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My comment in the discourse on social pedagogy*

ABSTRACT: The text includes, on the one hand, comments on the threats to the identity of social pedagogy coming from various individuals and scientific circles who seem to practice this discipline without any substantive preparation. This threatens to *dilute the identity of* social pedagogy. On the other hand, in the form of questions, I point to a few dilemmas that need to be resolved and a few possibilities that need to be taken in order to further develop social pedagogy.

KEYWORDS: Social pedagogy, Helena Radlińska, spaces of contemporary social pedagogy.

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Since the early 1990s, a lively debate on the identity of Polish social pedagogy has been going on. It is reflected in numerous publications: textbooks, monographs, problem papers, articles in pedagogical periodicals, research projects, press and Internet articles. A lot of attention has been and still is paid to the past, present and future of social pedagogy during scientific conferences, seminars and meetings organized by social pedagogues.

During this discourse, a dozen or so standpoints, different approaches to the essence and attributes of social pedagogy have emerged, seen in the context

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of the post-industrial reality and the changes taking place in our country. Some of the authors in their statements refer to and respect the assumptions of its classic version by Helena Radlińska, Ryszard Wroczyński, Aleksander Kamiński and some of their students, enriching these standpoints with a few new topical and methodological elements. This group includes Stanisław Kawula, Edmund Trempała, Tadeusz Pilch, Anna Przeclawska, Wiesław Theiss, Jacek Piekarski, Tadeusz Frąckowiak, as well as Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka and Andrzej Radziewicz-Winnicki.

However, many authors clearly depart from the paradigm of classic social pedagogy, proposing and formulating new visions of this pedagogical subdiscipline. Here, social pedagogy is treated as, among others: 1) science on accompanying children, young people and adults in their life and development, as well as on subjective relations between man and man, such as: meeting, dialogue, cooperation; 2) theory of specific practical institutions (mainly social assistance and social work) and conflicts arising in the course of socialisation of children and young people; 3) science on aspirations, quality and sense of human life at different ages in the community context; 4) science on human and their development; community as a development factor; social activity – as means of shaping the community; values in the context of social functioning and their reciprocal influence on human development. In this context, the subject of social pedagogy consists of: care work, cultural work, social work and resocialisation work.

If we assume that the above mentioned standpoints and interpretations say something about the subject of social pedagogy, then the fundamental question immediately arises: about which social pedagogy? It seems to be about a pedagogy that has little to do with its heritage, the framework of its subject and its point of view. These are rather projections of some imaginary, undefined social pedagogy, cloudy in its object and eclectic in its direction. These are concepts which, in my opinion, can be considered a joyful creation of authors who neither have a deeper orientation in the field of pedagogical sciences, nor a direct contact with social pedagogy.

The entry into the field of social pedagogy by representatives of other sub-disciplines of pedagogy and related sciences, as well as the far-reaching voluntarism in the creation of new visions of this discipline, brings a certain, already noticeable danger in the form of *fuzzy identity*. There are more and more frequent comments about the fact that social pedagogy does not have a definite subject or clear methodological assumptions, that it is threatened with catastrophe, collapse, or being taken over by related disciplines. Others, in this case, point to the lack of a permanent core in social pedagogy, the main theme,

a kind of problematic signpost placed on the continuum: continuity – change. It is about selective consideration of the achievements of classic social pedagogy, values that do not lose their importance and remain valid, and on the other hand – about rebuilding of social pedagogy, taking into account the values of the tradition and the challenges of the present and the anticipated future.

So what is the way out of the signalled deadlock of the liquid identity of social pedagogy, or more precisely its far-reaching disintegration, carrying with it a crisis or even doom? It seems that the following may be of paramount importance here: a) referring to the heritage of social pedagogy, the achievements of its creators and co-authors; b) respecting the imperative of continuity and change in the broadest sense, which guarantees the progressive development of the discipline; c) preserving and observing the general principle that the superior characteristic of social pedagogy is the reciprocal relationship between the environment and human, which must be considered, as it has been accepted in classic social pedagogy, as its permanent core, a foundation determining the identity of this discipline; d) continuous identification of practice fields being the area of empirical research of social pedagogy and practical socio-educational activities, e) developing the methodology of environmental empirical research conducted in the spirit of the specificity of the subject of this discipline, f) educating the staff of social pedagogues with the profile of animators and organizers of community service.

