

# **A SOCIAL WORKER, A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKER AND AN ADULT EDUCATOR WALK INTO A BAR: ON STRANGE BEDFELLOWS AND SOCIAL PEDAGOGY**

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**ABSTRACT:** With a long tradition that can be traced to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, social pedagogy has evolved as a discipline that combines educational and social perspectives and interventions. Since its origins, it has been concerned with the mutual relations between human development, on the one hand, and the development of a just and democratic society, on the other. Whereas in a few countries social pedagogy is a professional occupation recognized by the state, in most places it constitutes a framework that contributes to other occupations, and at the same time is informed by other fields. Prominent among these fields are social work, community development, and youth and adult education. This paper discusses the particular features of these three fields and their connections to social pedagogy.

**Resumo:** Con una larga tradición que se remonta al siglo XIX, la pedagogía social ha evolucionado como una disciplina que combina perspectivas y las intervenciones educativas y sociales. Desde sus orígenes, la pedagogía social se ha ocupado de las relaciones entre el desarrollo humano, por un lado, y el desarrollo de una sociedad más justa y democrática, por el otro. Mientras que en algunos países la pedagogía social es una ocupación profesional reconocida por el Estado, en general constituye un marco conceptual que contribuye a la práctica de otras ocupaciones, y que al mismo tiempo se nutre de otros campos. Destacan entre estos campos el trabajo social, el desarrollo comunitario, y educación de jóvenes y adultos. Este artículo analiza las características particulares de estos tres campos y sus conexiones con la pedagogía social.

## Introduction

Since its beginnings, social pedagogy has been about designing and implementing educational interventions to address social problems in order to alleviate human suffering and contribute to the development of a more democratic and just society. If we consider social pedagogy as a hybrid, interdisciplinary and multi-professional subject (Ucar 2013, Hamalainen 2014), then it is appropriate to pay attention to some of the disciplines and professions that constitute it. Social pedagogy is associated with several fields, and prominent among them are social work, community development, and youth and adult education (hereinafter referred to as adult education). Although in theory social pedagogy is an interdisciplinary and inter-professional subject, at this moment this is more an aspiration than a reality. With a few exceptions, in most places these three fields tend to operate in separate realms. An old term popularized by Shakespeare in *The Tempest*, “strange bedfellows” refers to people or groups who are connected through a particular activity but have different perspectives and seldom work together. This paper discusses the particular features and perspectives of social work, community development and adult education, especially regarding their relationships with social pedagogy. In the last decade, the relations (or lack of thereof) among these fields have attracted the attention of social pedagogy scholars. For instance, Van der Veen (2003) and Eriksson (2010) examined the connections and differences between community development and adult education; Ott (2013) and Lorenz et al. (2014) analyzed the tensions between social work and adult education, and

Kornbeck (2014) discussed converging and diverging trends in the professional education of social work and social pedagogy.

The paper is organized in six sections. The first one provides a brief historical account of social pedagogy, since its original formulations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The second section identifies common themes and internal trends in social pedagogy. The next three sections discuss the theoretical and practical orientations of the three ‘bedfellows’: social work, community development and adult education. In the final section (summary and conclusions) the paper argues that while disciplinary specializations can enhance professionalization, it can hinder not only the holistic, humanistic and interdisciplinary approach of social pedagogy, but also the possibilities of impactful interventions in real communities. Thus, the paper concludes that social pedagogy can greatly benefit from more interactions among social workers, community development workers and adult educators in regards to theory, policy, research and practice.

### **A brief history of social pedagogy**

Social pedagogy has a long and rich history. The literature on this topic tends to agree that the term ‘social pedagogy’ was first introduced in 1844 by German educator Karl Mager (1810-1858). More recently, however, Sinkler and Braches-Chyrek (2009) claimed that Mager borrowed it from his older contemporary Friedrich Diestersweg (1790-1866), an educational philosopher. In any case, both Mager and Diestersweg believed that education should have a social mission, and that such mission should go beyond

the individual's acquisition of knowledge and focus on the acquisition of culture by society and on activities oriented to benefit the community. To some extent, their ideas were influenced by the work of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), particularly his attempt to reconcile the tension between the individual and social goals of education. For Pestalozzi, education should foster the autonomy, freedom and self-realization of learners, and at the same time should develop responsible and engaged citizens concerned with the common good.

