

Social pedagogy as a study programme

Degree Programme Social Education and Counselling at the Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic

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The degree programme Social Education and Counselling has been running now for more than two decades at the Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University (FA MU). From the very beginning, its profile has been focused on the field of counselling. However, the orientation of the programme in a broader perspective can be characterised as a focus on social education, minimisation or elimination of educational and training problems, and support of the quality of life of various target groups, including marginalised groups or those at risk of social exclusion.

The design of the degree programme is based on the premise that Social Education is an applied pedagogical discipline with a strong multidisciplinary overlap. The design of the curriculum and the idea of the competences to be developed in the study are based on this concept. Thanks to the multidisciplinary social-science foundation, graduates of the degree programme are prepared for various social professions. Hand in hand with the development of the curriculum, we also strive to develop social education as a discipline.

History of the degree programme

Initial efforts leading to the implementation of the degree programme were made at our department in the mid-1990s. Under the leadership of Assoc Prof Libor Hřebíček, a two-year specialisation course was established (within the framework of lifelong learning). The first of its graduates completed their studies in 1995. Over the next two years, a full-fledged university course was prepared, and the Academic Senate of the Faculty approved the field of study (nowadays a degree programme) of Social Education with a focus on counselling. From the academic year 1997/98, it became a five-year course from an independent field within the degree programme Pedagogy in the combined form of study. In subsequent years, the form of study changed, and from 1999 it became a full-time course. (At that time, the system of accreditation of fields of study had not yet been established.) Dr. Lenka Hloušková joined the organisation of the field and teaching and gradually took over the main responsibility for the field. Following the gradual changes in the tertiary education sector (see the Bologna Declaration), the organisational and formal transformation of the field of study took place. Since the academic year 2006/07, the study in the field was carried out within the Pedagogy degree programme (programme code N7501), and within the new accreditation procedure, it was divided into Bachelor's and Master's degrees. In the meantime, the management of the department decided that the full-time form of study would continue to be preferred.

The study in the field has been successfully reaccredited twice – in 2001 and in 2014. Due to the increasing number of students (among other things, the influence of massification at universities and interest in studying in the field), the staff of the department was bolstered, and three new staff members gradually started to work in the field within the Pedagogy programme. The development of the field of study has been directed towards the current state, where, again in connection with changes in accreditation processes, another organisational change took place in 2019. The field of study was transformed into an independent degree programme. Now the programme is guaranteed by Assoc Prof Petr Hlad'o (for Bachelor's studies) and Assoc Prof Dana Knotová studies and about 50 students in the Master's studies.

Content of the degree programme

Until the academic 2019/2020 year, Social Education and Counselling could only be studied as single-subject within the Bachelor's and Master's programmes in the full-time form of study. Since the academic 2019/2020 year, a major conceptual change has taken place. The focus of the degree programme has been theoretical and professional. The change concerned the form of study and the study plan structure. The conceptual change brought about a change to the single-subject study plan and the addition of a major study plan (called the major) and a minor study plan (called the minor). The curricula contain three groups of courses, compulsory, selective and elective. All study plans are offered only in the full-time form of study, *inter alia* because of the skill focus of some of the selective courses. We believe that the courses focused on the development of skills could not be implemented in the required quality and scope in the combined form of study. An important part of the degree programme Social Education and Counselling is the system of professional practice, which is connected with reflection and supervision.

In designing the content of the degree programme and defining the study objectives, the Standards of Education in Social Education and the Minimum Standard of Education in Social Work were used and respected. The aim of the degree programme is to prepare graduates not only for work in social pedagogical and counselling practice, but also for independent management and research activities, project and expert analytical work.

Graduates of the degree programme find very good employment, work in many social professions and also join schools within the framework of the so-called educational development templates. We would like to see the position of social educators in schooling firmly anchored in legislation and our expectations are directed towards the amendment to the Act on Pedagogical Staff, which is currently undergoing the approval procedure.

Degree programme staffing

In addition to the Social Education and Counselling programme, the Department of Educational Sciences has also accredited the degree programmes Pedagogy and Andragogy; the department is not divided into schools or sections, and the department's staff routinely collaborate on teaching in all three programmes, and of course on development and research projects. Nevertheless, four people make up the team prioritising the Social Education and Counselling programme. The staff of the Department of Educational Sciences who make up the team with a priority focus on Social Education and Counselling are active members of many professional associations and professional societies, such as the Association of School Psychology, the Czech Pedagogical Society, the Czech Association of Educational Research, and the Department has been a member of the Association of Educators in Social Education since 2013.

