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Social Pedagogue at Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Slovak Republic – Present Situation and Perspectives

Abstract:

The paper exposes the possibilities to employ social pedagogues at elementary and secondary schools, their basic activities to be performed. It is also bringing the results of a research among teachers – coordinators of prevention at elementary and secondary schools in the region of Central Slovakia.

Key words: *social pedagogue, competences of a social pedagogue, coordinator of prevention, social pedagogue's tasks at school*

The profession of a social pedagogue has been adherent both to the development of social pedagogy as a science and to the definition of its subject. The attention of social pedagogy to the solutions of many socio-educational problems, in the past as well as today, is reflected not only on various approaches to the definition of its subject but also on heterogeneous definitions of the competences and of the profession of a social pedagogue. A broad scale of social pedagogue's field of action is not yet institutionally anchored in the Slovak Republic, especially not at elementary and secondary schools.

According to A. Tokárová (2005, p. 307) "It is the task of social pedagogy to analyze and direct the process of education and training of individuals for particular types of social environments (with specific features: regional, ecological, economic, health, moral, and the like). It researches how to prevent or solve arisen socially undesirable problems through education." O. Lipkowski (1996, p. 59) highlights social pedagogy's concern with education of the addicted in regard to civilization changes of society, pointing to a changed environment, hereby the conditions of education as well, pursuing these changes both at

a general level and also in situations when moral development of an individual is jeopardized.

According to B. Kraus (2000, p. 276) we can define a social pedagogue as a professional that is equipped by theoretical, practical, and conceptual skills to educationally work in those places where he/she can contribute to a formation of a healthy way of life; in particular, in those places where the environment of an individual, or of a group, acts in a destructive or non-creative way during the process of meeting the needs. A social pedagogue is thus a professional that leads and organizes the educational process at a professional level while influencing children, youth, and adults towards the desired direction in personality development.

Z. Bakošová (2005, p. 15–19) mentions the following competences of a social pedagogue:

1. Competence in educating – A social pedagogue in a broad sense of the word is an educator and a pedagogue. In the area of the education of children and youth, he/she supports their development towards pro-sociality, altruism, compassionateness, solidarity and other features of a humanistic character. In the process of self-education, he/she is oriented towards his/her own self-understanding, patience, and endurance.
2. Competence in re-educating – If a social pedagogue is equipped with educational competences, he/she can diagnose strays from the norm and from socially desirable behaviour. This competence is embodied in reconditioning, re-socialisation, or re-education.
3. Competence in counselling – A social pedagogue makes counselling under school environment conditions in relation to school pupils (when helping to integrate to the school body, when leading pupils towards social behaviour, when family setting is disrupted, when problematic behaviour emerges), in relation to teachers (helping solve pedagogic situations especially to beginner teachers, initiating further education of teachers, protecting the rights of teachers against aggressively acting parents), and in relation to the parents of school pupils (competence in counselling is employed when family setting is disrupted; the social pedagogue also provides parents with counsels on the educational process connected with the development of their child, on the effective communication between parents and children; he/she also gives information on the prevention of socio-pathological phenomena, their potential risks for children and youth as well as on possibilities of help).
4. Competence in prevention – Prevention means to anticipate and avoid non-desirable phenomena. Prevention in general can be divided into primary, secondary and tertiary one; a social pedagogue can come across each of those,

for children and youth mainly in the primary prevention (directing towards the whole society) and the secondary prevention (directing towards risky groups of children and youth). Primary or general prevention involves the most general conditions for non-desirable phenomena prevention. It targets the whole population, the population which is neither disrupted in health nor socially or otherwise disordered. Primary prevention begins in the life of a young man at the time when there are no problems with socio-pathological phenomena yet. Secondary or direct prevention is intent on imperilled groups of population, it does not involve all. The goal of the secondary prevention is to put an individual back to the original disposition and to systematically monitor him/her because of the danger of the failure recurrence. The secondary prevention is heading to vulnerable children and youth aiming at empowering the protective factors of their life so that the level of risky situation diminishes.

5. Competences in management – Cooperation with other professionals is inevitable in an interdisciplinary approach and it requires managing the work.

