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JAN STORO (2013). *Practical social pedagogy. Theories, values and tools for working with children and young people.*

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I would like to start by saying that this book seems to me one of the most interesting that has been written in recent years on social pedagogy; this will be my position throughout this review. Like any good book, this work has challenged me from its opening pages and has made me reaffirm or call into question many of my own previous ideas. But let me warn you, however, that I am speaking from southern Europe and from the socio-pedagogical tradition that has been built-up here over the last century. For this is a tradition that, as will be seen, differs in certain regards from what the author suggests.

I think that this is an honest and realistic book. The author locates himself clearly, from the outset, within the place from which he reflects, constructs knowledge and writes. For this reason he decides, for example, not to enter into a definition of social-pedagogy –one of the most challenging issues still unresolved in our field- but to define, instead, social pedagogical practice. It is in this sense that the two main objectives of the text are posed; these are: (1) to write about a Social Pedagogy oriented towards practice; and (2) to investigate whether social constructionism theory can expand fundamental thinking on social pedagogy. On reading the book, it becomes clear that the author achieves both objectives.

Many authors have insisted over time that social pedagogy lies, or has lain, between the theoretical and the practical or, as the author has it, that there are two ways of understanding this: *Social Pedagogy as work with people and social pedagogy as theoretical perspective* (p. 3). I think that this book tries to position itself in what is in effect a difficult balancing point between the one and the other, not only with respect to the content itself but also in the very way it has been written. The book begins with a two people, one theoretical and the other practical, discussing Social Pedagogy by revealing their different relative positions. The dialogue runs on in an inter-connected way into chapters two and three, with case studies or practice situations that illustrate the author's argument at every point.

The book is organized into eight chapters. Through a case study, the introductory chapter deals with the main terms and concepts used throughout the book. The subsequent chapter questions the theoretical perspective underlying social pedagogy and opts to locate itself within the perspective of "social constructionism". From their point of view, practical social pedagogues cannot wait for good theories to come along, but must instead act in the 'here and now'. For this very reason, the theoretical perspective taken here is so appropriate. The author is aware, however, that his scope is very broad and that it represents both a problem and an opportunity.

In chapter three, the author tries to build connections between theory and practice. In my view, this is one of the book's most complex chapters and is where the author makes a number of its main contributions. Chapter four considers the identity of social pedagogues, questioning what motivates them to seek boundaries, connections and overlaps that place

them in relation to other professionals such as social workers, psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, lawyers, researchers or entrepreneurs.

The fifth chapter sets out to ascertain just what it is that social pedagogues do. This creates a socio-educational context built on three pillars: those relations that are the means by which action takes place; the structure that represents place and manner (and, indeed, the means) in which this happens; and, finally, change, which is the aim of that action. Chapter six relates to social pedagogues' actions take place; from the author's perspective, these are focused on the individual, group and social levels.

Chapter seven highlights the tools that social pedagogues make use of in their actions. From the most general or transversal, such as the systematic character of action, language and practical interventions to what the author calls "local methods", i.e., negotiated social constructions that are put into place in the relationship between social pedagogues and children or adolescents with whom they are interacting. It should be noted that this chapter (in a practical manner while remaining theoretically grounded) addresses the problem facing social pedagogues in their daily work. Issues such as authority, conflict and negotiation, among others, are worked on within the framework of social and pedagogical relationship. Finally, chapter eight concludes the book by highlighting the complexity of the profession; this relates, on the one hand, to the fact lying halfway between theory and practice and, on the other, to contextually situated negotiations between professionals and participants that are a fundamental axis of social pedagogy.

Following other authors and despite recognizing the controversial nature of the term, Storo choose to speak of the "client" in referring to the participant in the socio-pedagogical relationship. This decision matches that of social workers in southern Europe, but it should be pointed out that this terminology is not used by social pedagogues and social educators. The latter refer instead to the "learner" or "participant", as the term "client" has business and commercial connotations that are not entirely appropriate to the contents of socio-pedagogical relationships.

I agree with the choice of the term "intervention" as the core of the social pedagogue's work. This is an open discussion today in which some people prefer the term "action", which conveys a supposedly less "invasive" nature for the term. The greater imprecision of this usage, however, and the tradition of applying "intervention" and its own etymological meaning (Carballeda, 2002) to the field of social pedagogy are arguments that, from my point of view, justify the use of "intervention".

I also share one of the key ideas in this book, namely, remarking the importance of theory by stating that practice should always be informed if it is to be 'good practice'. Herein lies one of the major challenges of social pedagogy: [to] *include reflection in the execution of practice and use it actively to develop practice* (p. 44). This, in my view, is a solid contribution: approaching social pedagogy as *Values/Theory-Methods/Action*.

It could be said that the relationship between social work and social pedagogy is one of the oldest and most traditional discussions in our field. The author differentiates the two professions—rather too readily in my view—noting that the second focuses on children and young people while the former does not. Although this follows the line defended in recent years from *Anglo-Saxon* ambit with respect to social pedagogy, this is not what has been proposed from central and southern Europe, where it has a clear social vocation that transcends ages and areas, as various texts clearly reflect (See, Kornbeck / Rosendal Jensen, 2011, 2012).

One of the ideas with which the author finishes the book is particularly interesting to me: *adapting methods to the context where one Works is an important function. Social pedagogy practice is contextual and has to be tailored to the individuals in question* (p. 138). On balance, my view is that Storo's book is a useful contribution to all of use who, whether from research or theory or practice, are interested in social pedagogy.

## References

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