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Social Pedagogy in the Czech Republic

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Social Pedagogy in the Czech Republic

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THEORY

PRACTICE

RESEARCH

This article outlines the evolution of Czech social pedagogy from its origins in the 19th century to the present day. The development of social pedagogy has been non-linear and very slow. The socio-political situation in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 brought substantial changes, to which educational thinking, theory and practice began to adapt. This was expressed by the fact that social pedagogy started to present itself as an independent educational discipline, study subject and profession. The article aims to present nationally significant authors who have had a marked influence on the development of social pedagogy. Well-known authors of theories are briefly introduced in the text, including their publications, as well as authors of research and important pedagogues involved in the practice. Current concepts of Czech social pedagogy, reflecting various philosophical starting points and ideas on the profession of social pedagogue are presented. Despite these different starting points and concepts, an agreement is reached as regards the primary task of social pedagogy as a preventive activity (by means of educational measures) and support for social cohesion.

Key words: social pedagogy; Czech tradition; historical developments; professionalization

Introduction

The social processes and changes of the last decade of the 20th century had a significant impact on education and schooling in the post-communist countries. In the two decades that have passed since, these developments have also become the focus of consideration and research, which enables us to recognize people in the educational process in a modified social context, which, in the Czech Republic, was brought upon by reforms of political and social systems due to the so-called 'Velvet Revolution' in 1989. Before then, pedagogy and formal education were used for political aims, subordinate to a unified ideological goal of so-called 'common socialist [communist] education'. Since 1989, attention has been refocused on the newly established social conditions, which serve to inspire, direct and often even provoke by their newness and, simultaneously, their variability. Czech pedagogy has been heavily influenced by postmodern thinking. Expressions of scepticism towards traditional normative concepts, enforcement of radical plurality, relativization of rationality and, even more, pluralism of values have contributed to a pessimistic and sometimes

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even nihilistic approach to education, society and the individual's part in them. This approach is manifested even in the vocabulary, with terms such as the crisis of education, low quality of schooling, indifference towards parenthood, powerlessness in education, uncertainty in values and loss of authority in education appearing frequently (Bakošová 2008, Kraus 2008). Critical postmodern thinking does not create concepts but offers new perspectives by means of transforming traditional concepts, common procedures and perspectives on society and on the role of education and schooling. Attention is focused on the impact of changes in social systems, social problems and 'negative' social phenomena. Various social sciences, including social pedagogy, are looking for ways of addressing these or at least minimizing their impact on individuals and social groups. In the Czech Republic, the intense social changes of the last two decades have opened up new perspectives for the development of Czech social pedagogy and provided social education as both a science and a professional discipline with new tasks.

The evolution of Czech social pedagogy

The scientific background of Czech social pedagogy was created in the context of the Central European tradition, along with the development of the philosophical and sociological thinking of the second half of the 19th century. Yet its development was non-linear and very slow. There were historical periods in which theory was almost abandoned and activity was oriented to practice and research. In practice, attention was aimed at individuals and groups of socially disadvantaged or excluded people whose lives had been made difficult by society's modernizing processes. Educators supported people whose low quality of life was caused by the impact of social conflicts or the events of war. After World War II, under the pressure of societal and political changes and communist ideology, educators occupied themselves with the newly emerging educational system and leisure activities. Therefore, as Hämäläinen (2012) notes, Czech social pedagogy was not developed as a coherent system of theory, research and profession.