A social pedagogue should be able to find employment in both elementary and secondary schools. The basis for his/her work would be socio-educational activity with children and youth, especially with the children and youth in problematic situations, or in the work with children from dysfunctional families. He/she should pay attention to:

- children and youth from disadvantaged socio-cultural milieu,
- pupils with socio-pathological behaviour: drug addiction, delinquency and criminality, truancy, chicanery, and others,
- children and youth with mild brain dysfunction,
- pupils suffering from the CAN syndrome (of an ill-treated, abused, and uncared-for child),
- all pupils while organizing free-time activities,
- preventive activity,
- pupils in problematic situations.

A social pedagogue can give a specific form of help to children and adolescents especially at school, wherein J. Lorenzová and V. Poláčková (In: Kraus, B. and team, 2001, p. 192) see opportunities of his/her employment in the following areas:

1. social education:
 - extra-class activities,
 - supporting social teaching in classes with an emphasis on creating pro-social personality characteristics,
2. social counselling,

3. multicultural education.

The roles of a social pedagogue at school can be featured according to the above-mentioned authors as follows:

- a helper and an advocate of pupils, their rights and dignity,
- a mediator in conflicts with pupils and parents,
- a coordinator with public administration,
- an initiator of cooperation with local educational and training institutions,
- an organiser of free-time projects and activities.

L. Nemcová (2005, p. 128) points to the possibility to employ social pedagogues at elementary and secondary schools as coordinators of an education for matrimony and parenthood.

Every teacher should know what attitudes pupils have towards their parents and vice versa. The roots of non-adequate pupil behaviour can be found in the erosion of this attitude. Here a new horizon opens up for a social pedagogue's activities. Improvement of cooperation and links between the school and family becomes important. This cooperation should be based on the participation of children in this attitude. The child thus comes to understanding of being a participant in what is happening. The cooperation should be based on cooperation and effective communication. Part of the relation should be mutual acceptance, respect and tolerance. School and family cooperate through various forms. Among individual forms can be found inviting parents to school, visiting families, individual conversations, pupil's book, and several other forms of written contact. It is the written contact of teachers with parents which is the most frequently used way of cooperation. Among collective forms of cooperation we place class meetings (the most frequent collective form of cooperation between schools and families), Open Door Days, discussions, and additional activities organized by schools. The cooperation of the school with families help provide a clearer picture of the child's needs, more information from schools and families will create a sense of trust and will improve the relation of parents to the school. Families can help school with material accessories. On the other hand, teachers better understand family culture and its possibilities. The atmosphere of cooperation and mutual support will be changed. Pupils themselves are more motivated when they see teachers and parents cooperating.

The results of the conference (2000, p. 276) called "Current situation of social pedagogy in Slovakia" held on February 2nd and 3rd 1999 in Bratislava attract attention to the possibilities of employment of social pedagogues in the prevention of socio-pathological phenomena. The conference verified social pedagogy to have its place in prevention and its attention is drawn to the area of the prevention of socio-pathological phenomena. According to A. Tokárová (2005, p. 307), the primary task of social pedagogy, and therefore of a social pedagogue as well, is

prevention activity as well as recovery of social cohesion through pedagogical therapy.

D. Miňová (2000, p. 239) specifies objects of a social pedagogue's activity, such as children and their socio-pathological problems, pointing to some of them:

- excruciation, neglect, misuse, chicanery,
- drug addiction,
- alcoholism,
- truancy,
- defective behaviour,
- disrupted family relations.

A social pedagogue's profession is required by vigorous growth of socio-pathological phenomena among children and youth, by a the development of a high-consumption way of life, by a negative mass-media influence, by a negative leisure use as well as by an increase of social problems in society. A special task of social pedagogues would be to perform the function of a coordinator of drug addiction prevention as well as of additional socio-pathological phenomena, which are presently under the attention of teachers; they often complement their work load by that, though without necessary professional training.

In the years 2004 and 2006 we carried out research using a questionnaire method among those teachers of elementary and secondary schools who perform the function of a drug addiction coordinator and of additional socio-pathological phenomena. The studies were implemented in the Central Slovakian region with a sample of 159 respondents – coordinators.

