and from there to a proposal for modernisation’ (p. 210).

Several aspects should be highlighted in relation to how the profession has developed in Spain. Summarising the ideas posited by various authors, Matos-Silveira (2013) stated that the functional dependence resulting from the first studies on social assistance being conducted by the Catholic Church under the dictatorship considerably delayed the development of the profession of social work.

With regard to its development, we must also point out the consequences of the profession’s identification with the social services. This identification was a result of the important role played by social work professionals in creating and consolidating the social services system in Spain throughout the 1980s and 1990s. This would include the predominance of a bureaucratic-administrative professional performance model (Barahona, 2016; Barbero, 2002; Del Río Mulas, 2014; Hernández Echegaray, 2018), which led to social workers being identified as *providers of resources* (Barbero, 2002, p. 123). A national study by Ballestero Izquierdo, Viscarret Garro and Úriz Pemán (2013) confirmed as much, finding that more than 80 per cent of social work professionals acknowledge their usual work as being somewhat or fairly related to bureaucratic and administrative tasks. Hernández Echegaray pointed out that social work has focused more on building the public social services system than on itself as a discipline. Being subordinate to specific social services tasks has led to professionals losing skills (‘deskilling’) and de-professionalising, resulting in what the author refers to as the ‘industrialisation of social work’ (Hernández Echegaray, 2018, p. 146).

It is also worth emphasising the high proportion of women in the profession (Matos-Silveira, 2013). When analysing the academic literature, it is notable how often academics and professionals who study the field refer to social work professionals as females. In a national study, it was found that 91 per cent of professionals are women and only 9 per cent are men (Viscarret, Ballestero, Idareta and Úriz, 2016).

How social pedagogy became professionalised as social education

During the twentieth century, three currents of thought and action arrived in Spain from Germany, the UK and France, respectively. The first was philosophical and focused on the concept of pedagogy. It was a line of thought that mainly reached universities. The second focused on the sciences of education and a scientific vision of it. This also mainly influenced academic settings. The third was a pragmatic and action-based perspective, focused on solving problems and needs detected in people and communities (see Caride and Ortega, 2015; Ortega, 2005; Ortega, Caride and Úcar, 2013; Úcar, 2011). This latter approach, from France, reached neighbourhoods and communities. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, social pedagogy became a compulsory academic discipline in the undergraduate studies that comprise the profession of social education.

Table 2 shows the main milestones in the history of social pedagogy and social education in Spain.

Table 2. Milestones in the history of social pedagogy and social education in Spain (Source: Author, 2021).

Political Context and Year	Milestone
Reign of Alfonso XIII	
1905	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M. Rodríguez Navas publishes <i>Social pedagogy</i>.
1913	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul Natorp's work <i>Social pedagogy</i> is translated into Spanish.
1918	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of the Superior Council for the Protection of Minors, which abolishes prison sentences for children and adolescents.
1920	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R. Ruíz Amado publishes <i>Social education</i>.
Dictatorship	
1944	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The University of Madrid incorporates contents of social pedagogy on the subject of 'Rational Pedagogy (individual and social)' into its Pedagogy studies curriculum.
1955	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The University of Valencia incorporates the subject of 'Social Pedagogy' into its Pedagogy studies curriculum.
1961	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of Escola de l'Esplai in Barcelona, dedicated to the training of free-time educators.
1969	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of the Training Centre for Specialised Educators in Barcelona. The Church plays a key role in opening this centre. • M. Marchioni publishes <i>Community and development</i>. He is the main promoter of the majority of community development plans that are carried out in Spain. He has a great influence on both social work and social education.
1970	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The General Education Act (LOE) establishes the first regulated training of 'Educators' in 2nd year vocational training. • 'The first version of the <i>Pedagogy of the oppressed</i> [by Paulo Freire] that circulated in Spain was a pirated edition, multi-reproduced, that someone took care of translating, reproducing and clandestinely distributing by certain pedagogical circles' (Ayuste and Trilla, 2020, p. 3, author's translation). Freire has been a great influence on social education and social work.
1972	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of the Association of Specialised Education in Barcelona.
Democracy	
1978	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval of the Spanish Constitution. • The State of Autonomies is created. • The Ministry of Culture creates the Subdirectorate General for Cultural Animation and the General Directorate for Community Development.
1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference on Sociocultural Animation organised by the Ministry of Culture's Youth Institute.
1981	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Training Centre for Specialised Educators in Barcelona becomes Escola Flor de Maig, under the wing of the Barcelona Provincial Council. • 1st National Conference on Social Pedagogy and Sociology of Education. Beginning of university conferences that will result in the creation of the Iberoamerican Society of Social Pedagogy (SIPS).
1983	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Jornades d'Educació d'Adults (Adult Education Conference) held in Barcelona.