All of them work very closely together on the creation of analyses and background materials for the National Institute of Education (e.g. for school counselling, school evaluation, preparation of a new concept of further education of teaching staff). Over the long term, they also collaborate on analyses with the Czech School Inspectorate, prepare background studies and methodologies in cooperation with the Euroguidance Centre, the Regional Office of the South Moravian Region and many other institutions (e.g. IQ Roma service and Mediation Centre) or various organisations in the non-profit sector (e.g. Wheelchair League, Spondeo, Charity and civic counselling centres). The list of cooperating organisations and institutions could be very long, so we are only selecting some of them for illustrative purposes, without wishing to express preference or importance of cooperation. The various forms of cooperation also provide the students of the Social Education and Counselling programme with the opportunity to participate in a wide range of activities, including the possibility of carrying out professional practice or internships.

Teamwork on development and research projects

The Department of Educational Sciences of the MU FA is characterised by teamwork on projects of a developmental and research nature. Looking back at the last decade, the staff of the Department (focusing on Social Education and Counselling) have been involved in the following development projects:

The international project *Developing an open online course in European Social Education* (under the Erasmus+ scheme), to which we were invited by the main partner of the ThemPra Social Education project from the UK; the project was run between 2016 and 2019 (Faculty of Arts, n.d.). We believe that this is an exceptional project, which, thanks to the collaboration of seven partners from EU member states, has produced educational online materials on different concepts of Social Education in the participating countries. From these materials, a course consisting of nine lessons has been developed and is freely available on the Coursera platform (Holthoff et al., n.d.) in the Social Sciences section.

Another current development project supported by the Ministry of Education (OP VVV), in which the staff of the Department of Educational Sciences of the MU FA participate, is a project called *Life paths of unsuccessful secondary school graduates* (Faculty of Arts, n.d.); the project will be completed in 2022.

Among the research projects carried out in recent years, two projects supported by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic are significant. The first is the project *Non-traditional students studying for education degrees in tertiary education within the Czech Republic* (GA18-15451S; Faculty of Arts, n.d.) and the second is the project *Career adaptability of vocational upper-secondary school graduates during the school-to-work transition* (GA18-07537S; Masaryk University, n.d.).

Currently, two projects supported by the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic are also being implemented. One of them is *Modification of the Finnish educational programme Towards Successful Seniority based on the current needs of secondary school teachers* (TL02000290; Masaryk University, n.d.), the other is a project called *Diagnosis of Dyslexia using Eye-tracking and Artificial Intelligence* (TL05000177; Masaryk University, n.d.).

The team members have produced many professional publications, articles, monographs and teaching documents, not only from these projects. Information about these works is available in the University Information System (is.muni.cz) or on the website of the Department of Educational Sciences (Department of Educational Sciences, n.d.).

Conclusion

Social Education and Counselling is one of the established degree programmes of the Department of Educational Sciences. We hope that, together with colleagues from other university departments where social education is cultivated, we may contribute to the development of social education not only as a degree programme but also as a scientific discipline. In Czech social education academia, we share the efforts towards acceptance of the profession of social educators not only in the non-profit sector, but also towards anchoring the profession firmly in legislation in the education sector and institutions that are under the responsibility of other government departments.

We believe that the last two decades have been the *aurea prima sata est aetas* of Czech social education, and we are pleased to be contributing to this through our professional activities at the Department of Educational Sciences of the Masaryk University Faculty of Arts.

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Doc. PhDr. Dana Knotová, Ph.D. works at the Faculty of Arts' Department of Educational Sciences at Masaryk University in Brno. For many years, she has been focused in particular on social pedagogy and leisure time pedagogy. Within this field, she looks at informal learning and the influence of various types of environment on the quality and accessibility of leisure, educational and social services, amongst other areas. She has been involved in work on a number of projects (e.g. the Czech Science Foundation projects *Everyday Life of Basic Schools during the Normalisation Period: the Use of Oral History in Studying the Contemporary History of Schools*; and *Small Schools with Composite Classes in the Czech Republic: Analysis of Current Situation and Further Development Potential*).