

## BOOK REVIEW

Charfe, L., Gardner, A. (2019). *Social pedagogy and social work*. London: Sage.

Reviewed by *Cintia Csók*\*

Received: June 2, 2021 • Accepted: June 14, 2021

Published online: November 12, 2021

© 2021 The Author(s)



### IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF SOCIAL PEDAGOGY

In 2019, Lowis Charfe and Ali Gardner's book of *Social Pedagogy and Social Work* was published, to which Lindy Simpson also contributed. Authors with academic and practical experience justify the birth of this work on the grounds that, at the time of writing, social pedagogy was increasingly at the forefront of professional discourses. However, its conceptual foundations were just emerging in the United Kingdom. Despite the fact that in other parts of Europe and in South America, social pedagogy has a broader social function and is embedded in the practice of the educational environment and social care. Researchers point out that there is no internationally uniform definition of social pedagogy, and its relationship to social work is not clear. The main reason for this is that its theoretical framework and practical application are historically and politically variable, and they are rooted in the culture of a given country (Charfe & Gardner, 2019). According to another approach, social pedagogy is a social construct (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011a) that results in new interpretations. The most important theoretical points of the book are summarized below.

#### The social role of social pedagogy

In the first chapter (*What is Social Pedagogy and How Does it Link to Social Work?*) the reader can get acquainted with the definitional framework of social pedagogy and its connection to the norms and practice of social work. The conceptual diversity of social pedagogy is rooted in the fact that its theoretical and practical foundations differ from country to country. For an example, while in the United Kingdom, children and their families are typically clients of social pedagogues, in Denmark, these professionals provide services for all ages (Cameron & Moss, 2011). According to the author of the chapter, Lowis Charfe, it is worth considering the composition of the word social pedagogy as a starting point. *Pedagogy* in the ancient Greeks covered not only formal education but also the activities of paid pedagogues (*paidagogos*) who took care of children outside school, contributing to their well-being and the development of their social skills (Castle, 1961, referred at Smith, 2009). Furthermore, the term *social* is used in situations related to society (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018). Thus, social pedagogy can be defined as the social education of people.

---

\*University of Debrecen, Egyetem tér 1., 4032, Debrecen, Hungary. E-mail: csokcintia@gmail.com

In the XIX. century, Karl Mager (1810–1858) and Adolph Diesterweg (1790–1866) pointed out the negative effects of the industrial revolution, such as the growing inequality and poverty among the working class. German theorists approached the issue of social gaps from different sociological perspectives, while both viewed the individual as a social being. In addition, it was thought that social pedagogy could be used to achieve a caring state (Rothuizen & Harbo, 2017). The holistic approach to social pedagogy, according to Mager's approach, emphasizes the equal importance of the personal, social, and moral areas. According to the author of the chapter, this view contrasts with the dominant ideology in Great Britain, which focuses on personal responsibility and individualization.

Lewis Charfe, after developing traditional interpretive frameworks, balances social pedagogy from the aspect of education. It presents approaches according to which social pedagogy can be seen as a meeting between education and social work (Cameron & Moss, 2011; Petrie, 2013). Highlighting Hämäläinen's (2003) study, according to which the practical development of social pedagogy must take into account the need to find educational solutions for the correction of social problems. All this is confirmed by the metaphor of the sculptor and gardener by Eichsteller and Holthoff (2011a), which can be traced back to the thoughts of the philosopher John Amos Comenius (1592–1670). Comenius compared children to empty vessels that could be filled with knowledge through education. However, as long as the sculptor - with the tools he uses - shapes the available material into the desired shape, the gardener creates a supportive environment that ensures the growth and development of the plants. This metaphor illustrates the principles of social pedagogy, which together includes the triad of well-being, learning and growth (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011b). Finally, the author discusses the issues of empowerment and social justice. Along with the former concept, Charfe emphasizes Bandura's (1997) approach that support should be given to mobilizing the individual's abilities and skills that can contribute to positive change and self-efficacy. He also puts social justice at the heart of social pedagogical practice, as in addition to working with individuals, groups and communities, efforts to promote social equality are a priority.

## Major theorists and concepts of social pedagogy

In the second chapter (*Social Pedagogical Key Thinkers*), Lewis Charfe outlines the theories of key thinkers who have influenced the development of social pedagogy. The main aim of the author was to briefly present the outstanding philosophical views, ideas, and practical experiences of the last 300 years in the field of social pedagogy. Charfe examines the theoretical approaches of the following authors: Pestalozzi (1746–1827), Grundtvig (1783–1872), Natorp (1854–1924), Montessori (1870–1952), Nohl (1879–1960), Korczak (1878–1942), Vygotsky (1896–1934) and Freire (1921–1997).

