



Towards the Transversalism of Social Pedagogy

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Abstract

The text below is a small contribution to this discussion about the search for ontological, epistemological and axiological references, which enable us to develop hypotheses that explain social events and processes within the field of social work. It is also a very synthetic presentation of social pedagogy's point of view on the processes and individually enacted events that occur in the field of practice. We describe this point of view as the transversal dimension of social pedagogy.

The thesis of the viewpoint presented here refers to an expectation that social pedagogy, understood as a certain theoretical construct (epistemological-ontological-axiological), will provide us with an orientation for social action undertaken in the field of social practice.

“[...] Modern science is increasingly becoming a discipline of *reflection upon reflection*. One only needs to reach for all the subjects of biological evolution to see the revolutionary character of this complexity, studying them from only one point of view – the relationship of that which is *external* to that which is *internal*. One can then see, as evolution progresses, direct and local reactions gradually beginning to complicate, extend and become suspended in time and space, as so excellently demonstrated by Bergson. A living being perfects itself to the extent that it can reference its point of view, *the fact of the moment and centre, to enduring and various types of greater dimensions*” (Bachelard 2002: 322).

1 Placement of the problem

In analysing, from a certain distance, the work of Walter Lorenz in the community of people and institutions concerned with the theory and practice of social work in Europe, I believe that one could propose its main characteristics to be:

- sensitising the social work community of researchers and practitioners to reflection on practice (providing practice with the dimension of reflection);
- constructing the theoretical framework of this reflection upon reflection;
- clearly situated in the changing social context.

The problem of social change and its implication for social work (both practice, as well as theory) was the main field of interest in the research of Walter Lorenz (1994). My conviction in this was also reinforced by the editors of this publication, who gave it exactly such a title.

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explain social events and processes within the field of social work. It is also a very synthetic presentation of social pedagogy's point of view on the processes and individually enacted events that occur in the field of practice. We describe this point of view as the transversal dimension of social pedagogy.

The thesis of the viewpoint presented here refers to an expectation that social pedagogy, understood as a certain theoretical construct (epistemological-ontological-axiological), will provide us with an orientation for social action undertaken in the field of social practice. The action orientation is understood as a mental process of the actor, based on a search for epistemological, ontological and axiological references for the action to be undertaken, allowing for the discovery of a probable answer to the questions of why an action is undertaken, which direction it should take and what gives it sense and meaning.

This problem is being considered in relationship to the discussion about the identity of the discipline, especially the assessment of the extent it exists as a discipline. This particularly pertains to its relationship to practice, the tools of analysis it constructs, and the concept of the said field of practice. Of essence is its understanding, description, manner in which it is discussed, and its construction, together with the subjects acting in the practice fields of interest to the social pedagogue (it is understood that we will be speaking here of education, including teaching, and social work, with its dimension of work for society).

We refer to Bachelard's viewpoint here because of the essential meaning given to the transversal perspective of analysing the social practice fields from the socio-pedagogical point of view. The transversal perspective is a certain type of *reflection upon reflection*, emerging from the observation and interpretation of what is occurring in the field of social practice (for example, social work, teaching, or even education). This attribute – transversalism – is also emphasised in the accepted understanding of social pedagogy as an academic discipline and as an orientation for action.

The concept of the person as able to undertake action (Ricoeur 2004) is important in the point of view of social pedagogy presented here. It is understood, that the individual, or more precisely, his/her personality, can be recognised as a system of “relationships to the world” (see Świda, 1974), as such, the person's *relational dimension* is especially important in the *concept of the person* within this point of view of social pedagogy. It is underscored by the analysis of such processes as social growth, rootedness, introduction of cultural values, as well as participation in social life by identifying with past generations. The search for *relationships* and providing such a dimension with a fixed conceptual category in social pedagogy is, it seems, a specific characteristic of the accepted point of view.

The concept of the person, his/her identity, proposed by Ricoeur (2004) could be very useful in understanding the acting subject. It is defined by two pairs of concepts: engagement and commitment, loyalty (*promesse*). These are at the foundation of two opposing categories characterising the modern person: *the person vulnerable to threats (homme vulnerable)* and the *capable person (homme capable)*, able to resist them.

A different concept, useful in enriching the ontological perspective of *reflection upon socio-pedagogical reflection* is the concept of *duality* (Witkowski 2001), and also the position on this, as it now stands, pointing to it in its context as a process, characterised by *severance and discontinuity* (see Bachelard 2002). It is impossible to provide an exhaustive analysis of these

concepts. However, it is worth emphasising that this direction is useful in developing the foundations of a “philosophy of action” (Ricouer 2004: 232-233).

