

## THE PROBLEMS OF SOCIAL PEDAGOGIST TRAINING: APTITUDE AND/OR SUITABILITY

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*In my paper I attempted to introduce social pedagogy as a profession and a job. I described that aptitude for a helping profession is a result of a very long personality development process. The basis of the aptitude is the suitable motivation, good motivation is the joint effect of several events and abilities. In accordance with Super's theory I emphasized the following processes: curiosity and interest in childhood, parental pattern, acquisition of professional-human abilities, trying out the helping profession in practice, career socialization process and higher education training. Professional personality developed by mid-life is the proof that suitability exists in this profession.*

**Keywords:** social work, social pedagogy, career development, professional personality

Social training in Hungary celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the academic year of 2009-2010. Social pedagogist students have studied in higher education for 20 years now who can handle the most complex human problems among young people belonging to the most different social groups at a very high level in theory and practice as well.

These 20 years have brought acknowledgement and recognition to this much-needed social profession. Pedagogists, doctors, psychologists, health visitors working in similar professions have learnt and recognized how a full-time family care professional, a child welfare professional, a school childcare specialist or a free-time activity organizer, in short a well-trained social pedagogist can provide effective help. On the other hand these 20 years have proved little in several aspects to learn the social pedagogist profession deeply and thoroughly.

What does a trained social pedagogist do? Their basic task is prevention starting from early childhood, renewal, looking after and taking care of people. All these tasks are in need since the change of the regime in Hungary in 1989 increased social differences, social problems, social inequalities and the number of social classes falling. The situation did not get better after the turn of the millennium. Zsuzsa Ferge (2008) calls our attention on growing social differences.

Low schooling is the most important endangering aspect in sustaining the disadvantaged situation as proved in the *Hungarostudy 2002* (Kopp & Kovács, 2006; Kopp, 2008) national representative study and the 2006 consecutive study again. Research carried out by Maria Kopp and her colleagues showed that low-schooled people spend four times less time in money earning jobs – there is a high proportion of unemployed and

disability pensioners among them – which they do not tolerate well. This phenomenon resulted in a relatively high deterioration of health data of the Hungarian population, mainly in the men mortality index in the age group of 45 to 65. Differences further increased during the 2008 financial then economic crisis, the need for social care is getting bigger and bigger nowadays. Family Assistance Services have more and more clients and several people are in need of debt managing services.

Today the work of social workers and social pedagogists is extremely significant both in childcare-child welfare, social basic and special supply and in the public education system. Laws and orders regulating where they can find a position are the following: 1/2000 Ministry order, 15/98 Ministry order, 1993 public education act. Difficulties social pedagogists have to face are shown in the several types of jobs and positions they can get and it can be summarized in the following points:

1. Their job is uncertain in many ways. It is difficult to determine the aim of the job, e.g. in issue 27 of the Ethical Codex of Social Work it is put down that “they are responsible for the process and its quality controlled by them” (A Szociális Munka Etikai Kódexe, 2005:3). In practice this task is too vague and not very easy to determine. All their cases are unique and it is impossible to do them as a routine. The professionals have to work out their own methods.
2. Special difficulty arises from the composition of clients assisted by the social pedagogist or specific features originating from their motivation. They deal with disadvantaged, endangered children or their families in the field of childcare which includes meeting insulting, alcoholic or extremely poor parents and families on a daily basis. They meet children with behaviour or adaptation problems, several times aggressive or anxious kids in public education, in social care they often see disabled children, young people with psychiatric problems or addiction and homeless people. These clients altogether can be characterized with a low level motivation. These families and children consider cooperation with the helper in most cases as constraint so they can be classified as pushed forward or unintellectual types according to Argelander (2006). This type of motivation influences the results of the helping work and the helper’s personality negatively.
3. Further difficulties are the badly equipped institutions, the lack of specialised institutions, not sufficient financial resources and the lack of cooperating specialists. A typical example for this are the above mentioned institutes that take care of disabled young people where the number of residential homes is very low and the existing ones strive to survive. Civil institutes which take care of adult disabled people can go bankrupt without money from applications.
4. General difficulty of the pedagogist profession is also apparent, namely results are not spectacular, educational process consists of small steps and small successes.
5. Lack of social respect, clash of interests among social pedagogists and social workers, low financial esteem should have been mentioned first among the psychic burdens of social work. These factors contribute to the womanization of the profession and job leaving.