Table 2. Cont.

Political Context and Year	Milestone
1984	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of <i>Social pedagogy</i> by J. M. Quintana. Showing a clear German influence, he presents social pedagogy as a pedagogical approach to social work.
1986	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of the first issue of the journal <i>Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria</i>.
1987	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry report on new education degrees prepared by university experts (Commission XV). It proposes creating the bachelor's degree (five years) in Social Pedagogy.
1988	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Congress of Specialised Educators held in Pamplona. • Conference on training for educators and socio-cultural agents. The professional profiles of educators, the so-called historical profiles and initial training are defined. • Creation of the Coordinator of State Sociocultural Animation Schools (CEPAS).
1991	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Official University Diploma in Social Education is established (three-year training, first cycle).
1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Professional Association of Specialised Educators of Catalonia (APEEC) is renamed the Professional Association of Social Educators of Catalonia (APESC).
1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First State Congress of Social Education held in Murcia. • First year of Social Education Diploma graduates.
1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of the Professional College of Social Educators of Catalonia (CEESC), the first in Spain.
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of the State Association for Social Education (ASEDES). • Creation of the Iberian Society of Social Pedagogy (SIPS). Two years later, it is renamed the Ibero-American Society for Social Pedagogy (SIPS).
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval of the code of ethics for social educators.
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of the General Council of Colleges for Social Educators in Spain (CGCEES). • The CGCEES defines social education as a 'right of citizenship'.
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocates for the government to approve a Social Education Act.

Note: Compiled from the works conducted by ANECA, 2005; Ayuste and Trilla, 2020; Caride, 2004, 2011; Caride and Ortega, 2015; Catalá, 2003; Chamseddine, 2013; Fermoso, 2003; Fullana Noell, Pallisera, Tesouro and Castro, 2009; March, Orte and Ballester, 2016; Melendro, De-Juanas and Rodríguez-Bravo, 2018; Monreal Bel and López Zaguirre, 2018; Ortega, 2005; Ortín Pérez, 2003; Planella, 2020; Quintana, 1984; Riera Romaní, 1998; Sáez Careras, 2007; Senent, 2003; Tiana, Somoza and Badanelli, 2014; Úcar, 1992, 2013; Vega Fuente, 1988; Vilar and Planella, 2011).

The first point worth noting in the history outlined above is the meeting of different traditions, not only related to thought, as pointed out at the beginning, but also to action. While some of these originated in other countries, others have a long tradition in Spain. Adult education, popular education, social pedagogy, free-time education, social education, specialised education and socio-cultural animation joined together in what would end up becoming the profession of the social educator – a heterogeneous and diverse profession integrating different forms of social, educational and cultural work.

As previously mentioned, social pedagogy has been developed in the academic field. The initiatives and experiences that were instigated in the neighbourhoods of Spain from the 1950s onwards had differing nomenclatures. Over the next three decades, socio-educational experiences flourished in Spanish communities led by a whole series of 'artisan' interveners, who went by a long list of very different names: monitors, social animators, street educators, socio-cultural animators, work monitors, civic animators, free-time educators, specialised educators, local development agents and many more. The training of these agents was carried out by municipal bodies.