The first author of socially oriented theories in Czech pedagogy was Gustav Adolf Lindner (1828–1887) in the second half of the 19th century. A contemporary of Paul Natorp and scientist at Charles University in Prague, Lindner in 1882 became the first professor of education of Czech origin at the then Austro-Hungarian universities. His educational views were influenced by John Amos Comenius, an important Czech humanist pedagogue of the 17th century, as well as Johann Friedrich Herbart's approach to education and the evolutionism of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. Influenced by the pedagogy of Herbart, Lindner considered it necessary to overcome an individualistic approach to education, but, unlike Herbart, he emphasizes not didactics but social education: '[The] human [being] is a cell in the organism of society, his life is part of this whole. Education cannot accomplish anything if it is separated from nature and society.' (Lindner 1888, p.121, author's translation) His work was essential for the theoretical development of Czech social pedagogy. In particular, he developed a new concept for the objectives of education, which, in his opinion, should offer people the chance to improve themselves socially: 'The goal of social pedagogy is education of citizens and building of moral character.'(p.48) He criticized the preference for individual targets of education, stressing education of the citizen and 'cultivation of moral character' as the main goals of social education and the only way of creating conditions for any other development of society. Also, Lindner fought for democratization in education. Another important idea of his concerned attending to the effect of the environment of education, accentuating in particular the importance of the quality of family and local settings. Crucial for the development of social pedagogy, his last work *Pedagogika na základě nauky o vývoji přirozeném, kulturním a mravním* (Pedagogy as based on the study of natural, cultural and moral development) was published in 1888, after his death.

Lindner's immediate successors did not study the theory of social pedagogy systematically. Events such as World War I, the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and the origin of the Czechoslovak Republic (1918) meant that his successors worked mainly on the newly established school system or helped poor families, people affected by the impacts of the war, orphans and street children, and tended to concern themselves with socio-educational practice. One of the most important successors of Lindner's was Přemysl Pitter (1895-1976), a humanist and pacifist who devoted himself to socio-educational activities as well as spiritual pastoral work. His early endeavours led to the founding of an asylum house for children from poor families in Prague. During the war he helped Jewish children and families, and between 1945 and 1948 he built further asylum houses for abandoned Jewish children returning from concentration camps, and provided asylum for German children who were ill or interned in camps on Czech territory. After the political coup of 1948 he was persecuted by the police, escaped into exile in 1951 and settled in Germany, where he offered pastoral services in refugee camps such as the Valka camp in Nuremberg. In the 1960s Pitter was involved with Czech radio broadcasts for the BBC.

Some other authors contributed to the development of the theory of social pedagogy in the inter-war period. One of them was Josef Hendrich (1888-1950), a university teacher who considered social pedagogy and individually focused education as two different educational concepts which had been taking turns throughout the history of pedagogy. In his view, social pedagogy is characterized as a theory of social education. Another theorist of this period was Stanislav Velinský (1899-1991), who describes the definition of the subject, objectives and methods of social pedagogy in his book *Individuální základy sociální pedagogiky* (Individual bases of social pedagogy, 1927). 'Social pedagogy emphasises society before individuality, examines social trends, attempts to discover factors that social trends are affected by and ought to use educational tools that facilitate personal development or remove factors that affect it negatively' (p. 29, author's translation).

Also much involved in the development of the theory of social pedagogy, Inocenc Arnošt Bláha (1879-1960) was an important Czech sociologist in the first half of the 20th century, who examined and defined differences between social pedagogy and sociological education (later called sociology of education). He regarded social pedagogy as a normative science determining the goals and tasks of education. His importance for social pedagogy is especially due to him initiating and carrying out a variety of research into the effects of various types of social environments on education. For instance, he conducted an interesting study into the family backgrounds of urban children. Another of his important works is *Sociologie dětství* (The sociology of childhood, 1927). Other researchers of the inter-war period inquired into topics such as the wage-earning work of children and school attainment in relation to the social origin or situation of families whose breadwinners were killed during the war.

Nevertheless, unlike other Central European countries (e.g. Germany and Poland), in Czechoslovakia social pedagogy developed at a slow pace between the two world wars, featuring no real discipline or profession. Discussions were frequently held about the fact that social pedagogy should have been seen as an independent scientific and professional discipline. Social pedagogy was therefore not successfully constituted and remained in the shadow of the 'big education' (schooling and other settings for formal education) and sociology. After World War II, the situation became even more problematic.

