

Window to the world

Social Education: Educational Activity and a Social Profession

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1 Introduction: The Social Education context

Social Education (Social Educator) is the name used in Spain for the designation of educational activity in a non-formal contexts; an equivalent name is used in other European countries – “Social Pedagogy” (Social pedagogue), “Social Work” (Social worker) and “Special Education” (Specialist Teacher).

1.1 *Social intervention perspective*

The scope of action of social educators is very diverse and complex due to a great variety of concepts; we refer to the definitions of two associations trying to reflect the most important aspects.

The International Association of Social Educators (AIEJI) defines it by referring to the social educator:

By social educator we understand a person who, after specific training, promotes personal development, social maturity and the autonomy of young people, disabled adults or the maladjusted (or in danger of becoming so) through pedagogical, psychological and social skills and methods. The social educator shares with such persons different and spontaneous situations which are caused from everyday life either within residential institutions or services, either in the natural environment of life through continuous and joint action with the person and the environment ([Cervera, 1988](#)).

The Professional Association of Educators and Social Educators of Castilla la Mancha ([Asociación Profesional de Educadores Sociales de Castilla, 2017](#)), autonomy of the Spanish State defines it in the following way.

Social Education is a right of citizenship which is centered in the recognition of a profession of pedagogical character, generating educational contexts and mediating and formative actions in the scope of the competence of the Social Educator to make possible.

- The incorporation of the subjects of education to the diversity of social networks, both regarding the development of sociability and the possibilities of social movement;
- Cultural and social promotion, understood as openness to new acquisition possibilities that expand the cultural, labor and educational prospects of leisure and social participation.

1.2 *Institutional perspective*

At a European level, we can observe three levels of professionalism, recognition, regulation and specialization. The Social Education in Spain has the first level, the recognition. The Social Education acquired university status in 1991 by establishing the title of Social Education via Royal Decree 1420/1921; it also traces the professional profile already established in a previous law as “educator in the fields of non-formal education, adult education (including the elderly), social inclusion of handicapped or disabled people, as well as socio-educational action” ([Ley 2/1974, 2017](#)).

This legal recognition has been added to an academic process. In a Congress in Madrid 1998, it highlighted the importance of creating a degree in Social Education. The University of Barcelona was the first to give this title as its own from the academic year 2001–2001. After the implementation of the European space of higher education, the degree is taught in nearly all Spanish universities, with the same academic structure required for other professions with the same duration (four years) and the culmination of the same academic title, the title of degree in Social Education.

Undoubtedly, an important factor in achieving this institutionalization it has been the function played by the various associations. In the 1980s, various associations of social educators in the different regions have been raised. Independent of the different activities, they have a common purpose, such as promoting meetings and the exchange of experiences and practices of the profession to promote the dissemination and legal recognition as an activity of a professional nature. In 1989, the first coordinator of associations of Social Educators was organized; in 1992 the Federation of Professional Associations of Social Educators is formed; in 2000 the State Association of Social Education, unifying all public schools and statewide organizations was created to create a legal, organizational and coordination framework covering the various associations. Currently, these associations have been transformed into official Colleges of Social Education, an association of professional character.

2 Field of professional activity

Nowadays, there are four important areas of activity of social educators: adult education, non-formal education, integration of people with disabilities or special educational needs and socio-educational action. Each of these areas has gradually been defined.

2.1 Adults education

Just as everywhere, in Spain, the changes that have taken place as training activities have developed in order to adapt the work to the new circumstances. Changes in production systems have forced people to acquire new professional development. The most significant were produced in the 1960s, which meant increased demand for the educational qualification of citizens and workers; this led to the creation of new types of institutions as education centers open and home distance courses that allowed the combination of work and training, family and work commitments.

Thus, it has been shaping the field of education of adults with two aspects, academic and professional. Adult education today is one of the most dynamic fields of social education.

2.2 No formal education

Activities of non-formal education have always developed, but sometimes it has not been clearly differentiated from secondary socialization mechanisms: for example, professional training whose inclusion in the educational process did not prevent the opening of new training courses attended by non-formal educational channels, as is the case in occupational training of the growth process.

2.3 People with specific educational needs integration

A third area is related to a category of non-adapted people, or who have with special educational needs and are at risk of marginalization or social exclusion. Over time, the focus categories of people, its characterization and its name have changed.