Early social pedagogy was also inspired by Pestalozzi's holistic approach to education that combined intellectual, moral and practical dimensions. Such integrated model, summarized in the metaphor 'head, heart and hand', included three related goals: a) nurturing intellectual curiosity and developing cognitive capacities, b) promoting values that emphasize the dignity of all human beings and a concern for the less fortunate, and c) encouraging learners to be active participants of their own learning, with direct physical experiences in the natural and social world (Rosendal Jensen 2013; Stephens, 2013).

Pestalozzi, in turn, was influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), the author of *The Social Contract* and *Emile*. As Petrie (2013) observed, in the DNA of social pedagogy we can recognize the ideas of several 18<sup>th</sup> Century enlightenment philosophers and visionaries like Rousseau, Voltaire, Kant, Fichter, and Owen. The case of the utopian reformer Robert Owen (1771-1858) is interesting because his educational approach foreshadowed some elements of social pedagogy. Among them were advocating a holistic approach to education guided by a social project,

promoting social welfare and cooperation, integrating children's education and adult learning activities in the same buildings, and connecting theory and practice, linking the curriculum to real-life experiences acquired in a variety of social spaces, from gardens to workshops, and from museums to community halls (Owen, 1842). His case is also interesting because not only he wrote about the role of education in social change but also attempted to put those ideas into practice in experimental communities in Scotland and in the USA.

Early social pedagogical thinkers were also inspired by the work Nikolaj Grundtvig (1783-1872), a contemporary of Owen who founded the folk schools in Denmark. The folk schools worked with the poorer members of society, emphasized individual enlightenment and cooperative work, and were guided by the twin concepts of 'living word' and 'school for life' (Fleming, 1998). The pedagogical approach of the folk schools was ahead of its time: it went well beyond vocational training, provided a high degree of pedagogical freedom for teachers and students, combined personal development with associational life, and did not have final exams. Moreover, teachers and students lived and worked together, learned from each other, and shared the running of the school. The folk schools had a relatively open curriculum, and connected their activities to cooperative agriculture, community associations and the like (Lindeman, 1929; Lawson, 1994).

These and other related educational ideas and experiments prepared the ground for the development of a field called 'social pedagogy' in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A pioneering figure in this effort was German philosopher

and educator Paul Natorp (1854-1924), who at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century published a book entitled *Social Pedagogy: The theory of educating the human will into a community asset*. In that work, Natorp contended that all pedagogy should be social, and that educators should consider the interactions of educational processes and societal processes. Reacting against the individualized educational theories and practices of that time, Natorp (1904, p.94) defined social pedagogy as a specific discipline that addresses the social aspects of education and the educational aspects of social life. Following Kant's philosophical approach and the sociological analysis of Ferdinand Tönnies, Natorp believed that human beings were more likely to find their true humanity in small, cohesive and democratic communities guided by solidarity principles. For him, social pedagogy was about creating the conditions for those communities, and this required the active mobilization of the labor movement (Hämäläinen,2012; Stephens, 2013; Wildemeersch, 2013).

By the 1920s, in the context of the social-democratic reforms of the Weimar Republic, social pedagogy further developed as a discipline and as a movement, largely through the efforts of Herman Nohl (1879-1960), who provided a critical structural analysis of social inequalities, and argued that social pedagogy should carry out concrete pedagogical interventions to alleviate suffering and at the same time contribute to the transformation of the social conditions that lead to such suffering. The pedagogical interventions proposed by Nohl emphasized 'social help', an educational process premised on human dignity, love, and awareness that should consider the specific social context of a given situation. Nohl also helped to develop curricula

for a university program on social pedagogy. For him, social pedagogy was about educational interventions in a “third space” outside the family and the school.