A very interesting fact about those times, when the ‘social’ occupations of the day were not assigned to specific fields or university degrees, is that theorists and practitioners of different disciplines or specific professions offered to adopt said occupations through written documents and events. One occupation where this could be seen very clearly was that of socio-cultural animation. Publications could be found in the fields of teaching, sociology, social work, pedagogy and psychology linking them with that occupation at the time (Úcar, 1992).

The 1988 conference on training for educators and socio-cultural agents, held in Barcelona, unified all these occupations into the three so-called historical profiles, that is, adult education, specialised education and socio-cultural animation.

With regard to these historical profiles, which initially configured what social education and, above all, the groups and associations behind each profile were to become, it was those involved in adult education who were most reluctant to accept such integration. Being more oriented towards school than social aspects led the professionals in that field to fight for their inclusion in the sphere of teaching rather than social education studies (Monreal Bel and López Zaguirre, 2018). The majority group was that of specialised educators, which is why they are considered by some to be the clearest predecessors of social educators (Fullana et al., 2011; Moreno López, Fernández Montañaño and Moyano Mangas, 2018; Quintana, 1994). It is worth noting that, anticipating their integration into the field of social education, they were quick to replace the term ‘specialised’ with ‘social’ in the names given to their association and professional profile (Julià i Bosch, 2011).

Currently, social pedagogy in Spain is an interdisciplinary matrix of theoretical and practical knowledge that guides the actions of social educators. Social education, for its part, is a socio-educational practice, a social and cultural profession and a university degree in the field of education. This means that we can define two separate professional fields: a disciplinary one, that of social pedagogy, where we mainly find scholars, and a professional one, where we find social educators.

It should also be noted that the field of social pedagogy is not limited to the profession of social education in Spain. Other non-university professionals with advanced vocational training, such as those who work in social integration or socio-cultural animation, are also linked to it.

Professional profile and university training in social work and social education

As we have seen in the previous sections, the first university social work graduates entered the labour market ten years earlier than those from the field of social education. We have also pointed out that social work is more homogeneous, insofar as it is only made up of social assistants who will later become social workers, while social education integrates professionals from different areas. This was key in both the deployment of the two professions and the social recognition given to them in Spain. It was also one reason, among many others, for the initial friction between the two professional groups (Benito Martínez, 1997; Quintana, 1994), especially in the professional areas in which they both worked, such as primary care social services, for example. These frictions have since diminished considerably due to the effects of time, the shared path and the experience of acting in the same areas and with the same population, as well as the sharing of common problems.

Table 3 compares definitions of the two professions and the studies that led to them being detailed in the respective White Papers,¹ the *Official State Gazette* and their main associations.

¹The White Papers were commissioned by the Spanish National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) as the basis for adapting university degrees to the requirements of the European Higher Education Area.

Table 3. Comparison of the professional profiles of social educator and social worker based on the definitions provided by the respective White Papers and the respective General Associations (Source: Author, 2021).

