

Social pedagogy as a study programme

Social Education and Leisure Time at the Department of Social Education at the Faculty of Education, Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic

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In 2001, I enrolled the Department of Social Education at the Faculty of Education at the Masaryk University (further as DSE FE MU) as a post-graduate student. At that time, the course of Social Education and Leisure Time was being created under supervision of associate professors M. Jůva and J. Němec. The course was focused on primary prevention and relationship of environment and education (in terms of the course's outline, contents, and form). In this text I present a brief general summary, as seen from my perspective and my own experience.

Creation and characteristics of the study programme

A few important dates:

1998 – Introduction of the Social Education and Leisure Time full time course at the FE MU.

2002 – Creation of the independent Department of Social Education.

2008 – The study programme is extended with Master's programme.

2016 – Acquisition of accreditation for double-major course of Social Education, in cooperation with Faculty of Social Studies (FSS).

2016 – Acquisition of own post-graduate study program of Social Education.

During the twenty years, when the DSE members have been accompanying current or future experts in full time courses (since 1998) and in combined courses (since 2001), we have already educated hundreds of graduates who have found interesting jobs in a myriad of fields in our society. Generally speaking, the graduates of the full time and combined forms find jobs in three major groups run by different Ministries:

Ministry of Education: teacher's assistants, social educators in schools, teachers in preparatory classes, low-threshold youth club workers, animators, lecturers, leisure time instructors, school club and home educators, leisure time educators in various NGOs.

Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs: in fields of social work and social service – gerontopedagogues, activation workers, curators for children and youth, street workers, in probation and mediation services, social workers.

Ministry of Interior: animators in asylum centres, in civic associations, expert workers and counsellors in field of drug addiction, gender topics, violence on persons (not only women and children), etc.

The department itself cooperates with many institutions and organisations in the Czech Republic, and also abroad, in six basic fields: (leisure time, environmental, educational, multicultural, social, and human rights). This activity not only covers tuition and students' practical experience, but predominantly includes various research and development projects.¹

¹ A detailed overview of projects and cooperation with various organizations can be found at www.ksop.ped.muni.cz.

Social Education, as a major study field at FE MU is experiencing constant development, not only in sense of professional development of tuition, but also in the research activities,² with adequate publication work.

The DSE cooperates at different levels with more than ten foreign partner schools (University of Vigo, Santiago de Compostela University, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, University of Wroclaw, School of Education Paula Frassinetti in Porto, Nova University of Applied Sciences in Vaasa, Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences working at three Norwegian Universities, University of Bologna, Coimbra College of Education, Leuven University College and UC Leuven-Limburg in Belgium, University of Miskolc in Hungary and recently terminated cooperation with University College Lillebaelt in Vejle, which was replaced by cooperation with VIA University College).

Our department members are active by themselves in many organisations involved in Social Education, for example Association of educators in social education, they contribute to editorial activities for the journal *Sociální pedagogika* (Social Education), and they cooperated on many 4R conferences as well as on international level,³ etc.

The Social Education graduates themselves often realize interesting projects for the society; they establish their own NGOs focused on various topics (work with children and youth, human rights protection, culture, heritage protection, art, research and development, health care and social services, environment protection, environmental education, community development, recreation, sport, etc.)

In general, we can say they find very well their place in the civic non-profit segment, and sometimes they contribute to establishment of new (non-governmental) institutions in fields neglected by the government, which sometimes reacts only when the actual social situation is in emergency. These are institutions providing care or education (depending on the Ministry they are governed by) for kids from children's homes and foster families; organizations helping people, who have experienced violence, maltreatment, or abuse; leisure time centres and alternative leisure time centres, facilities for young people experimenting with or abusing drugs, therapeutic communities, organizations supporting education, forest kindergartens, etc.

During the years, we realized a few research probes about our students' success in the job market.⁴ Not only in sense of efficient use of gained skills in various courses, which are constantly amended in the accreditations proposal, but mostly as a reaction to current situation in the society, sometimes also in a form of uncertain vision of education in the future. Simultaneously, in 2018, the Department

² The proof is the current participation in or solution of several research and development projects, such as: *Creation and innovation of educational programs and professional practices* (CZ.1.07/2.2.00/28.0040) – OPVK; *Progressive management of the university* (decision no. 25/2017/01) – CR; *Development of the process of undergraduate education at PdF MU: thorough preparation for good practice* (CZ.02.3.68/0.0/0.0/16_038/0006952) – OP RDE; *Support for the development of education in Ukraine* (Decision No. 25/2015/05, 25/2016/05, 25/2017/05) – CR; *School where I am human* (70p7) – ACTION; *Analysis of knowledge spaces in children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds* (GPP407/11/P091) – GAČR; *Acquisition of tacit knowledge by teaching students during their pedagogical practice* (GA13-20049S) – GAČR; *Barriers to inclusion and their overcoming - implementation in the environment of Czech primary schools* (TAČR); *Ways to an Inclusive School in the 21st Century: An Ethnographic Approach* (GA19-13038S) – GAČR; *Construction of education of a pupil from a socially disadvantaged environment from the point of view of three worlds of his real life* (GP13-24036P) – GAČR; *The Educational Role of the National Monuments Institute: Education as a Key Tool for Improving the Care of the Cultural Heritage of the Czech Republic* (DF12P01OVV014) – MK/NAKI.