Another focus of attention has been those people in situations of marginalization for economic reasons. In the not too distant past, the poor, beggars and vagrants were considered marginalized; afterwards, unemployed people were excluded from the production system. Nowadays, it includes all those who do not enjoy family or labor protection, but who are still covered by social assistance. The degree of exclusion and marginalization varies within each type of group and society.

2.4 *Socio/educational Action*

Examples of socio-educational actions would be for example, those carried out within cultural, ideological, religious or political groups.

Socio-cultural performances are registered in this area, too. It is a participatory model of social and cultural action that tries to generate the interaction and activation of the social environment in which it develops. It is defined as a process of socio-educational intervention in a territorially delimited community which intends its members to become active subjects of their own transformation and their environment in order to substantially improve their quality of life ([Ucar, 1992](#)).

3 **Conclusion: Some challenges**

3.1 *Designation*

A first challenge relates to the name or designation of the profession: Social Educator or Social Pedagogue? Social Education or Social Pedagogy?

In Europe, they both designations are used; in the countries of Latin tradition (Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Luxembourg) Social Educator is used. In the countries of Central Europe and Nordic countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Slovenia, Lithuania, the Netherlands), on the contrary, Social Pedagogue is used.

In reference to the term “social,” this appears in the majority of cases; the denomination “specialty” is used in French-speaking countries in order to differentiate the teacher or educator in formal contexts.

The differences in naming indicate a fragmentation in understanding of the professional practice. It would require a consensus on the designation since it would enable the mobility of professionals within the European Union, both academic and professional.

3.2 *Academic professional training*

We are referring to the type of training received by those who aspire to the exercise of the profession.

As it has been noted before, in Spain, the requirement of full university training for social educators did not exist until the implementation of the European Space for Higher Education in about 2010; before, the training was for three years, corresponding to the first university cycle without reaching the category of degree and required for the technical professionals in other areas such as health, architecture and telecommunications. It was tried to train “experts,” professionals with practical skills for the resolution of specific cases, with competence for intervention in certain areas, but not for diagnosis. The social educator, as technical, turned out to be more of semi-professional than professional.

With the implementation of European Higher Education Space, the differences in training and qualifications in relation to other professions have disappeared; it requires the same duration and same the title of degree as in other degrees. Nevertheless, there is still an ambiguity in the professional category. In Spain, the Social Education degree is included within the area of education, such as Basic or Childhood, whose activity is limited to intervention. Consideration of Social Education in the scientific area involves the scientific training of educational, social and psychological areas that make possible not only intervention but also the diagnosis, thus overcoming the limitations imposed by a purely technical training.

3.3 Professional level consolidation

In Europe, there are three categories or levels of professionalism: category A, level 1, as a regulated profession; B, level 2, as a recognized profession; C, level 3, as a specialized profession. As a regulated profession, it figures in the list of professions for which it is required to have a university degree, have passed a special examination or be enrolled in a professional association; it further requires a competent authority and laws regulating their exercise. As a recognized profession, it also figures in the corresponding list, with the recognition by the competent authority; it requires some features of level 1 (professional title, examinations or tests for access to it), but this regulation does not affect exercise. As a specialized profession, the professional is trained to act in a very specific area, p. and. in cases of disability. Level 2 level incomplete professional; Level 1 is the full level of professionalism as required by level 1; Level 3 may represent a complement to the professionalization but alone may not guarantee a professional status as there are states in which although there is specific training, it is not recognized as a specific profession as in the case of the training received to work in areas of wealth or education.

Social Education, in the vast majority of countries (among which is Spain), is included in category B and is a recognized profession but unregulated; as a specialized profession, it is located in four countries, including the Czech Republic. Not belonging to level A (professional, not only recognized but regulated) gives an incomplete character with the corresponding consequences for professional practice.

The economic crisis in Spain, which is progressively is being overcome, has already been a proof of the failure of the professionalism level value derived from the mere recognition of Social Education. We have referred to the workspaces of professional social education, non-formal education, adult education (including with the elderly) and social inclusion of misfits and disabled – as well as the socio-educational action. The crisis has had a particular impact on education in general and particularly in non-formal education, which has meant the disappearance of jobs for a large number of professionals; the result has also been the decline of this degree with students in the faculties of education. The mere recognition of the profession does not guarantee its survival; new strategies to consolidate have to be looked for. Recognition is the first step for setting Social Education; regulation and specialization contribute to a social institutionalization, empowering its value to solve social problems and needs.

References

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