2 The framework of reflection upon reflection – the dimensions of social pedagogy

The developing thesis that social pedagogy can be perceived as reflection upon reflection, became the fundamental position discussed in the academic text on social pedagogy published in 2006 (Marynowicz-Hetka 2006) and also in the second volume of this text currently in publication (*Social pedagogy*, in publication). The project of preparing an academic text on social pedagogy, with the participation of over 40 authors, is clearly rooted in the socio-pedagogical mandate evident from the start of this discipline’s development. It strives to refer to the present and proposes that it be considered from the socio-pedagogical perspective. Volume II of the text, subtitled “debate,” includes theoretical and methodological references from the first volume of *Social pedagogy*, where an attempt was made to formulate a cohesive point of view about what social pedagogy is, or rather what it could be, perceived as an academic discipline and an orientation for action. As a result, both volumes complement each other and form a cohesive tool. Reading them provides a mutual investigation of references and rationales.

The entire analysis concentrates on three theses. Two refer to how social pedagogy paradigms can (should) develop, when perceived as:

- an academic discipline – reflection upon reflection, whose characteristic trait is the *heterogeneous paradigm*;
- pedagogy, reflection on practice and for practice, which can develop in the direction of a *paradigm of socio-pedagogical orientation for action*.

The framework joining these two theses provided throughout the entire text, especially in Volume I, is the position that social pedagogy can be perceived transversally. This is possible due to its roots and the beginnings of *socio-pedagogical reflection*, which is also conducted transectionally (transversally). Above all, this is possible due to the extent and intensity of its relationship to other disciplines and theoretical approaches, as well as a result of its openness. Such are the rationales for perceiving social pedagogy as *reflection upon reflection* – a socio-pedagogical meta-theory on the one hand, while on the other hand, fulfilling the conditions for a global analysis of social action, understood as the creation of a symbolic institution (Castoriadis 1975).

The position of Gaston Bachelard (2002) became the basis for proposing a debate on social pedagogy, its forms and state of development. For this purpose, following the thoughts of Bachelard, we needed to define the point of view. Its dominating characteristic is a relativity, enabling it to be constructed as the result of a comparison between that which is “internal” to that which is “external.” In this mental process, that which is “internal” is understood as the endurance of social pedagogy, as well as its evolution in relationship to the effects of this endurance. That which is “external” is defined as the references to other theses, other disciplines, other points of view. In paraphrasing Bachelard (2002), that which is “external” is farther from the “centre and the fact of the moment,” “a type of the larger dimensions.” Such an intention was partly achieved in Volume I of the text. But this was achieved to a limited degree, due to the interpretation of other theses from one, clearly defined point of view. For this reason, it seemed necessary to undertake the interdisciplinary and intercultural debate of Volume II.

The *point of view* on social pedagogy formulated in Volume I may, and even should, be open to discussion. It expresses the position that one should not only describe the subjective scope of its interest, but, above all, ensure that the point of view is defined (see Przeclawska 1990). This thesis is the main rationale for preparing the lecture on social pedagogy published in Volume I. The assumed conceptual definition here of the point of view includes those elements existing in some concept, some position, which indicate the basis for the interpretation of the observed reality, as well as for its analysis. Most often, a belief system serves as such a reference. In the case of social pedagogy, this can be the point of view of the meaning (place) of the subject (individual) in the community of life, of the opportunity to mould that community, of the strength of the capacity to act, of social pedagogy's specific characteristics, understood as an academic discipline and as an orientation for action.

Our intention was to search for methodological justifications to provide social pedagogy with a transversal dimension. It was acknowledged, that two of its forms could be distinguished:

1. when the transversal perspective is assumed in analysing social practice, where the socio-pedagogical point of view is clearly delineated;
2. when conceptual categories and ontological, epistemological and axiological references are considered, the transversal perspective is assumed in the process of reflection upon reflection, emerging from the observation and interpretation of what is occurring in the field of social practice.

Such an understanding of the attribute of transversalism sets forth the two-tracked thinking about *social pedagogy*: as an *academic discipline* and as an *orientation for action*.

In assuming such an understanding, the following dimensions of social pedagogy can be distinguished. It can be understood as:

- an *academic discipline*, still in the process of creation and development, as an institution that is forming, influenced by change and influencing change, transmitted through learning;
- a certain type of *reflective pedagogy (pedagogies)*, being the result of thought about changes in the social context and the processes occurring therein, on the areas of action and about social action itself within its confines, its direction and orientation, and especially on discovering its sense and meaning;
- *reflection upon reflection*, conducted transversally, which emerges as a result of thought about its current perception as an academic discipline and as an orientation for action, referring to its tradition and initial formulations, as well as other theoretical tenets in the social and humanities disciplines.