According to Ali Gardner, author of the third chapter (*Social Pedagogy Concepts*), social pedagogy deals with both the individual and society, integrating knowledge from many disciplines (e.g., philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology, political science). In the followings, we summarize the ideas and basic values of social pedagogical thinking:

1. *Head, Heart and Hands*: a central element of social pedagogy. Following Pestalozzi, the author believes that every individual has the right to learn. In his theory, the head symbolizes intellectuality, which builds on existing and available knowledge. In the practice of the social profession, this may be related to knowledge of theories, processes, policies, legislation, and resources. So social pedagogues are expected to build on an appropriate knowledge base in



their work. However, the heart as a symbol of humanity is also a cornerstone of the profession, manifested in the people-centeredness, empathy, and tolerance of professionals. Finally, the hand can be interpreted as a symbol of (practical) abilities and skills manifested in action and as a means of understanding.

2. *Creativity*: the practical application of theories and methods requires a high degree of creativity from professionals in the human professions.
3. *The Three Ps*: this concept (Jappe, 2010) provides a reflective framework for practitioners. Social pedagogues rely on theories and research knowledge to form a *professional* relationship. At the same time, within a professional framework, their *personal* selves and own personalities are included in the helping process, while separating the *private* thread that is no longer shared with the client.
4. *The Common Third*: the Danish concept (Lihme, 1988) is about a joint activity between professional and client. The aim of this activity is to strengthen the relationship of trust between the two parties through learning and gaining a shared experience, distracting the child (or adult) from the sense of a hierarchical relationship. At the same time, it is a common method not only among professionals but also among foster parents when they adopt a new child into their home (e.g., cooking together, creating, or playing sports).
5. *Reflection*: due to the practical nature of social pedagogy, it is not possible to accurately plan the work process. Thus, professionals are expected to handle unexpected events with integrity and professionalism.
6. *Learning Zone*: the Senninger learning zone model consists of three parts known as the *Comfort Zone*, the *Learning Zone* and the *Panic Zone*. Social pedagogy encourages helping professionals to create joyful and curious learning opportunities for children, thus contributing to their development. However, to reach the learning zone, they need to know the child's comfort zone, the conditions that cause anxiety and fear (e.g., children in child protection care need special attention).
7. *Zone of Proximal Development*: According to the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1978), learning is most effective in a social context when the child is assisted in development by a supportive person (e.g., mentor, educator, social pedagogue). The author points out that in the United Kingdom, social workers focus on care, but the management of *learning* plays a central role in the practical work of social pedagogues. It should be noted that, from the aspect of social pedagogy, the emphasis is not on the concept of *educating* but on the concept of *learning*.
8. *Relational Universe*: the starting point of the theory is that the individual forms relationships with different persons from birth. Some of the natural relationships deepen, but in extreme cases, it is necessary to reconfigure the child's universe in an official way through external intervention. However, this is a traumatic experience, as, for example, the alienated parent is also part of the child's universe and remains a defining reference point in his life. So, the gravitational pull - the emotional attachment - does not necessarily break, which helps professionals pay more attention to their work. The relational universe symbolizes the importance of all relationships, whether they are constructive or destructive bonds in an individual's life (Carter & Eichsteller, 2017).
9. *The Diamond Model*: Eichsteller and Holthoff (2012) use the diamond metaphor in their work, according to which individuals are not always polished and shiny, but everyone has the opportunity inside. However, social pedagogues can help children and adults identify and develop their potential.



Overall, Ali Gardner argues that social pedagogy is closely related to emancipatory aspirations. However, it is clear that economic and social processes also have a significant impact on a country's socio-pedagogical objectives, frameworks, and tasks. According to the author, professionals cannot complete themselves in bureaucratic areas, and thus they may experience limitations, uncertainties, and frustrations in their professional roles. Furthermore, structural factors may prevent the social integration of individuals with low socioeconomic status in economically less developed countries. However, the concepts presented above, the key elements of social pedagogical thinking, can serve as a guide in practical work.

### From theory to practice

In the fourth chapter (*The Development of Social Pedagogy in Children, Young People and Families Social Work*), Lowis Charfe highlights Scotland's historical relationship to welfare policies in Northern Europe, which are rooted in the social pedagogical ideas of the Scandinavian countries. Emphasizing that social pedagogues seek to find pedagogical solutions in dealing with social problems (Stephens, 2013), in which the education of the rising generations and the role of the community are also significant (Smith, 2012). Despite the interest in social pedagogy in higher education institutions since the 1990s (Kornbeck, 2009), a pedagogically focused approach was only developed later in England. On the one hand, researchers cite cultural and linguistic differences as the reason for this, as most key concepts in social pedagogy do not have a direct English equivalent (Cameron & Moss, 2011). On the other hand, the individualistic image of neoliberalism and the emphasis on individual responsibility have had a significant impact on social work practices, so working with children and families has focused on meeting needs and case management (Smith & Whyte, 2008, referred at Cameron & Moss, 2011). So, according to Charfe, modern social work focuses on risk management activity and problem-solving. However, social pedagogy focuses on social action while seeking to provide individuals with the means to solve their problems and change their circumstances through education (Smith, 2008, referred to Hatton, 2013). In the followings, the author presents projects aimed at children and families in which they wanted to incorporate the approach and tools of social pedagogy in the United Kingdom. In the fifth chapter (*Adopting Social Pedagogical Approaches in Working with Adults*), Ali Gardner explores the areas of application of social pedagogy that provide guidance for social work with adults. Lindy Simpson contributes to a deeper understanding of the theory and practice of the social profession by bringing the following concepts closer to the reader in the sixth chapter (*Participation*), such as participation, values, and power. Finally, the last chapter (*Social Pedagogy and Risk 'Have you done a risk assessment?'*) also highlights the importance of autonomy and the dangers posed by paternalism. According to Ali Gardner, paternalistic decision-making and communication have been pushed into the background in recent years, and such political narratives have emerged which promote children's and adults' self-determination.

