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This is the **accepted version** of the journal article:

Úcar, Xavier. «Book review : Social pedagogy and working with children and young people: when care and education meet». *European journal of social work*, Vol. 16, Num. 4 (2013), p. 581-583

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Book review of **Social Pedagogy and working with children and Young people.**

**When care and education meet**

Claire Cameron and Peter Moss (Eds.)

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London and Philadelphia, 2011.

221 pages, ISBN 978-1-84905-119-4

I must confess that it was an authentic pleasure for me to read this book. And this is so for several reasons: First, because it is a book on Social Pedagogy, which also explicitly uses such a denomination in the title. Until recent years, people interested, in one way or another, in social pedagogy had to be content with a rather modest presence of this theme in a few journals. This text is added to an incipient list of books dealing with this field of research and practice. On the other hand, this book is a sign that the long 'drought' of research and works specifically focused on social pedagogy might be coming to an end.

The second reason is that it is a book about social pedagogy written in English. Just as in other languages (German, Spanish, Danish, Finnish, etc.) many books on this subject have been published, the books written in English are so few that they could almost be counted on the fingers of one hand. The editors situate their own text in the interest aroused in recent years in UK in a way of working with children and young people, which, despite being widely developed in continental Europe, hardly had had any presence in that context. In fact, both the editors and many of the authors involved in the book belong or have belonged to the Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London. Researchers in this unit

are leading the development of social pedagogy in English-speaking countries. In recent years, the Thomas Coram Research Unit has been publishing several studies on the application of its models of socio-pedagogical work in the British system of residential care for children and young people.

The third reason is that the content of the book fulfils what the title and the subtitle promise. Throughout the various chapters, perspectives for socio-pedagogical work with children and young people are shown, and it can be seen that education and care are inseparable, as Pestalozzi said many years ago. Although Social Pedagogy can work in many areas, the editors focus the content of the book on only two of them: (1) early childhood education and care and (2) residential care for children and young people.

Finally, the fourth reason is that, despite being written by a broad and diverse group of authors (including not only English authors but also Belgian and Danish authors), the book maintains a significant level of consistency and quality. Although it is very difficult for all the articles to keep the same level of quality, it should be noted that most of them keep a high level of quality.

I really liked the book. It seemed to me it is opportune, interesting, and useful. The editors claim that it can be useful not only for students but for anyone working with children and young people, either "*in policy or practice, teaching or research*" (p.27).

One could say that the 11 chapters of the book are structured into four categories:

- a) Two chapters that present the conceptual foundations of social pedagogy from

different perspectives, and reflect on them from various approaches. b) Three chapters that provide experiences in England, Denmark, and Italy that serve as examples of ways to do social pedagogy. c) Four chapters that give rise to different perspectives on what is the core of social pedagogy, i.e. socio-pedagogical relations. And finally, we have the initial and final chapters, both written by the editors of the book. In the first chapter, they explain the need and opportunity of the book. In the last chapter, they reflect on future directions of social pedagogy based on ideas developed by the authors in each chapter. I think these two chapters contribute decisively to give unity, coherence, and relevance to the whole book. On the other hand, they manage to minimize the imbalance among the different chapters in terms of content, contributions, and interest.

I think it is appropriate to devote four chapters to aspects or dimensions of what is the core of social pedagogy, i.e., socio-pedagogical relations. But perhaps this is the area where the contributions are more irregular. From my point of view, in some chapters there is not enough depth. Also, I think the specific choice of the topics addressed in them is arguable.

As regards content, I would like to highlight some of the ideas I find most interesting or opportune. I think the starting point of editors (the failure of the residential care system for children and young people in UK compared with the results obtained by this system in other European countries) is more than enough justification for the opportunity and the necessity of a text like this. Let me take this occasion to stress the importance and urgency of comparative research on the conceptualization and

practice of social pedagogy in Europe (Kornbeck, 2002; Kornbeck and Rosendal Jensen, 2009).

With regard to diversity in early childhood education, Vanderbroeck et al. raise an issue that affects all Social Pedagogy. Elsewhere (Úcar, 2011) I have suggested, based on the finding of the political dimension of education (which we owe to Freire), the need to distinguish the strictly pedagogical actions from the political ones. From my point of view, the analysis of the relationship between pedagogy and politics is done in a very suggestive and interesting way. To relate this analysis to the perspectives “Doing Things Right” and “Doing Right Things” brings new light on these relationships.

Also, it is worth noting that it is not necessary that an experience does not have to be characterized as “Social Pedagogy” to actually be considered as such, as evidenced by Moss with his account of the Reggio Emilia experience in Italy.

The editors devote the last chapter to raise questions on and future directions of Pedagogy taking as starting points some ideas provided by the authors of the different chapters. Although editors positioned themselves as “*outsiders*” (p. 196) in this area, they make a firm commitment to the socio-pedagogical work with children and young people and its application in the Anglo-Saxon context despite the difficulties posed by existing structures and concepts. Out of the various issues they raise, it is worth emphasizing the need to review and rethink the relationship between social pedagogy and school pedagogy, between social pedagogues and teachers. I fully agree with them that it is necessary to establish a closer contact

between them. From my point of view, it is not about establishing boundaries. It is about generating permeability, complicity, languages, territories, and shared objectives.

I want to end up explaining to the readers of this review that much of my enthusiasm for this book is due to the above-mentioned quality criteria. But also, it is due to the authors' confidence in the ability of social pedagogy to transform society through its work with children and young people; a trust and a hope shared by all those who have chosen to become involved in this field, from the academic sphere or from the professional sphere.

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