For those interventions, Nohl proposed a hermeneutical approach that included four steps. The first is to observe persons in concrete situations to try to understand what are they experiencing and how they be feeling. In the second step, social pedagogues should recall their own past experiences in order empathize with the subjects, remembering how they felt in similar or comparable situations. Given that those past experiences are subjective and could mislead social pedagogues in interpreting the behavior of other people, in the third step Nohl suggests to include shared experiences in the analysis. The last step is to pay attention to the social, emotional and physical context of the situation in order fully understand what is going on. Situations like homelessness, migration, peer pressure among youth, unemployment, or living in a foster homes, for instance, can be better understood hermeneutically (Eichsteller, 2010). It is pertinent to note that when Nohl was making these contributions around mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, social pedagogical interventions focused on homeless and orphan children and youth (Nohl, 1965, Hämäläinen, 2003; Badry and Knapp, 2003; Cousée and Verschelden, 2011). Decades later, social pedagogy took a lifelong perspective, but the identification with children and youth is still so strong in some countries (for instance, England) even today that Kornbeck and Rosendal Jensen (2011), in a recent book, felt necessary to clarify in the title of their introduction that social pedagogy is “not only for infants, orphans and young people”.

In the same way that Freire's ideas were misused in different contexts (Kidd and Kumar, 1981; Brookfield and Holst, 2011; Manyozo, 2003) social pedagogy was not immune to co-optation. Despite the humanitarian and democratic intentions of its pioneers, in the 1930s and 1940s social pedagogy was misappropriated by the Nazis, who used its community building and service elements in their work with youth. It took social pedagogy several decades to disassociate itself from that horrific past (Lorenz 1994; Sunker and Otto, 1997; Smith, 2009; Rosendal Jensen 2013).

In the 1960s and 1970s, Klaus Mollenhauer and Hans Thiersch, influenced by the Frankfurt School, continued Nohl's efforts to build social pedagogy as an autonomous discipline, but with a stronger emphasis on social criticism, social emancipation and anti-colonial approaches through flexible and experimental non-formal education programs that paid attention to everyday life. In those years, social pedagogy theory shifted from philosophy and anthropology towards critical sociology (Hämäläinen, 2003, Schugurensky, 2014). Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, social pedagogy took hold in parts of continental Europe, particularly in Germany, Belgium, Holland, Hungary, Slovenia, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Sweden and Denmark. Denmark is an interesting case because social pedagogy had problems establishing itself as an academic discipline but it was very successful in becoming a legally recognized profession and in instituting a vibrant professional association (Whinter-Jensen, 2011). In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the field of social pedagogy expanded internationally, with the creation of new



programs of study, professional associations and academic journals outside continental Europe.

It is pertinent to clarify that as a theoretical and practical approach, social pedagogy is older than the use of the term 'social pedagogy'. Both in the past and today, it is possible to identify educational theories and practices that share some of the principles of social pedagogy but do not make references to this particular concept. For instance, Russian educator Anton Makarenko (1888-1939) developed and put in practice a holistic educational philosophy that emphasized democracy, self-governance and cooperation, understood education as a lifelong process, subordinated individual interests to the common good, and called for more interaction among families, schools, clubs, workers' cooperatives, public agencies and local community organizations. For this work and for his insights and accomplishments on group dynamics in youth work, some authors (e.g. Eriksson and Markström, 2003; Rosendal Jensen, 2013; De Oliveira, 2014) consider Makarenko as an important contributor to the field of social pedagogy. A similar argument could be made in relation to many other 20<sup>th</sup> century educators like John Dewey, Mary Parker Follet, Jane Addams, Eduard Lindeman, Moses Coady, Paulo Freire and Myles Horton because their work was premised on the same assumption of social pedagogy, that is, that education can make an important contribution to changing individuals and societies for the better. Following Lindeman (1926, 1945), this requires two related tasks. The first is to combine the short-term goal of self-improvement with a long-term program of changing the social order. The second is to combine pedagogical interventions with social action.