Subsequent developments were influenced negatively by the radical political changes of 1948. The communists seized power, and their ideology affected whatever was happening in society, including social sciences and education. Ideological pressure resulted in social pedagogy being regarded as useless or even undesirable. Naive as it was, social problems were supposed to disappear, and if they still existed, it would be improper or even harmful for society to remark on them. The focus of interest in pedagogy was turned to schooling, the educational system and schools as educational institutions. Consequently, there was only cautious and sporadic interest in socio-educational subjects. Interest in the influence of the environment was shown by Josef Linhart,

a Marxist philosopher and psychologist who analysed the influence of living conditions on the development of urban and rural children from a Marxist point of view in his book *Vliv prostředí a výchovy na duševní vývoj dítěte*, (Influence of the environment and education on children's mental development, 1950), emphasizing the necessity for homogenizing trends in education and the indispensability of the influence of communist ideology on social and educational policies.

The 1960s brought a revival of interest in social pedagogy. Thanks to a relaxation in the political atmosphere, developments in social sciences and international contacts, the theory of social education and its methodology began to develop again, albeit irregularly, unsystematically and still influenced by communist ideology. Some initial socio-educational surveys were carried out. A very important incentive was the publication of *Sociální pedagogika* (Social pedagogy, 1969), a translation of a book by the Polish pedagogue Richard Wroczyński. Starting from the 1970s, the specification of the subject of social pedagogy and its place in the structure of educational sciences were studied by Ondrej Baláž, for instance in his study *Sociální pedagogika v systému pedagogických věd* (Social pedagogy in the system of educational sciences, 1978). In the following two decades, the history of social pedagogy, the mutual influence of the environment and education, and some partial investigations were systematically pursued by Milan Přádka, for example in *Vybrané problémy vztahu výchovy a prostředí* (Selected problems of environment and education, 1983).

An important new topic in social education was the education of children and young people in their leisure time. In this connection, let us mention the work of the Czech sociologist Karel Galla, *Úvod do sociologie výchovy* (Introduction to the sociology of education, 1967). This publication presents various important figures from the 19th century who contributed to shaping opinions on the social objectives of education and describes the differences between social education and the sociology of education. In Galla's view, social pedagogy concentrates on the social objectives of education and special assistance to 'problem groups'. Highlighting the educational influence of family and local environments, he emphasises the professional impact of social pedagogy on the education of children and young people in their leisure time, for example in

In the 1980s, Blahoslav Kraus was a leading new figure in Czech social pedagogy. Since then Kraus has systematically dealt with social pedagogy in terms of theory, concepts, methodology and, partially, social pedagogy as a profession, for instance in *Sociální aspekty výchovy* (Social aspects of education, 1988). The belief that social aspects of education must be studied was first accepted in the 1970s and 1980s. Practical efforts were rooted in an ideologically homogenized social system. Prevention of, and compensation for, negative social phenomena in schools, families and leisure activities became the main issues of pedagogy. Theoretical works on social pedagogy began to appear as well as studies on various types of educational settings, although social pedagogy as a theoretical discipline and profession had not yet earned reputation it enjoys today, mainly due to the political and ideological burdens that limited its free and independent development. Contact with foreign countries was limited by the Eastern Bloc, specialist literature in translation was seldom published, and literature in foreign languages apart from Russian was almost inaccessible.

The new socio-political situation in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 brought substantial changes, to which educational thinking, theory and practice began to adapt. This was expressed by the fact that social pedagogy started to present itself as an independent educational discipline, study subject and profession.

Characteristics of current Czech social pedagogy

The notion of social pedagogy has been worded in many different ways in the last two decades. An almost vicious circle of questions about the delimitation of the subject and its content have been discussed and basic questions of methodology addressed; at the same time, relations to the sociology of education, social psychology and social work still remain to be clarified. Between 1991 and 1993, the first proponents of social pedagogy (e.g. Haškovec, 1991; Klíma, 1992; Přadka 1993) published their studies in specialist periodicals, especially in the Czech journal *Pedagogická orientace*. Specialist publications and textbooks began to be published (e.g. Klapilová, 1996; Kraus, 1998) and partial socio-pedagogy research surveys (e.g. Knotová, 1995; Němec, 1998) were presented in the following years. Both formal and informal contacts were established, mainly with German, Slovakian and Polish representatives of social pedagogy, such as Jolana Hroncova, Zlatica Bakošová, Andrzej Radziewicz-Winicki, Barbara Theiss- Smolinska.