We can see that social professionals are in for enormous tasks, they have a huge responsibility in order to decrease social unequal opportunities and sustain professional ethical rules. Training institutes are responsible, too,

since they have to prepare students to fulfil this great range of tasks. During the training it is necessary to provide students with a variety of knowledge: current professional skills both from several fields of social politics and social work, but it is also important for students to get personality training. Professional training has to stand on the following three basis according to many specialists (Billédi, 2004).

Possession of knowledge or theories from a wide range of fields. They have to know the history of the profession and targets, social care system, client system, cooperation with other specialists including basic law and health knowledge, the nature of interactions so they need to have psychological and pedagogical skills. The second large unit which determines training is setting up of values or more precisely the basic values of social work listed in the Professional Ethical Codex. For example the respect for human rights, lack of prejudices, responsibility and commitment to helping profession. The third unit that all trainings must include is the training of those skills with the help of which students can use their theoretical knowledge in practice i.e. skills which make them good practical specialists.

The main point of the training is the following: who are those people who want to work as social pedagogists in future, either people of 18-20 years of age trying to become regular students or people in their twenties or thirties who wish to become correspondent students? Why would they choose this profession? – In a broader sense: how do we see our professional future, how do we see our place in a profession?

Donald E. Super (1963) worked out his most well-known, most extensive professional personality development theory which would include developmental psychology for the development of a professional personality. (Szilágyi, 2007) Two basic points of Super's theory:

- His life span vocational choice theory sets the life span development on the basis of developmental psychology
- He worked out a theory with five stages and he divided the main stages into further sub stages.

Super's first stage (1963):

1. Development stage (0-14) which can be characterized by imaginations about professions, then interest and curiosity become the main points. Certainly those who live in the social milieu affect the lives and choices of these young people. The profession of those who live in the family of origin, parents, grandparents, other relatives or meeting significant people can be determining for the young, but at the end of the stage interest and abilities also appear besides imagination. Further sub stages:

- Imagination stage (0-10) the main goal is to fulfil their own needs, imagination and role play are essential in acting out professions.
- Interest stage (10-12) curiosity and personal interest are formed. They want to find out what they are interested in.
- Ability stage (13-14) they start to study their own abilities in connection with notions about professions. The main question is: "What am I able to do?" Which subjects am I good at and which direction should I choose? Should I choose arts, sciences, art or some kind of sports activities?

This early stage of imagination and interest can be observed in interviews as follows: “I have always wanted to deal with children, it has been my dream. First I wanted to become a kindergarten teacher but I was not admitted because I failed my aptitude test so I chose health care and finally day nurseries. First I finished health care then nursery worker training. I immediately started to work in a nursery. I worked there for 10 years but my children became students at a primary school so I had to choose. I wanted to take care of them, take them to school in the morning so I had an offer to go to a family counselling institution and I started to work there as a social worker, I looked after old people. I found a position in an old people’s home, I went to nurse and look after people and at the same time I also worked as a family counselling assistant at my own workplace 4 hours a day. I gradually got acquainted with this profession, persistence and I had a feeling that I had to pass on this knowledge. That was when I applied to college to get a social pedagogist degree. (50 year old children’s home manager with 11 years of children’s home experience)

“I worked as a nursery worker before that in a mother-infant home as an assistant for 13 years. I have had a dream since my childhood to work in health care and with children. At the secondary technical school I thought I would like to be a health visitor but then I retreated, still the love of infants and little children remained so I worked in this field after the school leaving exam till the birth of my child. During the years of the maternity leave I realized I needed more and my job did not satisfy me professionally. I had my own child and what I did for her made up for my care and attention towards other children before she had been born. I was on maternity leave from 2000 to 2003, in 2001 one of my colleagues applied to social pedagogist training. She was the one who persuaded me to start the training although I had no idea about this profession at that time. I thought I would deal with children and young people as before only at a higher level with a college degree. (family care professional with 5 years of experience)

The next interview refers to the monitoring of abilities: “I have chosen this profession because I found myself suitable for this career. I like children, adapt to situations quite easily and possess empathy so I felt I could attain self-realization in this profession” (school childcare worker with 5 years of experience).