## **Common themes and orientations**

Although the field of social pedagogy includes a diversity of orientations and approaches, it is possible to identify at least four common themes. The first one, already noted, is that social pedagogy is about providing educational solutions to social problems. Indeed, a key assumption of social pedagogy is that it is possible to change social circumstances through education (Hamalainen, 2003, p. 71). Social pedagogy deals with the connections between educational and social dynamics: it is concerned with both the educational dimension of social issues and the social dimensions of educational issues. In social pedagogy, individual development and social development are mutually reinforcing, because social development requires an educated, critical and engaged citizenry, and individual development is contingent upon a society that ensures the wellbeing of its population.

This is a crucial theme in social pedagogy, because it originated as a critique to the dominant educational approaches that focused on the development of individuals without considering the social dimensions of human existence. From a social pedagogy perspective, thus, enhancing the quality of life of individuals and improving the communities where they live are inseparable tasks. A second theme is that the word 'education', in the context of social pedagogy, does not refer exclusively to the formal education system or to children, but to a lifelong and lifewide phenomenon that includes a great variety of experiences inside and outside the classroom. A third theme is a humanistic and holistic approach that pays attention to the whole person and to overall personal

development, combining intellectual, moral and physical development, and helping participants to accomplish personal, social and professional development goals throughout their lifespan. This also implies considering different dimensions of human life such as study, work, leisure, and community participation, as well as societal structures, processes and policies that can contribute or hinder human development. A fourth theme, which is rooted in a long tradition of social pedagogical thinking, is that, at its core, social pedagogy is not a mere set of specific methods and techniques, but a theoretical conceptualization and a philosophical orientation with a normative framework that guides social pedagogical actions. As Hämäläinen stated,

an action is not social pedagogical because certain methods are used therein, but because some methods are chosen and used as a consequence of a social pedagogical thought that is rooted in democratic and humanistic values (Hämäläinen 2003, p. 77) .

Beyond these common themes, it is possible to observe some different orientations. This is not surprising given that a) theories and practices of social pedagogy emerged in diverse historical and geographical contexts that were affected by particular economic, social and political realities, and b) theorists and practitioners of social pedagogy were –and still are- influenced by different philosophical, ideological, sociological and educational traditions, from Pestalozzi and Grundtvig to the Frankfurt School to Freire. The origin of these emphases can be traced to the beginnings of social pedagogy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the context of the emerging German Welfare

State. Karl Mager and other social pedagogy pioneers of that period were proposing a new field that combined the double challenge of preparing individuals for community life, on the one hand, and re-orienting society to address the personal and social needs of individuals, on the other. There was a related debate on the ‘pedagogical’ and the ‘social’ missions of social pedagogy. Although there was a general agreement that social pedagogy should alleviate human suffering and social ills through education, those who emphasized the pedagogical side focused on the development of individual autonomy, and those who emphasized the social focused on the socialization processes that were required by modern societies.

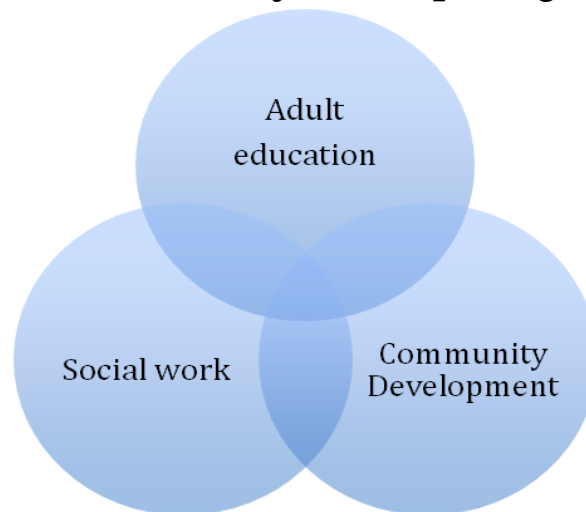
The tensions inherent in these two missions of social pedagogy generated vibrant pedagogical and social policy debates and, in certain historical periods, a polarization into two camps: on the one hand, a progressive and emancipatory tradition inspired by the Enlightenment that advocated for the right of every person to develop their full potential and for the responsibility of society to create the conditions to make this possible. On the other, a more conservative tradition that was concerned with ensuring social stability through education and other means to adapt individuals to societal structures. Indeed, in examining theories and practices of social pedagogy we can find, at one end of the spectrum, a preoccupation for social control and adaptation to the status quo (social reproduction tradition), and on the other end a concern for critical analysis and emancipation (social transformation tradition), with many gradations in between (Lorenz 2003, Fielding, 2011; Cameron and Moss, 2011a, b; Hämäläinen, 2013). In terms of social pedagogical interventions, it is