As a result this scope bestowed on social pedagogy, examples of its specific problem areas can include:

- the concept of the *other* and the *multi-dimensional perception of the individual* in the social context;

- the issue of *social action*, its socio-pedagogical dimension and the meaning of axiological aspects, the acting subject;
- an analysis of the *phenomenon of social pedagogy's endurance* (the currency of H. Radlińska's concept, referring to the concept of work for society, social support, the axiological dimension of action research and learning (recherche – action-participation));
- reflection on the possibilities of *learning (formulating) to act* in / through and for communities, to the skill of choosing the orientation for action;
- an analysis of using other solutions outside the traditional areas of social pedagogy, and their application to optimise and *transform social practice*, for example, institutional pedagogies;
- other elements of the problem important to social pedagogy, and also theoretical references, revealed among the sciences of education, social and humanities disciplines.

3 Reflection upon reflection – towards the transversalism of social pedagogy

As we have already tried to show, social pedagogy as presented here is constructed from the appropriate elements of many paradigms. The construct respects the characteristics of transversalism, and hence of continuity and change, as well as, figuratively speaking, an analysis “across” and “from above.”

With the intention of providing a very brief explanation of the category of transversalism, we must present, above all, *two of its dimensions*. First, *transversalism* understood as *creating a transversal perspective* (inter-disciplinary) has a specific application in the process of making reflection upon the areas of action a discipline. An example of this is the process of creating disciplines with many references, as are the sciences (or) science of education, or the sciences (or) science of social work. In both cases, the transversal approach is a certain dimension of *meta-theorising reflection on the field of action*, that is education or social work. In the process of creating the science of social work, or the science of education, the search for the transversal perspective is evident – the creation of meta-theories enabling an epistemological reference for the recognition (understanding) of this area of action, its orientation and the search for the rationales for action.

Secondly, the *transversal approach* is understood as a *methodological tenet*, resulting from a lack of known perspectives for recognising action (when it itself is the subject of research). It originated as an antidote to the lack of objectivist perspectives. Transversal, understood here as the “from above” perspective, allows a complete analysis of action in three dimensions: from “outside,” from “inside” and from “above,” that is, also from a certain distance (see, for example, Barbier 2006).

Conducting an analysis from the perspective of the current concepts of multi-aspected studies of social reality and the multiple references of action therein (for example, Wagner 1998), one can attempt to answer the question about the relationship between closely related, yet different approaches (for example, systemic and transversal) and the consequences of this for research and action. The transversal approach uses its own, meta-theoretical language, used to express the relationships between the elements under analysis. Since, however, the subject of

this analysis is, for example, an educator's field of action or a representative of a social profession, it can also be useful in various disciplines. An awareness of the essence of the transversal approach can be beneficial in referring to it for systems analysis. In the systems approach of, for example, Stanisław Kowalski (1984) and his methodology, the normative perspective and the external position of the researcher is clearly evident. Using tools and appropriate skills, this enables him to analyse an ordered world and influence its changes by formulating, as it was called then, the praxiological directive for action.

In distinction from such an understanding of the systemic approach, the *participatory-interpretative perspective* permeates the transversal approach, constructed from an understanding of the person as a subject that acts and is surrounded by a disordered (and even chaotic) context, constantly in flux and in the process of being created. From this perspective, the researcher is situated internally, in an attempt to understand the field of action while participating in it. The transversal perspective helps to explain (illuminate) such a reality, where various external and internal elements transect, as well as those at a distance from the field of action. This then is a perspective that enables reality to be analysed in three dimensions.

The *transversal approach* provides the opportunity to observe the complexity of social reality from the point of view of many disciplines, but its expression occurs in one, universal transmission. This is how the approach links that which is universal and recurring to that which is individual, specific and unique. At the same time, the meta-theoretical and meta-methodological aspect can be useful in constituting disciplines and in the entire process of *making reflective practice a discipline*. This occasion to reflect on the condition of social pedagogy and methodological reflection on the field of activity (action) became the impulse to consider again the possible use of the transversal approach in analysing the field of action (and to prepare for it). It seemed useful for a new reading of Radlińska's thoughts on social pedagogy, formulated in the well-known definition: "the term social pedagogy expresses its role as a link between the set of sciences concerned with education and those of culture and society," (Theiss 1984, p. 233). It seems then, that one could take social pedagogy under consideration, understood in a certain way, as reflection about and for action, as a specific system of concepts and meanings, providing references for an understanding of action-education, assisting with development, its orientation and rationale for chosen ways of acting. Discovering new meaning in the old gives sense to a return to the past oriented to the present and future, and confirms our conviction that the phenomenon of cultural heritage (*la filiation*) enables deeper reflection on reality and our place within it.