³ One of the first major conferences realized by KSP PdF MU was the Worldwide International Conference, *ICCP - THE EVOLUTION OF CHILDREN PLAY* - 24th ICCP Word Play Conference 5 - 6 September 2007 and many more.

⁴ As an example, I offer Soják and Čech (2010), Soják and Kristková (2011), Zajíček (2011); Soják and Kurowski (2015).

launched its own marketing campaign, whose primary aim was to approach more prospective students. It also contained various analyses of motivation, needs, and employment possibilities of graduates in the field of their specialization. These analyses have not been published anywhere, however, they led to increased number of study applicants.

Social Education as conceived at the Faculty of Education at Masaryk University

In contemporary Czech expert literature, we can find more works and a few publications (Bendl, 2016; Knotová, 2014; Kraus, 2008; Procházka, 2012) offering summaries how “in/complete” the current way of Social Education in the Czech Republic is.

Social Education at FE MU can be understood as a crossover specialization, which uses resources and contexts of sociology, psychology, social-political sciences, but primarily those of education; we can see Social Education as a bordering discipline in context with social aspects of education, and namely at the level of prevention in different specific environments, considering influence on individuals or specific group.

Logically, the educational phenomena and processes concerning an individual are the subjects of interest at FE MU, this is where social education crosses the dimensions limited by regular school. School education, extra-curricular education, issues of life-long education, to street social work, not only with families, but also with individuals such as children, youth, adults, and retired ones, are involved.

Unfortunately, I personally perceive the fact that current understanding of all our department members is not defined by one uniting conception, vision, and mission. This causes coexistence of different views as defined by different prevailing resources. However, I still feel we are united in the course contents, which is based on education and training, and cannot be separated from social issues and cannot be narrowed only to (extra)curricular education.

Having experienced twenty years at the DSE, I find it logical and efficient to strive to build the contents of this specialization in more specific and unique conception and offer diversification of the different expert visions. But not in competitive sense between all the individual workplaces focused on the field of social education; contrarily, to create a clear and solid conception, which would help students to choose specifically (we may say a bit bravely) the “Brno School” among the number of choices of universities offering this specialization in the Czech Republic.

Since this specialization was established at the FE MU, we have been aiming to develop the specialization Social Education as connection between education and environment, in relation to Leisure Time Education (LTE). The LTE is a part of the “root” of the study program, and can be also extended by the students in their personal studying profiles. Or the students can enrich their experience by adding other study profiles: drama education, social work, and environmental education.

Graduate's profile

A broad personality profile is primarily built within the Bachelor's degree. In certain dimensions it is extended in consequent Master's and in Post-graduate degrees, based on imaginary pillars⁵ which are specifically focused, and continuing courses (disciplines). These courses nurture the knowledge basis (historical facts and contexts, theories and conceptions, methodologies, etc.) by their contents, focusing, and prevailing teaching methods, and also bring own non-transferable experience and foster practical skills. The emphasis is not on development of facts-knowledge, but a large space is dedicated for experiential learning, personal and social development, and confrontation of the knowledge with one's own non-transferable practical experience gained during simulated situations within compulsory

⁵ Freely paraphrased from accreditation materials (Němec, 2010); Bachelor's and Master's fields B-PD SOVC Social Pedagogy and Leisure; C-PD SOVC Social Pedagogy and Leisure 2016 (guarantor: J. Němec).

and optional courses focused differently on LTE, and consequently by project education by various educational situations (educational and social work experience, own research, etc.)

“The basic universal pillar” is formed by general university courses (philosophy, languages, education, etc.), whose primary function is cultivation. The student creates own vision of existing philosophical concepts, develops language skills, and learns the basic structure of scientific disciplines, basic definitions and theories. The students choose from a set of optional courses, thus cultivate own professional interests.

„Psychology pillar“- is composed by a relatively wide spectrum of interconnected and chronologically ordered psychological disciplines. It brings basic knowledge about mental life of a human, personality structure (personality psychology), his/her experience and creation of understanding the world (cognitive psychology), ontogenetic development of mental processes (ontogenetic psychology) and their interaction (social psychology) as well as possible pathology and further knowledge of intercultural psychology and relation to inclusive education.