The individual character and specificity of the subject of social pedagogy is determined not only by its permanent core, which is composed of the environment – human relationship, but first and foremost by the educational and developmental character of this relationship. This task consists in supporting the bio-socio-cultural development of the individual through such pedagogical activities as: upbringing, pedagogical care, introduction to cultural values, socio-cultural animation, social work. This process is carried out by professional institutions of education, care and community assistance. This activity is accompanied by educational and cultural non-formalised activity, undertaken by various community, neighbourhood and civic initiatives, especially active on a local scale.

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And now a few remarks and suggestions to make sure that contemporary social pedagogy does not find its way to disintegration and losing its identity, that is, becoming a non-social pedagogy. A lot of questions arise here:

Question one: Should the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity of social pedagogy be considered only from the perspective of its necessities and values?

There is no doubt that the introduction and inclusion of certain substantive and methodological content from other social sciences may contribute to further integration of social pedagogy in the group of social sciences, and thus to raising its importance, level and scientific prestige. But it may also carry a certain threat, which is (might be) opening the door for non-social pedagogues and for non-pedagogues in general, i.e. for newcomers, self-appointed „social pedagogues” who not only publish texts allegedly belonging to the area of social pedagogy, but even go as far as publishing pseudo-textbooks in the field of social pedagogy.

Question two: What is the scientifically more advantageous model of social pedagogy – micro-trend pedagogy or monolithic pedagogy?

It can be assumed that juxtaposing the above mentioned options, as it happens in the literature on the subject, is not justified. From its inception, social pedagogy has been a relatively homogeneous structure, with its own distinct identity, a relatively integrated and coherent structure. It was the external observers who lacked the cognitive and analytical tools to adequately recognize and understand this structure. In a coherent model of social pedagogy there have always been various thematic and problematic orientations with a pro-community inclination.

Question three: Can one agree with the statement that social pedagogy can pass on and owe the care for its scientific authority to other social partners? First of all, who are we talking about?

It is difficult to imagine this science without authority, since it has over a hundred years of tradition, highly valued both at the time of the Second Polish Republic and the Polish People's Republic; since social pedagogy has been practiced by many scientists known in Poland and abroad; since its theoretical and practical achievements are an important contribution to the development of today's educational sciences? At this point, I would like to suggest the necessary conditions for further raising the level of this discipline, formulated by social pedagogues themselves.

Question four: Is the state of balance in the relationship between human and the environment the most optimal state?

A balance in this respect may guarantee stability, but – attention – in the broader and longer perspective it may lead to stagnation, inertia or inhibition of development. In interpreting this relationship it is necessary to base not only on the theory of homeostasis, but also on the classical theory of po-

sitive disintegration (Kazimierz Dąbrowski) or today's concepts of public/civil pedagogy and community animation (Bohdan Skrzypczak), socialised school (Maria Mendel) and others.

Question five: Should the model of informal education connected with subjective social activity be preferred in contemporary social pedagogy as well as in its future vision, as can be seen today?

Beyond doubt yes, but we cannot limit ourselves to this range only. Since its inception, it has given importance not only to natural environments, but also to numerous categories of institutional environments, which has found its classical and contemporary development (e.g. Aleksander Kamiński, Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka).

Question six (last): To what extent, in the period of transformation of our country and progressing globalisation of today's world, do social pedagogues shoulder responsibility for the current state and further development of social pedagogy?

I think that not enough attention is being paid to this issue. That is a pity! Fortunately, however, some of the authors testify to their commitment and creativity in this area with their output. And here another question arises: to what extent does the youngest generation of social pedagogues manifest care for further development of social pedagogy?