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## Social pedagogy – a new paradigm in Romanian school education?

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### Abstract

Social pedagogy is not, for now, a distinct qualification in the Romanian university environment. It means that nobody having a qualification of a high level *plays* in the Romanian school educational environment some specific roles. That is why the author proposes several basic coordinates for an academic qualification in *social pedagogy*, revealing a series of competences remained uncovered with respect to child welfare in Romania. Such coordinates are relevant for an occupational analysis. *DACUM methodology* was applied to highlight certain duties, tasks and main competencies associated to the occupation of *social pedagogue* directed to a bachelor degree level. The criteria based on which such roles were described are those mentioned by Zane Berge (1995), namely: pedagogical, social, managerial, technical.

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### 1. Social pedagogy – as a profession linked to school environment

The social pedagogue profession still creates many controversies and debates both in Romania and at an international level. From the analysis of the approaches identified in the specialized literature or in the already existing educational practices regarding the exercise of the social pedagogue profession, for the age stages connected to school education, we notice a large diversity of opinions. In the British culture, for instance, this profession is assimilated to the social worker profession. However, the British manifest a special interest in the

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social pedagogy field. We retain, from this point of view, the opinion of Kiriadou, C., [1] who considers that "social pedagogy can be characterized as taking an integrated view of the needs of the whole child in terms of five key dimensions: care and welfare; inclusion; socialization; academic support; and social education". He thus establishes the area of action of this profession which he somehow puts in relation to school education.

In most of the countries, social pedagogues intend to especially deal with the most disadvantaged children. Their purpose is to explore the effectiveness of social pedagogy in residential care for the children with special needs. In these cases residential care is considered by Moss, P & Petrie, P., [2] to be the (best) natural setting for life-space work.

A high number of papers are dedicated to this option considering that social pedagogy and special educational provisions have to be connected.

Analyzing not only the general strategies of approaching the field but also the results obtained by social pedagogues in the specific activities, we notice the existence of practices satisfying to a large extent the needs for assistance and pedagogical support that children need for a complex and accurate development.

From this point of view, the German and Danish experiences which revealed that the professional performances of social pedagogues improve when they are trained to nurture every aspect of children's social and emotional development - as Madeleine Bunting appreciates [3], are worth mentioning. In a recent work Cameron, C. & Moss, P., [4] highlighted that the persons having a specific qualification know *how* to foster relationships between young people and staff and *how* to stimulate a general sense of positivity and well being.

Noticing such a big diversity of approaches, both theoreticians and practitioners speak about the necessity of bringing a common language and focus to work with children, young people and families and of the fact that – irrespective of the area of interest to which they orient their actions – social pedagogues should be united around the mission of potentiating the education which children/pupils receive in the formal educational environment.

The great privilege which a coherent approach to the social pedagogy field can generate was revealed by the Scottish tradition and experience according with social welfare – education could be seen as a force for social change. In the spirit of the same idea, Kiriadou, C. [5] considers that the *adoption of a social pedagogic approach in schools can provide a basis for promoting civic engagement*.

## 2. Romanian case

Taking into account the current practices, but also the preexisting ones, we notice that in Romania there is little concern in decision-making environments as to the launching of a new higher qualification (a highly qualified professional) having as its object social pedagogy or social education.

First of all, we want to emphasize a distinction which Ezechil, L. [6] makes between the two concepts: *social pedagogy collocation* –which we associate to that educative intervention focused on the child (pais=child and agein=to lead) and the *social education collocation*, which we put in relation to educative interventions of a larger level, addressed to all age categories.

At this time, in the sphere of professions existing in Romania, which are generically designated under the name of *social work*, there is already the *social pedagogue* occupation, but it is assimilated to social assistance. It does not necessarily require a higher qualification, much less going through a university study program strictly specialized in the field. The social pedagogue does not work in the school environment, but in other institutions (orphanages, reeducation schools, boarding schools, centers for minors, special boarding schools) and is qualified to take over family tasks, in total or in part.

## 3. Purpose of the study

The main target of our study is to highlight the need of ensuring, in the Romanian school, certain social pedagogy services supplied by highly qualified persons with higher studies. From this point of view, in our

opinion, the social pedagogue should be found, as a professional, in any school, to get involved not only in supplying certain family roles or in intermediating certain inter-institutional relationships having as their purpose the solving of certain child problems, but especially in supplementing the educative services targeting the complex development of the child's/youngster's personality in the relationships with himself or herself, with the others, with society.

#### 4. Methodology

The main theoretic coordinates taken as reference are those prepared by Claire Cameron and Peter Moss [4] combining several pedagogical theories: 1. ideals of a good life (philosophy), 2. understandings of individuals and groups and their resources and needs (psychology and biology) and 3. understandings of social resources, values and demands (cultural and social sciences).

Research methods: scientific literature review and analysis, Romanian school phenomena analysis, DACUM methodology, focus group

Eight experts with a rich experience in school education problems took part in the focus group. Activities were performed in two thematically differentiated rounds. The first debate theme had as its purpose the establishment of several essential roles a social pedagogue integrated in the school environment could hold, without overlapping the roles held by other professionals in the same family (social worker).