“Social-educational pillar” is narrowly interconnected with the disciplines of the other pillars. If we generally describe its benefit for the graduate’s profile, we can say its role is creation of harmony between a myriad of one’s personal potentials (child, young person, and adult) between the individual’s world and his/her social relationships (society) by differently adapted interaction processes. The purpose of the partial disciplines in the most general meaning is introduction of the knowledge into wider social contexts, and also specific situations.

Contrarily to the above mentioned example, the students more learn to solve complex situations, which lead from recognition of child’s or adult’s individual capacities (their possible limits) to identification of surrounding social factors, by which the given situation is determined, to setting of optimal adaptation level and social-educational strategy, which may lead to development of personal characters and elimination or alleviation of surrounding unfavourable social factors.

“Self-experiential and practical pillar” is based on acquisition of practical experience “with oneself” and in interaction with the “others” and consequently in real educational situations within the comprehensive structure of practical educational work and practically focused courses. The structure of three social trainings (OSP 1 to 3), following other courses and further practical works enables the students to answer following questions: Who am I, what kind of person am I, what can I offer to others, what should I be careful about from my and others’ point of view, what do I bring to concrete interactions and how can I further develop myself personally and socially. The aim of the educational and social-educational practical work is to bring the knowledge and skills to specific real interactions and social situations, which are different in many aspects: given environment (at schools, in low threshold centres, retirement homes, summer camps), target group (foreigners, socially disadvantaged or talented children, maltreated children, etc.), given context (education, social support, advice, help), etc.

Courses focused on future graduates’ practical skills and predominantly influencing the field of primary prevention are included in this pillar. These skills are connected with specific personal characteristics development by self-reflection, reflective learning coupled with projecting, specific seminars, and field courses among the compulsory courses within LTE, during practical work supervisions, etc.

“Research and academic pillar” is based on interconnection of theoretical knowledge, methodological skills, research activities, and application of research findings into educational practical work. Bachelor’s and Master’s theses are a practical proof of having mastered required outcomes; these are built on quantitative or qualitative research of a specific social-educational phenomenon. It is the systematic learning, predominantly description, explanation, and mapping of everyday situations and problems from the field of education, social relationships, drug abuse, mapping of reality about educational impact on an individual or a specific group and environment, etc., what helps to saturate the sphere of social education with new findings. It also opens space for introduction of new methods, forms, and tools of work in social education. Discovering the social reality of an

individual, either in diagnostic or research context may be helpful for an efficient intervention and becomes a starting point for short term educational action or a concept for educational programmes.

The graduates are ready for educational and social-educational work with many target groups in fields of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. They are able to design, launch, and evaluate educational activities (based on personal development) at school as well as in the field of leisure time for children, youth, and adults (including seniors), which are at risk (social exclusion, moral hazard, socially pathological phenomena, etc.). They have learned to plan, realize, and evaluate minor research investigations (mostly qualitative ones) with the aim to find socially pathological phenomena, to evaluate educational activities and programmes, to design adequate ways to prevent negative phenomena. In the personal dimension, they are able to face demanding professional situations, use self-reflection in interaction with clients (children, youth, and adults from different environments and with different type of social handicaps). They are able to build a team, select suitable environment and target group for their project to execute; to design a project and realize it in their social-educational practical work.

Conclusion

I am convinced that during the twenty years, the study program Social Education and Leisure Time at FE MU has gained its position of a unique approach to Social Education, within the Czech Republic.

When defining the qualifications of social educator's skills, we have to consider the importance of knowing where he/she will work. We will always be working in the human resources field, where not only education, but also the way how the one was brought up influences the person, mainly in the process of finding a place in broader social framework, as a member of the whole society. Alongside with the influence of the family, it is a demanding task, not only in terms of possible lower influence on each person.

I personally see the important power of Social Education in targeted connection with a specific student, as Komenský (Comenius) defined: the student is a subject (meaning an individual with specific needs), not an object (a uniform object, exactly same as others) in the process of education. We try in this sense, thanks to focused accent on student's self-reflection in a metaphor of family environment, to teach them to create a relationship with one's future client; to find time for them, willingly and predictably, and not only the leisure time.

This careful relationship, which the students also bring to their consequent practical work, is not only a question of good will and good heart, but is built on a series of specific characteristics and skills, and requires certain level of professional attitude and empathy of a future expert. A specific environment must be created, where the client safely finds his/her limits and comfort zone, in eustress, not in distress. An environment, where a specialist in helping professions is not saving or controlling anyone (not only from the position of power over the client), but is leading the client and consequently is giving full power to live independently and fills his/her own life to be satisfied, efficiently towards him/herself, as well as others.

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