### SUMMARY

The book presented provides readers with an extensive overview of both theoretical and practical knowledge. As Lowis Charfe and Ali Gardner have pointed out, social pedagogy has a diverse and rich history in both Europe and South America. It began as a philosophical



debate in which key thinkers focused on creating social justice and equality as well as improving self-efficacy. In addition, theorists have questioned the ideological foundations and practical activities of education systems and developed concepts of social pedagogy. While philosophical principles were embedded in different cultures, the values of social pedagogy were primarily integrated into European practice. Thus, it demanded a paradigmatic shift from social workers in terms of their roles in their work. These perspectives have become particularly important in the United Kingdom, where in recent years, relationship-based and relational social work has been dominated by process-driven mechanisms (Charfe & Gardner, 2019).

In summary, we can conclude that the theories presented by the authors summarize and synthesize the framework of social pedagogy, contributing to a systematic, eclectic body of knowledge. I recommend it to students, instructor, and researchers in the field of pedagogy and social sciences as well as teachers and support professionals. In particular, the concepts of educational science and philosophy bring us closer to understanding the goal system of social education and provide a helping hand to solve difficulties that arise during practical work.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book review is supported by the ÚNKP-20-3 New National Excellence Program of the Ministry for Innovation and Technology from the source of the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund.

## REFERENCES

- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy*. New York: W.H. Freeman and Company.
- Cameron, C., & Moss, P. (2011). Social pedagogy: Current understandings and opportunities. In C. Cameron, & P. Moss (Eds.), *Social pedagogy and working with children and young people*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Carter, A., & Eichsteller, G. (2017). Cultivating a relational universe. *Therapeutic Care Journal*. Available at: [www.thetcj.org/in-residence-articles/cultivating-relational-universeandy-carter-gabriel-eichsteller](http://www.thetcj.org/in-residence-articles/cultivating-relational-universeandy-carter-gabriel-eichsteller) (accessed 24 July 2018).
- Charfe, L., & Gardner, A. (2019). *Social pedagogy and social work*. London, Sage.
- Eichsteller, G., & Holthoff, S. (2011a). Conceptual foundations of social pedagogy: A transnational perspective from Germany. In C. Cameron, & P. Moss (Eds.), *Social pedagogy and working with children and young people*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Eichsteller, G., & Holthoff, S. (2011b). Social pedagogy as an ethical orientation towards working with people – Historical perspectives. *Children Australia*, 36(4), 176–186.
- Eichsteller, G., & Holthoff, S. (2012). The art of being a social pedagogue: Developing cultural change in children's homes in Essex. *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, 1(1), 30–46.
- Hämäläinen, J. (2003). The concept of social policy in the field of social work. *Journal of Social Work*, 3(1), 69–80.
- Hatton, K. (2013). *Social pedagogy in the UK: Theory and practice*. Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing.



- Jappe, E. (2010). The 3 Ps. Available at: <http://10rs1gruppe6.blogspot.com/2010/09/de-3-per.html> (accessed 24 July 2018).
- Kornbeck, J. (2009). 'Important but widely misunderstood': The problem of defining social pedagogy in Europe. In J. Kornbeck, & N. Jensen (Eds.), *The diversity of social pedagogy in Europe*. Bremen: Europaischer Hochschulverlag.
- Lihme, B. (1988). *Socialpædagogikken for born og unge: et debatoplæg med særligt henblik på døgninstitutionen*. Holte: Scopol.
- Oxford English Dictionary (2018). Available at: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/social> (accessed 9 January 2018).
- Petrie, P. (2013). Social pedagogy in the UK: Gaining a firm foothold? *Education Policy Analysis Archives/ Archivos Analíticos de Políticas Educativas*, 21, 37.
- Rothuizen, J. J., & Harbo, L. J. (2017). Social pedagogy: An approach without fixed recipes. *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, 6(1), 6–28.
- Smith, M. K. (2009). Social pedagogy. *The Encyclopaedia of Informal Education*. Available at: <http://infed.org/mobi/social-pedagogy-the-development-of-theory-andpractice/> (accessed 18 May 2018).
- Smith, M. (2012). Social pedagogy from a Scottish perspective. *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, 1(1), 46–55.
- Stephens, P. (2013). *Social pedagogy: Heart and head. Studies in comparative social pedagogies and international social work and social policy*, Vol. XXIV. Bremen: Europaischer Hochschulverlag.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

---

**Open Access.** This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial purposes, provided the original author and source are credited, a link to the CC License is provided, and changes – if any – are indicated.