possible to identify an orientation that considers participants mainly as vulnerable and at-risk clients that need assistance, and another that considers participants as active subjects with knowledge, skills, experiences, rights and responsibilities. The first orientation tends to take a deficit perspective while the second tends to follow an asset approach that takes into account local community organizations.

### **The practice of social pedagogy**

The practice of social pedagogy encompasses a wide and diffuse set of activities that are connected to a variety of social and educational interventions. Prominent among them are social work, community development, and adult education. In some countries, social pedagogy has a stronger connection to one of these fields.

*Figure 1: Three areas of social pedagogy practice*



For instance, in Germany social pedagogy is more strongly connected to social work, whereas in Brazil (and other

Latin American countries) it is usually associated with adult education (particularly Freirean traditions of popular education) and in parts of Spain and France is more closely related to community development and sociocultural animation.

## **Social work**

Considering that social pedagogy emerged in the context of the incipient Welfare State and the expansion of social services, and that early social pedagogy interventions focused on social care for vulnerable populations, it is not surprising that in some countries (particularly in Europe) there is a strong historical association between social pedagogy and social work. Furthermore, in some European universities social pedagogy programs are housed in faculties of social work, a good portion of academic articles on social pedagogy are published in social work journals, and for some authors (e.g. Lorenz 2008a) social pedagogy constitutes a specific German contribution to social work theory.

To be sure, the principles of social work have several parallels with social pedagogy. The International Federation of Social Work (IFSW), an organization of 116 country members that is considered the global voice of social workers, states that the profession strives to promote social development, social change, problem solving in human relationships, and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance their wellbeing. Likewise, in the definition adopted at its Montreal General Meeting in 2000, the IFSW states that the mission of social work is to enable all people to develop their full potential and enrich their

lives, and considers social workers as change agents in society and in the lives of the individuals, families and communities they serve.

Like social pedagogy, social work was inspired since its beginnings by humanitarian and democratic ideals, and by a belief in the equality, worth, and dignity of all people. Social workers are motivated by human rights and social justice, and in their daily work they try to alleviate poverty and to liberate oppressed people in order to promote social inclusion. The IFSW claims that social work has micro and macro dimensions. On the one hand, it responds to everyday personal and social problems, including crises and emergencies affecting all population groups, from abandoned children to unemployed youth to homeless elders. On the other, it analyzes and addresses barriers, inequities and injustices that exist in society (IFSW 2014). Likewise, the National Association of Social Work (NASW) in the USA states that a historic and defining feature of social work is its focus on individual wellbeing in a social context and the wellbeing of society, paying attention to the environmental forces that create or solve social problems (discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice) and to the empowerment and emancipation of the most vulnerable and oppressed members of society.

However, beyond the progressive and transformative discourse of international and national professional associations, in some contexts, particularly Anglo-Saxon societies shifting from the welfare state to the neoliberal state, the dominant model of social work is individualized case management guided by deficit based approaches. In these societies, social problems tend to be located at the individual level (“the client”) and rooted in individual or

family dysfunctions isolated from larger social structures and dynamics. For instance, poverty is often seen as a personal or family failure (lack of discipline and ambition, poor parenting, etc.), unrelated to issues of social inequality, structural unemployment or low wages. Likewise, in the case of young offenders, interventions often put more emphasis on individual responsibility, punishment and community safety than on societal integration. In these contexts, social workers can be regarded as functionaries within a neoliberal state apparatus (Higham, 2001; Wagner and Childs, 2001; Smith and Whyte, 2008; Ferguson, 2008; Cameron, 2013). At the same time, both in Anglo-Saxon countries and elsewhere it is possible to find social work practices that are closer to the philosophy of social pedagogy. These practices often go beyond helping people to cope with the difficulties of daily life, and include education, critical analysis of reality and community organizing; they are guided by asset-based approaches and consider micro-macro relationships, put values of human development and human dignity at the center, and assist communities in finding their own solutions. The pioneer settlement work of Jane Addams in Chicago's Hull House in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century is often seen as an early manifestation of this approach to social work in North America (Fook, 2002; Hämaläinen, 2003; Koengeter and Schroer, 2013).

