

Social pedagogy as a study programme

Social Pedagogy Degree Program at the Department of Pedagogy,
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History of the study program

The field of social pedagogy has enjoyed a long tradition at the Faculty of Education of the University of South Bohemia as a combined Bachelor's study program. The first model of study was created in 1997 in response to social demand. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Faculty has been active in the thematic pedagogical and psychological training of the State Police of the Czech Republic, who have, in turn, been professionally involved in youth work, crime prevention, and cooperation with schools in resolving pupils' educational and behavioral problems. The need soon arose for systematic preparation, thus resulting in cooperation and the subsequent accreditation of the Social Pedagogy Bachelor's Study Program, with a specific focus on profiling the police staff specialized in youth work. Interest in the field gradually increased among the police, as well as among public administration employees and those interested in social work. Over time, the program's narrow specialization began to appear as more of a disadvantage, so in 2003 the program was accredited to a new form. The graduate profile was created such that a common broad subject base consisting of social pedagogy, sociology, and pedagogical and psychological disciplines was followed by three blocks of optional subjects grouped into the "specialization" of the study. The first specialization followed on from the previous version of the program and provided knowledge from the field of security services management and activities, with its content also including the fields of law and criminology. The second specialization was contractually provided by the University of Economics in Prague, Faculty of Management in Jindřichův Hradec, as the focus on public administration was based on topics developed in public administration management. The third specialization directed graduates towards educational practice so that they may engage in educational work with children and youth. The re-accreditation of the existing model in 2008, as the last modification of the program, maintained the present model with only a change in the public administration specialization to the basics of special pedagogy specialization. This modification to the program took into account the increase in the number of students in the field of social and educational work, as well as the needs of the increasingly promoted model of joint education. This model has been fundamentally maintained in the currently existing accreditation.

Study program focus and graduate profile

As indicated above, the specificity of the model is the interconnection of undergraduate training of social educators with formative and preventive practice. The graduate should be able to implement pedagogical and socio-pedagogical professional activities aimed at children, youth, adults, and seniors. The content of the theoretical basis is based on the conception of the field as a borderline, combining social pedagogy with pedagogy (general pedagogy, theory and methodology of formative education) and sociology (general sociology, sociology of family and youth), and having a broader social science base (ethics, basics of law, basics of management). Specific professional competences are based on the model developed by the Association of Educators in Social Pedagogy. These include, for example, counseling competence based primarily on the outcomes of the study of psychological disciplines, and intervention competence based on knowledge of the prevention of risky behavior, social work, work with high risk groups, etc. Crucial here is the development of communicative

competences (subjects monitoring the personal and social dimension of interpersonal communication and interaction), methodological and diagnostic competences (with an emphasis on data collection from clients as well as the systematic evaluation of the needs and problems of individuals or groups), and managerial competences. Due to the complexity of the work of a social pedagogue, in the sense of coping with stress, sufficient space is created for the development of personality-cultivating competences (e.g. a course in positive psychology, mental well-being, etc.).

In the latest version of the accreditation material, the profile of the graduate is more strongly focused on the area of the school activity of the social pedagogue, thus responding to the reality of inclusive education. It is becoming clear that the addition of a social pedagogue to the school counseling workforce is absolutely necessary, given the social reality of the school environment in some regions and localities.

Research focus of the workplace

Naturally, ensuring the quality of a program is always related to the quality of its staff. Regarding the Faculty of Education, the program was always provided by the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology, which until 2020 functioned as a merged workplace with a broad team base. This means that neither an independent department of social pedagogy nor a department of non-teaching pedagogy was established, but rather the program developed integrally with the teaching programs and thus with the topics (and projects) that oriented social pedagogy to the social environment of the family and school. It is paradoxical that the future, which is (and hopefully will be) more and more saturated with the approaching needs of school practice and social pedagogical work, is opening up space for the promotion of social pedagogues in schools. Currently, an independent department of pedagogy has been established in which space is being created for the development of non-teaching pedagogy programs, in both social pedagogy and (for example) formative education.

Regarding the professional profile of the workplace, we have been monitoring three areas for a long time:

- the topic of social prevention and intervention, especially in connection with programs designed for the school environment;
- issues related to the work of a social pedagogue in school, mapping of forms of already existing cooperation of social pedagogues with schools and teachers, both within the school counseling center, and the role of social pedagogues as independent experts intervening in situations where teachers, pupils, or their parents need help;
- issues related to the use of elements of experiential pedagogy and education in the out-of-school environment in a socio-pedagogical context.

The aforementioned topics are implemented within the project, and in the publication activities of the workplace. Projects with a sphere of application are important for the professional study program. These include cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports, as well as the Regional Office of the South Bohemia Region, on projects to prevent risky behavior, create methodological support for prevention in the region, and address issues related to the effective prevention of bullying, classroom intervention, and mapping social support in class groups (researcher Kressa; Jihočeský kraj, [n.d.](#)). Examples of inspiring practice of the functional involvement of social pedagogues in cooperation in school counseling centers (researcher Procházka; Národní ústav pro vzdělávání, [n.d.](#)), or strengthening the competences of teachers and other pedagogical staff in the implementation of inclusive support for pupils from socio-culturally disadvantaged backgrounds (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway grants, researchers Vítečková, Procházka, and Najmonová; Dům zahraniční spolupráce, [n.d.](#)), are mapped in the area of the work of the social pedagogue at school. In the third area, this includes, for example, a project of the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic, which identifies the importance of free time for children and youth (researchers Kaplánek and

Procházka; TAČR STARFOS, n.d.). Mentions of this area of professional interest are reflected in the publishing activities of the members of the department, as well as in the lectures of its individual members.

Other activities related to the development of the study program

A number of factors are important for maintaining the dynamism and quality of the study program. One is to maintain its international character. Another is experience from cooperation with the Faculty of Education of the MBU in Banská Bystrica (experience with promoting social pedagogues in schools), the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Bratislava (profiling the theoretical basis of the field), the Pädagogische Hochschule Linz (experience with the application of multicultural approaches in schools integrating minority pupils), the University of Łódź (social pedagogue profiling), the University of Reykjavík (inclusive education of pupils and parents from socio-culturally different backgrounds), and the University of Uzghorod (socio-pedagogical work with minorities). Equally important, however, is cooperation with workplaces in the Czech Republic. It is especially important to create a community of educators in social pedagogy that has the potential to unite the efforts to promote the field, within the school sphere, with the efforts to promote the inclusion of social educators among other pedagogical professions. And perhaps the last important point that characterizes the workplace is maintaining contact with graduates, including them in teaching, and involving them in joint research cooperation. The field and the department always consist of people, and people are able to work together. It is this personal level on which the future of social pedagogy in southern Bohemia lies.

Conclusion

The long tradition of social pedagogy at the Faculty of Education of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice is also reflected in its perspectives. The current discussion on the development of the Czech educational system up to 2030 shows that there is room for the application of the inclusive potential of the social pedagogy study program. Its graduates can reduce regional disparities in the quality of education through their coordination and support activities for families and pupils from socio-culturally disadvantaged backgrounds, reducing segregation tendencies in specific schools, positively influencing the classroom climate, integrating pupils into children's groups through the implementation of preventive and socio-educational work at school, supporting pupils with different mother tongues, and connecting the teachers and parents of these pupils. The Department of Pedagogy at the Faculty of Education of the University of South Bohemia, together with other universities in the Czech Republic, can be an excellent institutional and organizational background for finding ways to solve these problems, and it can be a partner for the Ministry of Education and other institutions intervening in these areas.

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