4 The transversal dimension of social pedagogy

A thesis was presented in Volume I of the text that social pedagogy, understood as an ongoing process and temporal, serves as a crossroads (footbridge, gangway) enabling the permeation and flow of that which is:

- felt as subjective and that which is defined as objective;
- gradually regulated (changing the environment) and that which changes radically;
- exists internally, interpreted inter-subjectively and situated, and that which exists externally and is determined;

- individual (the person, human strengths) and that which is collective (group, community);
- external facts (data) and that which is internalised (assimilated);
- already created and that which is in the process of creation (changes);
- in process and that which is unchanging;
- communicative and oriented towards understanding and that which is solely oriented to persuasion (performative);
- defined historically of long duration, and that which is a-historic;
- unified in diversity (integrated transversally) and that which is solely multi-aspected, lacking a discovery of unity (eclectic).

The characteristics above, especially the placement “between” and the culture of action shared by the academic community, allow us to define the *transversal paradigm* of social pedagogy. Its characteristic is the unification of elements belonging to many approaches, whose expression is a defined, socio-pedagogical point of view. It is understood as reflection “about,” “for,” and “through” action, as a certain system of concepts and meanings, able to serve as a reference to understand action – education, assist in development, orient and rationalise choices in the methods of acting. The appropriate detail in the analysis can be ensured by careful attention to the relationships of social pedagogy as an orientation for action to other proposals of action orientations present in sociology, psychology, philosophy, anthropology, ethnology, etc. However, if we accept that a paradigm is a set rules governing scientific activity comprising an academic culture (Barbier, 2006), then it will also include characteristics suitable for both action, understood as the creation of a symbolic institution, as well as for the concept of culture.

A critical analysis of such a transversal approach to solving problems, which social pedagogy sets before itself, can raise the question of the legitimacy of adopting such a position. One should also add the ever present complicated and threatening feeling of incompetence. One answer, concurrently providing a basis for adopting such a perspective, is the search for such tools, theses, positions, methods and ways, which enable problems addressed by social pedagogy to be understood (and perhaps even resolved). The transversal approach also emerges in these two dimensions: a certain meta-concept that explains the real world from the socio-pedagogical point of view, and a multi-causative analysis of the field of social practice and the interpretation of relationships occurring therein, directed towards undertaking action.

The acceptance of such a perspective enables social pedagogy not only to become “enlivened” but also to reach to its edges and margins so that it can attain solutions which not only raise doubts about its past achievements, but also stimulate the construction of different proposals for defining the socio-pedagogical point of view. Undoubtedly, it is essential to develop a *framework of reflection upon reflection*, by, among other things, putting these proposals forth for social discourse. Otherwise, the search for solutions to socio-pedagogical problems externally, in other disciplines and theoretical tenets, can dangerously erode the boundaries of social pedagogy itself. We encroach here on the field of questions about the singularity of the

socio-pedagogical approach, that very point of view, on the field of the (sub) discipline's identity, where our deliberations began.

An indubitable characteristic of accepting such a position is its inherent opposition, which could be eased by skilfully finding a certain type of reflex provided by an overview of accepted solutions and positions of the socio-pedagogical point of view, which delineates the boundaries of their interpretation. In using other viewpoints, it is essential to know how to find the best arguments. However, one should remember Paul Ricoeur's warning, to be careful not to "stray from the path."

"My problem has always been knowing whether or not I have constructed a false window, is what I did only a simple compromise, or is it a true proposal for a third path, supportable and defensible" (Paul Ricoeur 1995, p. 118; in Foessel and Mongin 2006:12). To our understanding, this path is the socio-pedagogical *point of view*. It also seems that accepting the transversal perspective in creating the ontological and epistemological framework of the discipline and orientation for action requires certain personal dispositions of the actor, such as *openness* to other disciplines – let's say "controlled," rather a lack of radicalism and fundamental "maintenance" of one's own viewpoint, directed towards seeking balanced solutions. Most likely, an essential characteristic is a type of pragmatism, enabling one to discover the best solutions in terms of the subject. Bearing in mind all these stipulations, we propose that the possibility of developing the foundations of a *transversal paradigm of social pedagogy* be considered.

Whether or not we have been able to fulfil Ricoeur's wish, and at the same time present in this text social pedagogy open to influences and proposals, but at the same time clearly defined and firmly established in its initial formulations and concepts, is best left to the opinion of the readers. I am pleased to state that this position concurs well with the thinking of Walter Lorenz, as a theoretical reference for global standards of social work education and training accepted by the general assembly of IASSW members in Adelaide in 2004. We read there (*Global Qualifying Standards for Education and Training of the Social Work*, 2004: 2), among others, that Walter Lorenz points attention to the paradigmatic openness of the social professions and other essential values, such as its historical placement in the social context and ethical values. He writes: „Its paradigmatic openness that gives this profession the chance to engage with very specific (and constantly changing) historical and political contexts with, at the same time, striving for a degree of universality, scientific reliability, professional autonomy and moral accountability" (2001:12; in *Global Qualifying Standards..*). We harbour the hope that in this discussion of the quality of social work, the transversal paradigm of social pedagogy will prove to be very useful.

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