## **Community Development**

Community development is a collective process by which groups mobilize to improve their communities, sometimes supported by a professional (Van Der Veen 2003, Eriksson



2014). A classic definition was put forward by the United Nations in 1948 in article 55 of its Repertory of Practice:

Community development is a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and fullest possible reliance upon the community's initiative (quoted in Head 1979, p. 101).

Indeed, community development can be conceptualized as a process (not an outcome) through which community members (sometimes with assistance of community development workers) generate solutions to common problems and take collective action to implement those solutions. Such process can involve a variety of actors (including engaged residents, community leaders, activists and professionals) who aim at improving the quality of life in the community. Like social work, community development can be understood both as an occupation and as a particular approach to work with communities. The discourse on community development tends to emphasize the need to recognize community's assets, to ensure community ownership of the process, and to respect the pace of such process. This discourse also makes reference to goals related to self-determination, social change and empowerment, strategies related to capacity building, and to values like social justice, inclusion, equality, mutual respect, social action, dignity, participation, anti-discrimination, sustainability and the like.

While there is general consensus around this discourse, in the practice of community development it is

possible to identify different orientations that could be grouped under three models: social planning, locality development, and social action (Rothman & Tropman, 1987). As ideal types, these models are theoretical abstractions, idea-constructs that emphasize particular features of community development strategies and interventions.

The **social planning model** is probably the most common one, particularly in the global North. In this approach, which is problem-centered and agency-centered, experts determine the most pressing problems (e.g. drug addiction, poverty, delinquency alcoholism, homelessness, malnutrition, mental health, unemployment) and design and deliver programs and services to address those problems. This model assumes that most social problems in contemporary societies are too complex, and because average residents do not have enough knowledge about them, it is necessary to rely on professionals with technical expertise in the topic and in data collection and analysis. This model allows for public participation, but it is usually restricted to the lower rungs of Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation.

Central elements of this approach are needs assessments, planning, policy-making and policy implementation. Both in identifying the problems and in delivering services, social agencies enlist the collaboration of local leaders, some active residents and civil society organizations. To diagnose community needs, social planners usually collect data through surveys and interviews to create local inventories. Advocates of this model emphasize its reliance on technical expertise, its objectivity and rationality in determining needs and

interventions, its emphasis on data and on problem solving, and its efficiency and accountability in service delivery. Critics argue that it privileges external technical expertise over community engagement, considers vulnerable populations as victims rather than agents of change, blames communities for their problems, creates dependency relations with government agencies, does not challenge powerful social and economic groups, and aims at adapting people to the existing social order rather than at changing it.

The **locality development** model is rooted in two community development traditions: cooperation (mutual help) and self-organization. This model advocates bottom-up processes, emphasizes participatory action research, and pays attention to group dynamics. It usually starts with a community's analysis of its reality and a self-assessment of strengths, capabilities and resources. Leadership and the control of the process are locally driven, usually through community organizations, faith institutions, neighborhood associations and the like. Community development professionals could take a prominent role at the beginning, but their aspiration is to eventually become redundant by empowering local actors through capacity building activities. For this reason, locality development community workers prefer non-directive approaches, facilitating discussions and offering suggestions whenever the need arises. This model aims at promoting inclusive development strategies and broad community participation, and pays particular attention to consensus building processes.

Advocates of this model argue that it is more democratic and participatory than other approaches,

promotes autonomy and self-reliance through capacity building, and ultimately allows the community to be in charge of its own destiny. Critics note that this model tends to be premised on a romantic picture of communities, that change is often too slow and does not challenge powerful groups, that consensus processes inhibit the implementation of timely initiatives, and that its communitarian premises underscore social processes at the expense of political mobilization to advance demands based on rights (Sites, 1998).