Like many others I chose social pedagogy and the helping profession because I did not know what to do, what I would like to become “when I grow up.” There were several regular students who shared the same way of thinking like me. But basically – although we lacked motivation and calling towards the profession – we were not unsuitable for this career. We all possessed those basic qualities which predestined us to this profession such as patience, empathy, acceptance, authenticity, lack of prejudice, etc. All in all I have to admit that although at the beginning I did not wish to work in the helping profession, still thanks to my basic qualities necessary for this profession and through experience I got to like my vocation. Now I can’t imagine doing anything else. I was astonished to realize that nearly all my former fellow students now have a position in this profession. It seems that I was not the only one.” (child and youth care worker with 5 years of experience)

2. Discovery stage (15-24) This stage is the time for real career choice nowadays. The adolescent experiences the conflict between self identity as described by Erikson (1991) and role diffusion. While they try to set up their personal and

psychosexual identities and arranges his relationship with former authoritative people, they also have to formulate their professional aim. Professional attempts, extra curricular activities and voluntary jobs also assist in finding their personal identity. As a result of changes during the stage and the maturing process realistic elements are shown in career motivation, self knowledge, self examination and in the desire to acquire real experience.

- Making inquiries (15-17) Interest, considering skills and values, extracurricular activities, doing voluntary jobs.
- Transitions or adjustment stage (18-21) At this stage dominant values are set up and realized in professions: college years.
- Implementation stage (22-24) They get a job and take a professional role. They check whether their acquired knowledge and interest stand the test of practice or not. They are confronted with practical difficulties – quarter life crisis.

An example is when it is apparent during the interviews how the development of identity affects the professional development: “I have been asked this question a thousand times and I always give the same answer. I have picked up this profession because I had a dream that I had to complete this training. The antecedents go back a while before. In 2001 I was in Transylvania with a missionary team in Tirgu Mures. During the ten days we visited several institutions where we brought food. One day we went to two orphanages. One of them was a privately owned (Dutch) one, the other was a government owned one. The contrast between the two institutions was so enormous that we could hardly believe our eyes. In the government owned one the very basic needs of the children were not satisfied in the long run. The building was almost in ruins, childcare workers and nurses were really low paid, children were running around naked in the yard. When we entered we were told that we mustn't use cameras or video cameras. The children lived their in absolute poverty, most of them were dirty and smelly, full of lice. I felt pity and love in my heart and I feel the same whenever I think about them. That was the point when I realized that I wanted to deal with poor children.” (family counsellor with 1 year of experience)

Making inquiries is a typical example besides the above mentioned ability control: “When choosing a career before the school leaving exam psychology seemed to be a good decision but B2 language exam was enlisted as an entrance criterion which I did not have so I searched further. My decision fell upon social pedagogy because psychology was within the subjects. After the field study I decided to try this job.” (3 years of experience in family care)

“I definitely wanted to deal with children and I was also much interested in psychology. When I studied social pedagogy at college I could get an insight into psychology. After graduating it was obvious for me that I had to broaden my knowledge in this field. Professional practice and the support of my colleagues help me a lot.”

The importance of the implementation stage can be justified by many examples: During the last term at college I was on a field study at my current workplace. A colleague became pregnant so I was offered to hand in my application to her place. I got the job and started to work as a family care

professional. Family care was at first unknown for me since I had little experience during my studies. As time passed by I found family care a lot easier, I gained more experience and I made sure I could do my job effectively. I had always wanted to deal with people I strived to avoid monotonous jobs. Here workdays are diverse, I have new challenges every day but there is also a lack of cooperation and various professional dilemmas so I see the difficulties of this profession as well.” (3 years of experience in family care)

“I wished to help people by all means, especially disadvantaged and endangered children. I had no influencing person, it was me who made the decision. As an outsider you have no insight, you realize things when you start working. (7 years of experience in family care)

This stage of professional development shows that training institutions have huge responsibility in two fields: aptitude tests and career socialization. Previous practice in helping professions and social pedagogist training was the professional aptitude test. In the 90s career motivation talks and personal interviews were conducted by training institutions or different personality tests e.g. work values questionnaire by Super (1963), CPI test were carried out to clarify personal values and filter mental diseases.