Social Education	Social Work
<p>White Paper. Bachelor’s Degree in Pedagogy and Social Education (2005): ‘Social educators are agents of social change, drivers of social groups who use educational strategies that help subjects to understand their social, political, economic and cultural environment and integrate properly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventing and compensating for difficulties individuals have in structuring their personality and social maladjustments. • Fostering individuals’ autonomy. • Organising activities aimed at education, culture, recreation . . . • Promoting the search for information and understanding in and of the social environment. • Developing the critical spirit and the capacity to understand and analyse socio-political reality. • Fostering participation among groups and individuals. • Fostering the improvement of competences and aptitudes among individuals. • Promoting social change and transformation. • Fostering socio-cultural, socio-labour, institutional and community development. • Contributing to the creation and consolidation of the social fabric and local associations.’ (p. 127) 	<p>White Paper. Bachelor’s Degree in Social Work (2004): ‘Social workers are professionals of social action who have a broad understanding of social structures and processes, social change and human behaviour, which enables them to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intervene in situations (problems) of social (unrest) experienced by individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities, assisting, managing conflicts and exercising as mediators; • Participate in the formulation of Social Policies; • Contribute to active citizenship through empowerment and guaranteeing social rights. • This has the ultimate aim of contributing together with other of social action professionals to achieve: (A) the social integration of individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities, (B) a cohesive society and (C) quality of life and social well-being.’ (p. 111)
<p><i>Official State Gazette</i> (10 October 1991): ‘Teaching will be oriented towards training educators in the fields of: non-formal education; adult education (including senior citizens); social integration of maladjusted people; social integration of disabled people; and socio-educational action.’</p>	<p><i>Official State Gazette</i> (20 November 1990): ‘Teaching leading to the official qualification of Diploma in Social Work must provide adequate training in the theoretical bases and techniques of social workers.’</p>
<p>State Association of Social Education (ASEDES, 2007): ‘Right of citizens recognising a pedagogical profession which generates educational contexts and mediating and training actions that are the professional competence of the social educator, enabling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The subject of education’s incorporation into diverse social networks, understood as developing sociability and social circulation. • Cultural and social promotion, understood as opening up to new possibilities for the acquisition of cultural assets that broaden educational, work, leisure and social participation perspectives.’ (p. 12) 	<p>Statute of the Profession of Social Work/Social Assistant Graduates (2001): ‘Social work is the discipline from which the professional activity of social worker/social assistant is derived, which aims to promote social change, problem resolution in human relations and the strengthening and freedom of the people to increase well-being via the use of theories on human behaviour and social systems. Social work intervenes at the points where individuals interact with their environment. The principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental in social work.’ (n.p.)</p>

The differences in the definitions that the *Official State Gazette* provides for the two degree studies are very evident in relation to not only their content, but also the awareness of them or their representation in Spanish society. While it is assumed that everyone understands what social work studies refer to, social education studies need to be explained, given the integration of occupations it entails. And the latter was done in a fairly careless way from a technical and epistemological point of view (Úcar, 1996).

With regard to university training, we will refer to data from a study carried out by Moreno et al. (2018), which analysed 42 degree studies in social education and social work at Spanish universities. These authors point out that over 90 per cent of the social education degrees in Spain are taught in faculties of education. The remaining 10 per cent are taught in faculties of social sciences and, of these, a joint

degree with social work is only offered in two cases. Regarding social work degrees, these are generally taught in their own faculties or in labour law and/or social sciences faculties. Only in two cases do they appear in both education and social work faculties.

Regarding the content of the two studies on university curricula, no national research has been found to compare them in Spain. However, based on a comparison of the studies at one Spanish university, Moreno et al. (2018) concluded that social education studies are built around educational and pedagogical aspects, whereas those pertaining to social work are built around services and social rights. The perspectives presented by the White Papers and professional associations in Table 3 confirm this. They also point out that social education is concerned with the social, cultural and educational development of individuals in civic settings, while social work is more oriented towards quality of life, cohesion and social well-being.

One very interesting point regarding the evolution of both degrees is related to research. The fact that both were initially considered a diploma – that is, first-cycle studies with a duration of three years – limited the possibility of conducting research in the respective fields, since Spanish regulations established that research could only be conducted on five-year bachelor's degree studies – that is, from the second cycle. In respect of this, Ponce de León and Castro (2014) pointed out that the degree in pedagogy was a great ally of social education as it facilitated socio-educational research in this field. Social workers 'who wanted to do their doctoral theses had to study another related subject (mainly Sociology) to be able to do it' (p. 150). According to these authors, this explains the lack of research in the field of social work.

All this changed with the arrival of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2008–9 and the transformation of both diplomas into the current undergraduate degrees in social work and social education, which are four-year courses in Spain.