The **social action model** emphasizes community organizing and community mobilization through conflict strategies to achieve justice-oriented economic, social or political goals and at a redistribution of power and resources. To compensate for the fragmentation and marginalization of poor communities, this model promotes coalition building with communities facing similar issues and with organizations that support their cause. Strategies and tactics are usually confrontational, and include demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, and other acts of civil disobedience to achieve specific demands. Processes are often spearheaded by impassioned, committed and charismatic leaders who usually have university education. The model includes a class analysis of power and inequality, and its ultimate aim is to change social structures. Unlike the previous ones, this model is explicitly political by articulating interests, mobilizing constituencies, building alliances and making claims in the political realm.

Moreover, while the other two models avoid disruptive strategies and confrontations, the social action model thrives in conflict. Advocates of this model argue that it

brings issues of discrimination, exploitation, oppression, and human rights violations to the forefront of community development, and that it engages directly unequal power relations by fostering the empowerment of community members. Critics contend that its high reliance on external leadership creates the possibility that outside agents determine the community's agenda, generating a situation of dependency that hinders endogenous development. They also argue that the focus on power struggles and on promoting and escalating conflictive situations constrain opportunities to solve problems using constructive dialogue and collaboration.

In sum, each model has a different emphasis: technical expertise of external agencies, grassroots participation and capacity building, and political mobilization of oppressed groups. Having said that, these are abstract models of social analysis and community interventions, and the reality of community development practice is characterized by “mixing” and “phasing”. First, community development practitioners often combine, blend and adapt elements and techniques of the three approaches to a particular context. Second, one model may morph into another one as conditions and challenges change. For instance, if a social action organization is successful in securing resources or passing a policy, it may shift to a social planning model or a locality development during the next phase of the process (Rothman and Tropman, 1987). In any case, regardless of the model adopted, community development workers are expected to have good knowledge of the organizations and institutions that are active in the community in which they operate (Surel, Douglas and Finley, 2011).

## **Adult education**

The third field associated with the practice of social pedagogy practice is adult education, which in many countries also includes youth education. Like in the case of social work and community development, in adult education it is possible to identify different traditions, orientations and sub-fields such as literacy, basic education, skills upgrading and vocational training, professional development, trade union education, cooperative education, health education, environmental education, media literacy, art education, sports education, drivers education, political education, parents education, prison education, peace education, human rights education, religious education, drug education, citizenship education, second language education, and popular education. Given the breadth and diversity of the field, it is not surprising that one of the most quoted definitions of adult education is rather lengthy:

The term 'adult education' denotes the entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their

attitudes or behavior in the twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development (Unesco, 1976).

Although this definition is comprehensive, the key element is that adult education is a process by which adults acquire knowledge, abilities, attitudes and behaviors, that is, they learn. Indeed, in a shorter text, Merriam & Brockett (1997) focus on this element when they define adult education as “activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults.” This is important because, beyond the particular sub-fields and orientations, the distinctive feature of adult education in comparison with its social pedagogy siblings discussed in this paper (social work and community development) is its chief concern for teaching and learning. It is in this field where the pedagogical component of the term ‘social pedagogy’ is more clearly articulated.

In adult education it is possible to identify a spectrum of ideological orientations, from an emphasis on adaptation, control and the reproduction of the social order to an emphasis on emancipation and social change, and from an emphasis on individual development to an emphasis on social development. In this regard, Eduard Lindeman, one of the pioneers of the field in North America, argued that adult education is learning associated with social purposes, and claimed that:

Adult education will become an agency of progress if its short-term goal of self-improvement can be made



compatible with a long-term, experimental but resolute policy of changing the social order (Lindeman 1926, p.105).

He also made a connection between adult education and social action that is relevant to social pedagogy:

Every social action group should at the same time be an adult education group, and I go even as far as to believe that all successful adult education groups sooner or later become social action groups (Lindeman, 1945).