In today's research, topics in the field of social deviation feature very often and the dysfunctions of various types of educational settings are examined. Interest has recently been focused on phenomena such as bullying, truancy, addiction, abuse and delinquency. Subjects for exploration are minority and marginal groups, individuals and at-risk social groups, and people endangered in their development or deviant in their behaviour. Also, partial research into the history of social pedagogy and leisure activities has been carried out.

New theoretical concepts are based on various incentives, some of them of German (e.g. Mollenhauer, 1966; Huppertz & Schinzler, 1995; Niemeyer, 1998; Schilling, 1999) or Polish origin (Pilch; Lepalczyk, 1995; Marynowicz-Hetka, 2007). German and Polish social pedagogy, while revitalizing social pedagogy, has introduced impulses to profile its contents. The Polish concept is inspiring to Czech social pedagogy because in Poland social pedagogy is ranked among the system of pedagogical sciences. The German concept highlights its multidisciplinary character and close co-operation with social work. The notion of social pedagogy has developed dynamically, but approaches to the content and options of its professional application differ. One approach sees the task of social pedagogy narrowly as a theory of education (Haškovec, 1995), while another is oriented towards interactions between the environment and education (Přadka, Knotová & Faltýsková, 1998). There is also a focus on social counselling (Hloušková, 2007), on deviations in social behaviour (Moucha, 1993; Klíma, 1994) and, probably most commonly, on educational intervention in socio-pathological phenomena in various types of educational settings (Sekera, 2009).

To summarize the varying approaches to social pedagogy, there are three different concepts which have gained major acceptance, despite the diversity of their philosophical points of departure and related ideas about the profession. Each has got specific internal variants. The first conceptualizes social pedagogy as a discipline studying the inclusion and integration of individuals and groups which, for various reasons, are excluded, in danger of exclusion, or deviant in social behaviour. Procedures of re-education and re-socialization are accentuated. The Czech *Pedagogický slovník* (Educational Dictionary; Průcha, Walterová, Mareš, 2001) therefore defines social education as an applied educational discipline 'inquiring in a wide range of problems related to the educational influence of at-risk and socially disadvantaged groups of young people and adults' (p. 217).

In the second approach, social pedagogy is seen as a discipline studying the interactions between the social environment and education. Attention is paid to lifelong learning and education and quality of life, with a focus on leisure-time education and education for health. Following this notion, the Czech *Pedagogická encyklopedie* (Educational encyclopedia, Průcha, Rabušicova & Janík, 2009) defines social pedagogy as a trans-disciplinary field engaged in relationships between the social environment and education.

According to the third conceptualisation, social pedagogy is a discipline concentrating on assisting people in difficult life situations and those affected by negative social processes. This concept has to do with the prevention of social exclusion, social counselling and various procedures to compensate

for the impact of negative social phenomena. The key task is support towards mastering difficult life situations and creating the conditions for the best possible way of life, including leisure activities. According to Kraus (2008), social pedagogy helps to 'optimize and regulate life situations and processes, accentuating [a person's] inner potential and activity' (p. 17).

These three approaches are not strictly delimited, and their variants are often complementary. The above differences are mainly expressed in the design of social pedagogy courses and the definition of the profession.

Social pedagogy as a subject of study and profession

Since the 1990s, social pedagogy has been taught as a subject within teacher education programmes at universities (Faculties of Education and Faculties of Arts), but it has also been established as an independent subject. In the Czech Republic it is studied at universities of applied sciences and universities. Major centres of university study, with most students pursuing full- and part-time studies towards Bachelor's and Master's degrees, are Masaryk University in Brno, Tomáš Baťa University in Zlín, and the University of Ostrava. Besides these, four more universities offer a programme in social pedagogy.