According to current practice training institutions do not conduct career aptitude tests or talks, instead we can develop the career motivation or professional personality of our students by means of career socialisation. Tihamer Bakó (2004) interpreted career motivation as a process the aim of which is the development of professional self identity and professional identity i.e. a study model directed at practice which is capable of creative practice of profession through professional identity embedded in the personality (Bakó, 2004). To sum it up, communication personality development and self knowledge trainings, professional practices associated with professional consultation and supervision seminars, last but not least situational role plays during seminars, visit to institutions play an important role in forming not only the professional but also the personal identity. Our students claim the personal positive models, meeting significant, successful and experienced people of the profession who can influence their professional decision positively.

3. The stabilization stage (25-45) This stage can be characterised by creative ability in the developmental psychology described by Erikson (1991) in which the adults determines themselves by the product of his job. Permanent interest and professional identity evolve. Certainly it is not easy to find a workplace, a suitable position so this stage can be divided into sub stages as well.

- Experimental stage (25-30) Changing one or two workplaces is natural it is part of the search for the professional role.
- Stabilization stage (31-45) stabile, certain professional personality, creativity during the job, the possibility to evolve a vocational personality (Bagdy, 1996).

The result of the interviews is that several people become social pedagogists at this stage: “I started the profession during the compulsory training. The training had begun some years earlier at the college, we heard about the process of establishing the social protection system and the changes starting in the 90s. All teachers saw that the great social political

changes put a huge burden on families – like unemployment. It was obvious that it was no longer possible to teach and educate students using the traditional pedagogical methods. I felt necessary to choose a training which would give me more knowledge and my pedagogical work would be more effective. It was not a given moment but I was really delighted to take part in the National Child Care Conference in Budapest because it was before the coming out of the Child Care Law in 1997. It gave me much help in getting to know the profession better. (social pedagogist at a kindergarten with 8 years of experience)

“I have chosen this profession because it is varied, combined and personal and it deals with several issues. It is varied since it deals with many groups of people: children, young people, families, old people, unemployed, addicted, disabled, psychiatric patients, etc. They all include the multitude of different branches of science e.g. health care, psychology, sociology, philosophy, social sciences, social politics, justice, etc. You can decide more easily from this list who you would like to work with and where. In case you might want to change, I think you have the chance. I was never influenced which profession to choose. I was schooled from my workplace. (10 years of experience in old people’s care)

4. Sustenance stage (45-64) Sustaining the found way, development of professional routine, keeping the vocational personality. This stage might involve the possibility of burnout for helping professions but the adequate professional motivation and personality, self knowledge with continuous supervision, including effective team work could mean suitable prevention.

Specialists who consider their profession as a vocation are less likely to leave their profession. Not suitable career motivation during the long time spent in the profession might lead to establishing “helper syndrome” (Fekete, 1991). According to Schmidbauer (1977) helping in this case aims at sustaining an unstable personal moral balance, of course the way that this motive remains hidden and unknown for them. A consequence is that helpers with a motivation like this private life becomes chaotic which increases their personal uncertainty while in their job they are successful at the beginning. During some years helping becomes a real way of life, a “drug” for them while all other relationships cease and the helper clears away other types of emotions. As a psychoanalytic author, Schmidbauer (1977) determined the appearance of helper syndrome as the importance of early childhood experiences. He believed that early childhood narcissistic injury i.e. the rejecting behaviour of parents which is manifested in a hidden, indirect way causes excessive identification with the super ego and the child is directed towards helping. Typical features of a helper syndrome (HS) helper:

- They want to fill an internal gap with helping, they have their fear of their own emotions behind it.
- They reject their own personal need for help.
- They avoid equal relationships or they shape their private equal relationships to the form of a helping profession. It is extremely difficult to separate professional and private life, they mingle.
- They have hidden, not deliberate narcissistic needs which cannot be told. They communicate them indirectly e.g. through outbreking reproach or psychosomatic diseases.

As opposed to HS helper, specialists working as helpers turn to those in need not because of their own personal motives or their own abilities but because of their love and devotion to their profession (Allport, 1977). They do not ask: "What am I interested in?" or "What am I able to do?" but "What can I give to others and how can I help the well-being of others?" Helpers doing their jobs not for external presents or to fill their own personal gap become better during the helping process.

5. Decline stage (from the age of 65) This stage is also divided into two sub stages by Super (1963). This stage is characterised by withdrawal from work and identification with the role of the observer instead of the participant.
  - Stage of slowing down (from 65 to 70) when the pace of work becomes slower.
  - Withdrawal stage (from 70) which means the gradual withdrawal from work according to personal attitude

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