The second round of debates had as its task the application of the DACUM methodology for revealing certain duties, tasks, knowledge, skills and attitudes a social pedagogue could exercise or possess.

#### 5. Results

Analyzing scientific literature and school phenomena – on the one hand, and taking into account the results of debates at the focus group level – on the other hand, a table comparing the desirable roles of a social pedagogue to those held by other experts in related fields, was drafted. The task of the focus group was to establish what a social pedagogue should be or should not be. (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparing the desirable roles of the social pedagogue to the roles of other experts

What a social pedagogue should be	What a social pedagogue should not be
generally, a social worker	...but not a social assistant
an educator	...but not a teacher
a facilitator	...but not for learning school tasks
a counselor	...but not a psychologist
a manager	...but not as a school director or as a class master

Based on these differentiations, in the second round of applying the focus group method, the participants correlated several categories of knowledge, skills and attitudes considered to be relevant for a social pedagogue to the criteria proposed by Zane Berge [7], when he defined the competences necessary to an educator assuming more than simple pedagogic roles. Around the four criteria, namely: pedagogical, social, managerial, technical..., a generic competence profile of a social pedagogue was conceived (Table 2):

Table 2. A generic competence profile of a social pedagogue

Criteria/competencies	Duties	Tasks	Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
<i>pedagogical</i>	to collaborate with other educational factors: family, teachers, community, social services	-to intervene and act in a pedagogical manner whenever requested - to organize personalized pedagogical interventions in favor of each child	theoretical basis for realizing an effective education of children of different ages	to elaborate and conduct plans for personal or school community development	supportive
<i>social</i>	to develop efficient relationships with the persons and institutions involved in the personal, school and social development of the child	-to counsel the child for solving personal problems -to counsel the child's family -to counsel teachers	-knowledge in the field of psychology of social relationships -knowledge on the shaping/development of desirable skills and destructuring undesirable attitudes	-to communicate efficiently with various persons: children, parents, teachers -to facilitate the establishment of relationships between various persons and institutions	facilitator
<i>managerial</i>	to manage the activities and processes regarding the personal, school and social development of the child	-to draft personal, school, social development plans -to coordinate, evaluate, control, adjust various actions and processes in favor of the child	knowledge in the management of personal and social development, time management	to adopt adequate decisions in adequate moments to positively influence the child's development	goal-oriented
<i>technical</i>	to identify the most adequate methods and means of acting in favor and to the interest of the child (child welfare)	-to seek and find solutions in uncertain circumstances - to solve various types of problems faced by the child	to be familiar with procedures used by various institutions for solving specific problems	to correlate various strategies, methods, tactics of approaching the child's problems	efficiency, effectiveness

The members of the focus group did not intend to make a curricular project for a license or master study program regarding the professional training, in the university environment, of a social pedagogue. They only wanted to establish several reference points for such a qualification based on which this profession can be given a certain identity.

From this point of view, the participants in the work group agreed that an extension of professional roles in the following directions would be necessary:

- the achievement of a deeper professional preparation in the fields of pedagogy, psychology, pathology, sociology; the knowledge in these fields is necessary for increasing the capacity of understanding and acting with more professionalism in the situations which teachers cannot manage;
- increased sensitivity of social pedagogues to the problems regarding the personal and social development of children or youngsters and their training for being integrated in the world of higher professions;
- the development of the decision-making capacities of these experts who have to act on their own in various situations, by totally assuming responsibility;

- the development of their capacity of conjugating and harmonizing the educative efforts of all the actors involved in the process of shaping the child's/youngster's personality: teachers, family, various institutional environments;
- the development of their capacity to generate in the school environment a wellness culture, favorable to a good evolution of all the members of the school community: pupils, teachers and (indirectly) members of pupils' families.

## 6. Why should *social pedagogy* be a new paradigm in school education?

Of course, like many others, we also wonder: since teachers have a certain psycho-pedagogical training, is a new pedagogical paradigm regarding the performance of school education still needed? Can't the didactical staff ensure the pedagogical services we associate to the social pedagogue profession?

Considering the organizational and functional specificity of Romanian education, and the professional categories involved in making general education, we appreciate that the area of educational services dedicated to shaping the complex personality of the child/youngster and ensuring their wellness must be extended. The many problems faced by teachers (the intensification of violence phenomena in school, increase of the psychic vulnerability of children /youngsters, the proliferation of addictive behaviors, the increase of the number of those abandoning school ...) are arguments for which the teaching staff need help themselves. The main task of teachers continues to remain that of ensuring a certain efficiency of the didactical process to facilitate the pupils' access on the next levels of the education system.

The social pedagogy paradigm proposes another approach to education which – in Hämäläinen's opinion, J., [8] - is to be applied to all kinds of education throughout the educational system, covering all educational institutions and organizations of modern society.

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