Areas of intervention in social education and social work

Before beginning to characterise the areas in which these professionals operate, it is necessary to provide some context. Both work in the social field, which is constantly evolving. Over time, the emergence of new social phenomena and/or problems leads to the appearance and/or disappearance of spaces for intervention. Thus, any snapshot that seeks to define these areas can only be, by definition, provisional. In the field of social education, for example, schools constitute one of the new areas for intervention in recent years. Five Spanish autonomous regions currently legislate for the participation of social educators in schools (Alventosa-Bleda, Pulido-Montes and De Oliveira, 2020). Mediation is another area for intervention that has appeared in Spain recently, and one that is shared by both professions.

Another element that may cause variations in the material presented in Table 4 is a specific area in which both professions operate: the social services. Spain's autonomous regions design their own social services laws based on their respective realities. This has generated differences in relation to the specific spaces of intervention and the professionals who work in them. The table, which shows the areas of professional action in which social educators and social workers intervene, only offers an overview, and does not therefore precisely reflect the individual reality of each and every autonomous region.

Several ideas emerge from Table 4. First, it is evident that there are a large number of areas of intervention in which both professions operate in Spain, although we cannot infer from this that they carry out the same functions. This analysis also confirms what was noted in the previous section. Generically, we can state that social education works primarily in areas related to people's learning and their social, educational and cultural development in their own socio-cultural environments, while social work acts to resolve specific problems, helping to improve the well-being of individuals, groups and communities and social life in general.

It is, in all probability, these very differences that enable the two professions to act together in the same situation or in the face of a specific problem. The differences also make it easier for them to contribute various technical perspectives within the multi-professional teams in which they operate, such as primary care teams, for example.

Table 4. Areas of action for social educators and social workers (Source: Author, 2021).

Areas of Professional Action		Social Educator	Social Worker
Primary care social services	Primary care teams Home help and visits Day care centres Emergency social services		
Justice	Adult justice (prisons, care for victims, etc.) Monitoring alternative/non incarceration penal measures Youth justice (closed educational centres, street intervention, etc.) Technical assessment for judges Mediation		
Protection of children and adolescents at risk	Specialised social services for children and adolescents at risk Centres (residential, maternal, reception, children's homes, etc.)		
Care for the homeless	Centres, shelters, street accompaniment, etc.		
Care for gender equality, sex and sexual choice	Violence against women Care for women Prevention of hatred or violence by gender, sex and sexual choice Attention to situations of forced prostitution and social rights of sex workers Care for men		
Care for drug addicts	Recovery centres, day centres, homes, therapeutic communities, social and labour integration services, detox units, etc.		
Care for situations of disease	Care for eating disorders Primary healthcare centres Mental health services Hospitals Hospital classrooms Homecare for people suffering from chronic or terminal illnesses		
Care for functional diversity	Educational centres and services Occupational centres, houses, residences, etc.		
Care and help for the elderly	Residential centres, day centres, supervised housing, residential centres and civic centres Alzheimer's programmes and workshops, cognitive stimulation, etc.		
Refugees and immigrants	Shelter and care for refugees and immigrants, host networks, awareness campaigns, etc		
Care for children, young people and families	Street education Care for families with at-risk children aged 0–3 years Fostering and adoption Child protection centres Parents' schools		
Culture and free-time centres and services	Civic centres, cultural centres, other centres Youth spaces, youth information points, retirement centres, etc. Play groups, leisure services, extracurricular activities, school camps and summer play groups, etc.		
Community programmes and projects	Community developments plan, community projects, etc. Neighbourhood, sports and cultural entities Aid for participation and association membership Community arts Community mediation		
Cooperation and development aid	Campaigns for social justice, awareness, etc. Cooperation programmes NGOs, solidarity projects, volunteering		
Local educational services	Health education, environmental education, transport safety, forestry, road education, etc.		
Intercultural education	Programmes to foster intercultural dialogue and coexistence, cultural and religious diversity, community awareness, etc. Prevention, detection and intervention in situations of hate and discrimination		

Table 4. Cont.

