

Social pedagogy as a study programme

Degree Programme Social Pedagogy at the Department of Social Education, Faculty of Education, University of Ostrava, Czech Republic

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Transformations of Social Pedagogy in Ostrava

At the Faculty of Education of University of Ostrava (FE UO), the history of social pedagogy as a field of study and study program dates back to the 1990s. This paper describes the significant transformations it has undergone up to the present time. Over time, the structure of applicants has changed, as has the profile of graduates and the curriculum (Sekera, 2008a). Teaching methods and learning environments are currently being expanded, partly due to the measures implemented to curb the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Social pedagogy in Ostrava is closely linked to the development of the region, the restructuring of its industrial areas, and changes in the region's demography. In its narrower focus, its research and professional ambitions are mainly geared towards providing support to socially disadvantaged children and youth (in families, schools, and other institutions) to enable their integration. In its broader focus, members of our faculty and of the field of social pedagogy wish to nurture, educate, and shape pedagogues who understand themselves, their colleagues, and clients (whether they are children, adolescents, or adults) and can support them in a lifelong process of personal development.

History

Today's study program Social Pedagogy was preceded in the 1990s by an undivided four-year Master's study program titled Education. It was an on-site program, however, its combined mode was established soon after. The common core of the Education program was characterized by an emphasis on pedagogy and psychology, and partly also on sociology. After the first year, students chose one of four specializations: music, arts, sports, or an occupational-technical specialization.

The subsequent study program that built on Education was Social Pedagogy – Prevention and Resocialization, which had already been taught in the Bachelor and Master degrees, both in on-site and combined modes. Its curriculum was to a certain degree determined by subjects important for the functioning of the police (such as fundamentals of law, forensic psychology, criminology, the state and its functioning, selected problems of penology, courts and court proceedings, criminal law, legal foundations of police service, criminalistics, and other) as students of the combined form were largely recruited from the ranks of the police force. In fact, this "police-related" focus of the program met the requirements of career advancement within the police force. The program was characterized by intensive cooperation between faculty members and external teachers.

It should be noted that choosing a specialization in the Education program or studying in the distance mode of Social Pedagogy – Prevention and Resocialization program enabled students to better concentrate their knowledge of the field (in addition to the pedagogy and psychology studied in the common core). In the case of the Education program, selecting a specialization allowed for a greater number of hours dedicated to vocational and practically oriented courses in comparison with purely teaching-based programs. Teaching programs were usually studied with at least two approbations (which were often very different) in the undergraduate degree, which inevitably broadened the list of topics covered, but did not allow students to go into much depth.

Moreover, the pedagogy and psychology included in the common core of the Education program (and later in Social Pedagogy) differed from the common core of purely teaching programs in its focus on

educational formation of the personality and personal development of the child, whereas the pedagogical and psychological curriculum for teachers was mainly oriented towards mastery of didactic aspects of teaching. It should be added that at that time, the educational concept of pedagogy was dominated by the so-called theory of education. We have always believed that focusing on the child and personality development (e.g. Brezinka, Helus, Lazarová, Knotová, Smékal, Valenta, and others) is more valuable than any ideology or changeable theories promoted by power structures.

The managers of institutions where our graduates subsequently took up employment (such as children's homes, educational institutes, leisure organizations) rated their preparation considerably high, including their mastery of a particular specialization (Sekera, 2009). This was confirmed by questionnaire surveys, as well as personal meetings with the staff of the institutions at various meetings and workshops.

While the program Social Pedagogy – Prevention and Resocialization was phased out, the Education program was gradually replaced by a new study program with the same content, entitled Social Pedagogy. In this process, the four specializations were lost. In retrospect, it seems this was to a certain degree detrimental to the program, however, the reasons behind this development would require a separate analysis. Social Pedagogy is realized in both the Bachelor and Master degrees and the curriculum of its full-time form (both Bachelor and Master) is, with only slight differences, mirrored in the combined form. The emphasis is put on personality development, whether of child or adult, in the relation to the social environment.

Social pedagogy is a discipline of pedagogy. Opinions on its subject have evolved in the literature along two basic lines (in addition to a number of partial ones). Both main orientations have been reflected in the curricula of our study programs. The first approach is rather reductive and assumes that the focus of social pedagogy is educating at-risk individuals and the socially disadvantaged (e.g. Průcha et al., 2009). Subsequently, a broader conception emerged, understanding social pedagogy as a transdisciplinary field whose aim is to develop and nurture social skills and competences in children, but also adults, under the slightly declarative ambition to create a harmony between the needs of the individual and those of a society (e.g. Kraus & Poláčková, 2001).¹

The organization of the Social Pedagogy program at the Faculty of Education of Ostrava University was (similarly to other universities) marked by the establishment of a split study, i.e. Bachelor's and Master's degrees (as a consequence of the Bologna Process). The curriculum of the Bachelor's degree is more "practically" oriented, while the Master's provides a deeper theoretical background. It is questionable whether the idea of split degrees because of homogenization of the then existing views on the preparation of not only social pedagogues, but also teachers, for example, was a happy one. In any case, the undergraduate course is permeated by the need to link the fundamentals of theory with didactic practice of educational activities and is characterized by the emphasis we place on personal development of social pedagogues and their clients, which is rather specific for the Faculty of Education of Ostrava University. The personality of a social pedagogue is perceived by us as one of the key tools of pedagogical work. While we understand that mastery of "techniques of education" is essential, we have always considered it crucial to shape the personality of the pedagogue so that they can build a relationship with the child, which is closely linked to their ability to get to know and develop themselves. To put it somewhat simplistically, what develops a child is not primarily ideas, facts, and theories, but a relationship. To build a relationship means to have an alliance of a kind with the child or client.