According to Bakošová (2008), the curriculum should be designed so that 'the student receives knowledge of the personality, development, education, the environment, social policy, care, assistance, and questions of sociology, economics, law and psychology as well as medicine' (p. 67). Nevertheless, accredited programmes differ in the social pedagogy concepts accentuated by the universities teaching them. The example of the three largest universities in terms of student numbers demonstrates this: at Masaryk University, social pedagogy is studied in two different faculties, as part of two different subjects: *Social Pedagogy and Counselling* is based on the concept of socio-educational activities as assistance at various stages in one's career, with counselling as an integral part of the social and personal dimensions of life and a means for support in ambiguous situations. The other subject is *Social Pedagogy and Leisure*, which is based on a focus on interactions between the environment and education, with training for education in leisure time and the prevention of social deviation. Tomáš Baťa University's programme is focused rather on assistance to people in difficult situations and those affected by negative social processes, highlighting the prevention of social exclusion. At Ostrava, the subject *Social Pedagogy – Prevention and Re-socialization* concentrates on the prevention of negative social phenomena and the re-socialization of delinquent or potentially delinquent persons.

In order to strengthen the qualifications of graduates and improve their chances in the labour market, some interesting development programmes have attracted financial support from the European Social Fund. Some of these are aimed at the personal development of social pedagogy students. In connection with these projects, a training centre named the Academic Centre of Personal Development-ACOR¹ has been founded at Masaryk University to provide students with the necessary support for creating and developing a curriculum for personal development and learning based on reflection on experience.

Experience and reflection learning: support of professional student training is a current project, which offers a 4-semester introduction to the methodology of programmes of personal and social development and experience-based reflective learning. The project includes a number of other specialist activities such as the publication of the periodical *ACORát*, counselling, preparation of

¹ <http://www.acor.cz>

study material and monographs and organization of a series of conferences named Experience-Reflection-Learning.

It is thus evident that both Bachelor's and Master's programmes educate prospective social pedagogues so that they are ready to use prevention, counselling, re-education and re-socialization in working with children, young people and adults. Graduates find employment in the social services and social counselling in both the public and the non-profit sectors.

The Association of Educators in Social Pedagogy was founded in March 2013, and the start-up issue of the first professional journal, *Sociální pedagogika* (Social Pedagogy)², was published in autumn 2013. The main reason for establishing the said association was to support the social pedagogue occupation in the labour market and to create an open platform for specialized discussions.

Conclusion

Social pedagogy in the Czech Republic currently constitutes a discipline that is primarily concerned with processes of social cohesion and with preventative pedagogical actions that aim to overcome or avoid social problems on micro and mezzo scales across all age groups (children, youth and adults). Social pedagogy studies and controls deviations in the social development and behaviour of a person. Its task is to analyze and influence the process of education in various types of social environments.

Its development has been divergent from social work, with a variety of prominent historical origins. Czech social work does not stress educational and pedagogical activities, its concept highlights other historical roots (the model is, for instance, the idea of social work applied in England); mainly it comes out of social policy (including employment policy), gives preference to therapy and various types of help in socially situations via social services.

Czech social pedagogy is facing a lot of challenges and tasks. These may be classified into two levels: academic and practical. The academic level includes development of expert terminology, the elaboration of service forms and specific methods, and an examination of its relation to other humanity subjects and other fields (especially social work). There is no doubt that these tasks include the development of basic and applied research. The enforcement of a social pedagogue profession in the labour market is important as well as systematic co-operation with institutions and organizations which are active in practice. (The job of social pedagogue is not highly valued in the labour market, an aspect of the development of Czech social pedagogy that has not been examined in this paper).

To summarize the preceding text, at the present time social pedagogy is respected as an academic discipline, whose status has risen particularly in the last decade. At the same time, an important task for Czech social pedagogy is to develop positive alternatives in education for individuals and social groups, supporting social functioning across social and age groups, and creating conditions for the best possible careers for individuals. It must address a number of tasks simultaneously, all of which may facilitate the fulfilment of its potential.

² <http://www.soced.cz>

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