Areas of Professional Action		Social Educator	Social Worker
Formal education	Social education in primary and secondary schools		
	Learning communities		
	Help promoting inclusion at schools		
	Educational community and families		
Adult education	School workshops for transition to work		
	Adult training centres (basic education and literacy)		
Orientation programmes and accompaniment for insertion	Orientation and family intermediation		
	Local development programmes		
	Occupational training centres		
Digital social promotion programmes	Telecentres, digital literacy classrooms and manufacturing athenaeums		
Education, promotion of health and physical activity	Health promotion		
	(sexual and reproductive education, hygiene habits, etc.)		
	Promotion of healthy relationships (prevention of bullying and abuse, etc.)		
	Social insertion through sport, etc.		
Public administration youth departments			
Housing services			
Social exclusion for unemployment and economic problems			
Management and planning of social services			
Production of educational materials			

Note: Compiled from the works conducted by [Arnau et al., 2019](#); [De Leon, 2014](#); [Fullana Noell et al., 2009, 2011](#); [Mendioroz Goñi, 2014](#); [Monreal Bel and López Zaguirre, 2018](#); [Pérez-Eransus and Martínez-Virto, 2020](#); [Vallés Herrero, 2014](#); [Viscarret et al., 2016](#).

Social pedagogy/education and/or social work: what does or should really matter?

When analysing the relationship between social education and social work, [Ortega Esteban \(1991\)](#) stated that, as concrete historical responses, the two professions will modify their orientations and practices as society does. In the specific case of Spain, this prediction proved to be correct since, as [Quintana \(1994\)](#) pointed out, the two disciplines were ‘condemned’ to understand one another.

In Spain, the vast majority of authors agree that social pedagogy is the science of social education, just as there is a science of social work. [Quintana \(1984, 1994\)](#) pointed out that both are normative sciences, that is, they respectively guide the action of social educators and social workers based on the theories, methodologies and techniques that they investigate and devise.

Following a certain parallelism in their respective historical evolutions and after overcoming initial frictions, there is on the whole now a fluid communication between the two disciplines in Spain in both the academic and professional fields. This is perceived by the professionals themselves, but also in the collaborative work that both groups carry out with certain regularity organising different events, like those pertaining to the social services, for example.

Social work and social education are two very closely linked professions that work in numerous areas of social intervention. Many authors also state that there is more that unites them than separates them ([Llena, 2018](#); [Martín Alvarez, Martín Blazquez and Otaño Maiza, 2018](#); [Riera Romani, 1998](#); [Sixto-Costoya and Olivar Arroyo, 2018](#); [Úcar, 2020](#); [Viana-Orta, López-Francés and Zayas, 2018](#)). This does not mean that they have the same functions or pursue identical objectives, however. We can state that, in different ways and with diverse objectives, they have both acted as mediators between the resources of the welfare state and clients or users. Figure 1 shows what we consider to be the main differences between them based on the above analysis.