We were interested in what problems they encounter while acting as coordinators. The results for particular years are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Problems while acting as coordinators of prevention

	year 2004	year 2006
lack of time to act as coordinator, or left-out coordinator's work from workload	32.12%	28.57%
no cooperation of family	22.02%	20.41%
lack of finances	7.34%	18.37%
lack of materials	6.42%	4.08%
additional problems	6.42%	10.20%
lack of colleagues' interest	5.50%	6.12%
problems to get professionals for discussions	3.67%	4.08%
no problem	1.83%	2.04%
no answer to question	14.68%	8.16%

In 2004 the majority of the respondents had a problem with the lack of time, or they pointed to the fact that the work of a coordinator is left-out from their workload; they are not freed of additional work duties and coordinator's work in work "over-time". 22.02% of the respondents had problems with no cooperation of families and no interest of parents. The lack of finances was pointed to by 7.34% of the respondents and the lack of materials was reported by 6.42%. 3.67% of the respondents experienced problems to get professionals for discussions and lack of colleagues' interest was referred to by 5.50% of the respondents. Only 1.83% of the respondents – coordinators encountered no problems.

In 2006 again, the majority of the respondents expressed a lack of time as their biggest problem. In comparison with 2004 more coordinators feel the lack of finances for their work (18.37%). In the remaining entries there were no major changes.

We have found by the research that the biggest problem of coordinators is the lack of time to perform the function of a coordinator. This situation could be solved when a position for a social pedagogue is created in schools, which would also perform the function of a coordinator of prevention. This function is currently performed by teachers who teach subjects according to their approbation. It is normally two or more subjects. Besides, many coordinators are entrusted to execute an additional function: a class teacher or educational advisor.

School is the second strongest socialization factor. It must execute preventive activities, especially in relation to little motivating family environment of children. Enhanced attention must be paid to pupils coming from imperilled families and in this area the school must work in close cooperation mainly with extra school counselling organisations. This should become a target of interest in favour of having social pedagogues at schools.

In the prevention of socio-pathological phenomena, the coordination of preventive activities at school is inevitable. This function should be fulfilled by the coordinator of prevention, appointed by the school headmaster from among the teachers. The coordinator of prevention formulates a plan of preventive activities for the school year cooperating with teachers as well as with extra-school organisations during their implementation.

In our opinion social pedagogues are ready to perform the function of coordinators of prevention under the conditions of elementary and secondary schools because the focus of their activity is exactly in preventive activities.

A very important role during the prevention of a deviant behaviour is also played by the quality of how children and youth spend their leisure. Leisure has a significant and indispensable place in the development of a child's personality. The importance of leisure is currently growing and represents a significant individual,

societal, and pedagogical value. Rational use of free time to a great extent supports the prevention of socio-pathological phenomena of children and youth. Creation of a sufficient number of possibilities for leisure activities and involving of children and youth into regular interest activity is an inevitable presupposition of their positive development. Many studies refer to positive links between the use of leisure and the occurrence of deviant behaviour of children and youth. The preventive function of free time is emphasized in the National Programme to Combat Drugs. It is important for schools to create possibilities for an organized interest activity of pupils; at the same time it is necessary to pay increased attention to pupils coming from imperilled family environment.

Since the professional position “social pedagogue” at elementary and secondary schools has not yet been legislatively fixed, we assess as positive the activity of the Methodological Pedagogical Centre in Banská Bystrica for its working out a *Professional standard of a pedagogical employee – specialist. Working material on the preparation of the proposal to systematize a position of a social pedagogue at schools.*

The basic activities of a social pedagogue at elementary and secondary schools according to us should be rooted in:

- implementation of primary prevention of socio-pathological phenomena, they would perform the function of a coordinator of the prevention of drug addiction and of additional socio-pathological phenomena;
- organisation of free time activities of children and youth;
- social counselling;
- active work with pupils from disadvantaged family environment;
- cooperation with parents.

According to J. Hroncová (2004, p. 44) “integration processes in the European region will probably emphasize even more the inevitability to develop supporting professions, for example, in order to continue solving the Romany people problem or the growth of socio-pathological phenomena of children and youth or the problems linked to the crisis of family and so on.”

It would be desirable to create a place for a social pedagogue at every elementary and secondary school, because he/she holds professional skills to perform a prevention coordinator’s activities and other socio-educational work. It is also inevitable to intervene into the way pupils spend their leisure. A social pedagogue knows both risky and protective factors of an optimal development of children and youth. He/she focuses not only the problems of pathological character, problems of marginal groups, imperilled part of population as potentially deviant-acting, but actually the whole population. A social pedagogue should influence the personal development of pupils developing their social skills. Cooperation with families is also important.

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