Like other adult educators of that era, Lindeman was influenced by the Folk Schools that had been created by Grundtvig in Denmark in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The educational work of Myles Horton in Highlander, Moses Coady in Antigonish, Jane Addams in Hull House and Paulo Freire in Pernambuco, for instance, followed that tradition.

Much has been written and done in adult education since those times, but some of the general propositions, values and practices advanced by those pioneers are still relevant to social pedagogy. Among them are the humanistic, democratic and emancipatory approach to education, the idea that adult education can contribute to increase both the quality of life of participants and their capacity to change society for the better, the importance of dialogue and cooperation, and the connection between adult education and justice-oriented social movements. At the same time, one of the main criticisms to adult education is that, despite a progressive discourse, most practice (particularly institutionalized adult education)



tends to implement traditional 'banking' teaching methods, emphasize vocational training and individual approaches to learning, and lacks a critical view of societal structures and dynamics, and the role of education in them.

To be sure, there are many critical and transformative adult education practices undertaken around the world, but they constitute a minority in the adult education landscape. Of the three fields related to social pedagogy discussed in this paper, social work and community development are more concerned with the social side, and adult education is the one with a more clear preoccupation with pedagogical issues. Indeed, what adult education brings to the social pedagogy table is significant expertise on educational theories (including theories of learning) and a wealth of accumulated practices that can enhance the 'educational interventions' aimed at addressing social issues. It can also help to understand the lifelong and lifewide educational processes that take place in society (Lorenz, 2008b).

## **Summary and conclusions**

Currently, social pedagogy is experiencing a renewal in many parts of the world. New programs of study are being created at the undergraduate and graduate level, new journals in different languages are emerging and academic and professional associations are growing. In this context, the time is ripe for more fruitful dialogue and interactions among the three social pedagogy traditions: social work, community development and adult education. At the theoretical level, social pedagogy can be strengthened by fostering more mutual learning about new conceptual

developments and research findings emerging in each discipline. At the practical level adult educators, social workers, and community development workers could engage in selective borrowing of the three fields, with adaptations that take into account the context in which they operate. On the one hand, these efforts should consider the shared philosophical and normative principles of social pedagogy; on the other, they should aim at developing integrated programs that combine educational and social dimensions.

This is not an easy task. One of the barriers preventing cross-fertilization is the increasing professionalization of these fields. To be sure, professionalization is a positive development because it generates higher societal recognition, better working conditions, and more qualified professionals. At the same time, however, this tendency is problematic because it furthers a trend towards specialization, which in turn inhibits the holistic nature of social pedagogical work. In fact, an exacerbation of such tendency can increase separate professional silos and identities, rivalries and competition for funding, and in turn this may delay the construction of a comprehensive theory of social pedagogy and the development of an integrated approach in the field. This integration may also be delayed by the perceptions of hierarchies among workers of these fields, which are partly rooted in their differential professional status, with social workers usually enjoying better conditions in the public sector; community development workers facing more precarious employment in nonprofits and voluntary organizations; and adult educators somewhere in between.

From a social pedagogy approach, the artificial

divisions of care, education and mobilization do not make sense, neither from a conceptual perspective nor in terms of practical interventions in real communities. Additionally, social pedagogy practitioners can enhance their understanding of the characteristics of the communities and their contexts by using the analytical tools of other disciplines like sociology, political science, social psychology or economics. Indeed, the complexity of real life situations addressed by social pedagogues would be better served by an interdisciplinary and holistic approach than by differentiated disciplines. Honoring the principles and values of social pedagogy, such integration should emphasize inclusion, participation, equality, agency, empowerment and personal and community wellbeing (Hatton, 2013). Moreover, it should include both a social critique and an orientation towards emancipatory social change, and pay attention to the impact of policies and regulations on the reproduction of inequalities and on societal democratization. As Smith and White (2008) observed,

the current direction of policy and structural developments cries out for the conceptual synthesis a social educational model might provide (Smith and White 2008, p. 25).

Social pedagogy has great potential for contributing to such conceptual synthesis and for offering an appealing framework for those who have a concern for justice, participation and democracy and are interested in integrating social work, education and community development principles and methods in their endeavors.

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