We would like to mention two stages that were, from our point of view, significant in the development of the program Social Pedagogy at the Faculty of Education of Ostrava University. The first one was an attempt to accredit a doctoral degree in social pedagogy, made in 2007, which was based on

¹ Social competence can be understood as a skill to engage with others and manage one's own being within a broader society (Smékal, 2008, p. 11).

cooperation with the Faculty of Education of Hradec Králové University (Sekera, 2008b). An accreditation file was prepared and a considerable effort was made. However, accreditation was refused, the reasons for which are not entirely clear.

However, the Department of Education and Adult Education has currently obtained a doctoral accreditation where space is open for doctoral studies in social pedagogy. Unfortunately, it is limited only to issues related to teaching social pedagogy, and not to the wide range of areas within social pedagogy as a discipline. Nevertheless, we are grateful at least for this possibility.

The second "milestone" was the acquisition of a GAČR (Czech Science Foundation) research project entitled *Komunitní systém v resocializačních zařízeních pro adolescenty* (Community Systems in Resocialization Facilities for Adolescents; 406/06/0731; Ostravská univerzita, n.d.) in 2006. At the time, this was the most extensive analysis of work at facilities aimed at re-educating the population that is most vulnerable in terms of educational disadvantages, that is individuals aged from 12/15 to 19 years. The research took place in educational institutions between 2006 and 2008 and involved all members of the Department of Social Education at that time. The research sample was comprised of educational institutions across the whole of the Czech Republic. The results were published in three basic publications and in a number of scientific studies (Kurelová et al., 2008; Mišíková, 2008; Sekera, 2008b).

Present orientation

From the very beginning, we knew our goal was not to shape a social pedagogue as a clerk with only historically limited theoretical knowledge. We sought to form a pedagogical worker who, through experience and professional practice, will understand themselves, their teammates, and clients, whether they are children (also outside of the school setting) or adults. The intention is to create in the social pedagogue a conscious need for personal development as a condition of real and informal pedagogical work, not as a mere proclamation. This is paramount for us and highly perspective for further development of the field (Richterová, 2020; Sekera, 2012; Sekera, 2016; Sekera, 2020).

To attain the above goals, we staff the Department of Social Education not only with academically and research-oriented members but also with graduates of the psychotherapeutic training. All members of the Department have received this training. This is probably where we differ from other similar departments in the Czech Republic because psychotherapeutic courses are usually organized by private enterprises and not faculties of education.

The second research and professional direction of our department is related to the specifics of the Moravian-Silesian region and the city of Ostrava, where the university is located. With a population of 1.3 million inhabitants, the Moravian-Silesian region is the most densely populated in the country. Although the number of inhabitants in the region, as in the Czech Republic as a whole, has been declining on a long-term basis, the loss of population is compensated by people who move there for work, mainly from abroad (Český statistický úřad, Krajská správa ČSÚ v Ostravě, n.d.). In terms of regional particularities, the Moravian-Silesian region is among the regions with increased risk factors related to inequalities in access to education.

In terms of social exclusion and disadvantage, Ostrava and the Moravian-Silesian region are among the most at-risk within the country, which is evidenced by the number of people receiving social security benefits and the accumulation of excluded localities in the region (e.g. Český statistický úřad. Veřejná databáze, n.d.; Evropský sociální fond České republiky, n.d.). The need to target and support socially disadvantaged children so that they can integrate into society and experience success not only in the school environment, is shown, for example, by the PISA 2015 research (OECD, 2016). The relevance of these topics for the Czech Republic can also be found in the latest strategic documents (Fryč et al., 2020). We are currently preparing two large projects that will address this topic.

Starting in the academic year 2021/2022, students at the Faculty of Education of Ostrava University will enter four new accredited study programs in Social Pedagogy, both full-time and combined. Lately,

there has been increased stress on internalization. As was the case before, students choose a foreign language, and now they have a choice of vocational subjects taught in English or German. Students are strongly encouraged to participate in short-term and long-term mobility programs. We believe that such experiences will enable them to view the topics of social pedagogy in our region in a new light.

In addition to subjects that prepare pedagogical workers on-site at leisure-time institutions, educational and social organizations, the study programs now also include subjects that prepare them directly in the school environment. The program is in line with the current legislative process and is supported by the already approved and published documents and articles that deal with the introduction of the social pedagogue into schools (such as Asociace vzdělavatelů v sociální pedagogice 2017; 2020; Databáze strategií. Úřad vlády ČR, 2016). Emphasis continues to be placed on personality training of pedagogues. The theoretical basis of the Master's program has been enriched, for example with the course Therapy in Social Pedagogy.

Since its beginnings, social pedagogy at Ostrava University has involved both academics and practitioners in the development and implementation of study programs (Sekera, 2008a). This trend still continues today. Social pedagogy is being approached as a scientific branch but also as a practical discipline. Recently, there has been an increased emphasis on communication with both the professional community and the public. The department has recently started using social media and is looking for new communication channels.

Conclusion

The evolution and development of a field are always influenced by the context in which takes place. The political-legislative framework and regulation of the profession of the social pedagogue in the Czech Republic, has not been yet finalized. The Act on Pedagogical Staff has been revised several times and it is not clear at the moment whether and to what extent the profession of the social pedagogue will be legislatively supported. Another context is that of current social need, which shows that the themes of social pedagogy as we see them at Ostrava University, whether it is the need for emphasis on personality development of pedagogues or social disadvantage or the need to support these individuals, are current issues both in research and as applied in practice.

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