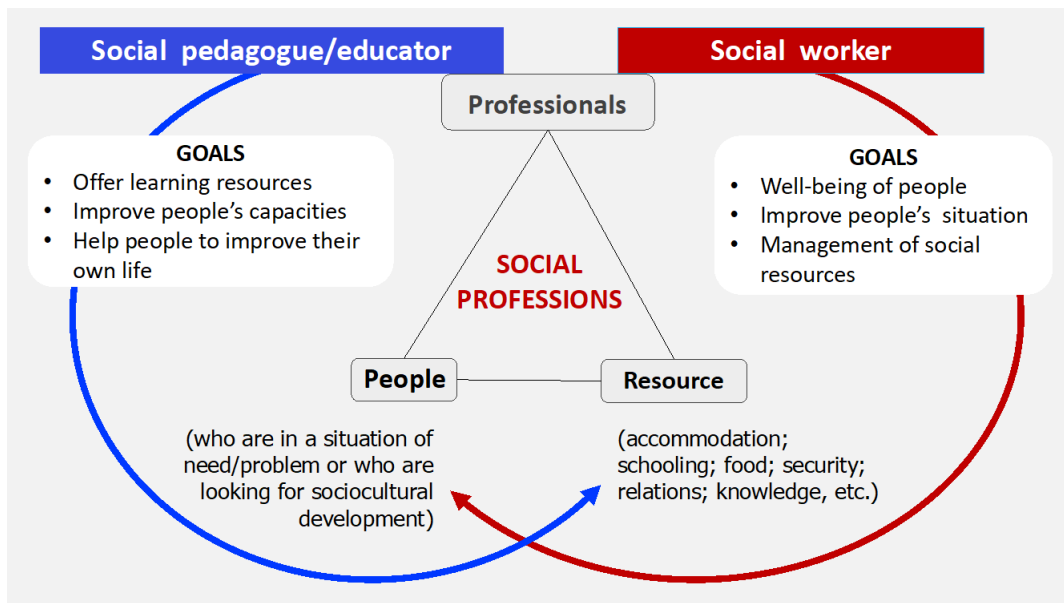


Figure 1. The social educator and the social worker considering the provision of resources and the needs of individuals, groups or communities (Source: Author, 2021).

As Figure 1 shows, although both professions bring people into contact with resources, the objectives they pursue and their way of working and seeing and interpreting reality differ. Social workers have a very broad and in-depth knowledge of resources and social structures and are capable of mobilising them in the face of personal, group or community problems, adhering to the criteria of social justice and human rights. In this sense, we might say that they work from resources to people.

Faced with a life situation or problem, social educators focus on initiating, activating or helping to implement all those learning tools that can lead people to manage their own lives in a way that is satisfactory, equitable and dignified. In this case, the actions of professionals follow a different direction from those of social workers. One might say they work from people to resources.

I would like to finish this article with a critical reflection on the question at the heart of many of the works currently being produced on social pedagogy and social work. Following a Foucauldian approach, the first issue that must be addressed is why we actually ask questions about the relationships between social pedagogy and social work. Following on from that, what previous interests or approaches – tacit or explicit – exist after this question? I have no doubt that behind this we may find epistemological questions that are entirely legitimate. There are also practical technical questions such as which professional should attend to which specific situation or problem and what basic training he or she must have.

However, when speaking of professions and disciplines, we are not only referring to scientific or technical questions, but also political ones that involve institutional or corporate powers. I believe this to be the hidden danger in a question that is posed as optional (either social pedagogy – SP – or social work – SW), as an alternative or confrontation (SP versus SW) or, finally, as denial (only one of the two, rejecting or not mentioning the other). Examples of each of the proposed options can be found in the academic literature on both social work and social pedagogy from recent decades.

To find such an approach in professions or disciplines that supposedly work to accompany and help people live their lives in a satisfactory and dignified way is disappointing. The question should not be whether social pedagogy is social work or social work is social pedagogy. Beyond our initial training, beyond our professional label, beyond the specific objectives that we seek and the methodologies and techniques that we respectively use, the important thing is how to work generously, jointly and cooperatively to achieve what really matters: helping the people we work with to improve their lives in the environments they inhabit. And we can do that by contributing the best of ourselves as professionals based on our respective initial training and the professional experience that we have accumulated over the years.

It seems to me that it is in the initial training offered to the two types of professional at universities that it is necessary to propose an integration of views rather than a discriminatory corporatism that affects the people and communities they work with. How are we to embody the democratic values of economic and social justice that our respective professions defend if we are not able to apply them in our own professional interrelations? Both are social professionals, and that is the umbrella I believe we must converge under and learn to feel comfortable with.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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