

# **Determinants for the Creation and Development of Decision-making Competencies in the Preparation of Social (Services) Pedagogues**

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## **Abstrakt**

Paper is oriented to professional and personality preparation of social pedagogues at TBU. In our paper, we will endeavour to elaborate a functional model of competencies, which will be verified in practice and subsequent reflection into the professional preparation of social pedagogues in Czech republic. We shall base ourselves upon the knowledge and observations contained in current professional literature as well as working practices (i.e. praxis). Decision-making competencies – on which our attention and activities are focused in this paper, are highly specific competencies. The decision-making competency is not understood (by us) as being from the perspective of technical, economic, or social policies, but rather from the perspective of key competencies – which are the load-bearing competencies, and at the same time, include within themselves a dimension of other competencies and these individual competencies intermingle to various degrees as does their content.

## **Summary of the current state of knowledge of the problems and issues and the perspectives for their resolution**

The transformation of societies, with the transfer of competencies to self-government, the entries of countries of the former “Eastern Block” into the EU – all require not only harmonisation with valid legislation but also harmonisation of the pre-graduate and graduate preparation of students with requirements for practical work experience (i.e. praxis) and new vocations and professions. The need for experts/professionals – social (services – further left out) pedagogues began in the nineteen nineties and has broken out once again. Many universities and other tertiary education establishments have reacted to the needs of their societies through the introduction of study disciplines like Social Pedagogy, and their further sub-specialisation in line with the orientation and ability of graduates to find employment in the social services and remedial behavioural education (further only reform) spheres. At the present time, this discipline is being developed by a variety of Pedagogical faculties, faculties of Social Sciences studies or Humanities-oriented faculties in the Czech Republic (i.e. 11 independent study disciplines with similar orientations).

The Social Pedagogue, (c.f Bakošová, 2000, Kraus, 2000) The Present Day and Future, who not only performs reform, and management functions, but also other “ancillary” activities - has to come to terms with the internal transitions within their society, transformations in their cultures, changes in value systems, in reform education and social processes and the new autonomies of these transformations.

They overcome the role of transformer of these changes and, acting as an intermediary, pass them on to other people. In the context of ever-growing demands arising from changes in societies and their applications in a variety of other resorts (c.f. Kraus, 2001, Ondrejkoč, 2000, Cintulová, 2005, Chudý, 2004) the social pedagogue is faced within the context of their profession with many key roles, for instance:

- Manager in Social Services and Remedial Behavioural (Reform) Education facilities.
- Diagnostic Expert on reform educational and social problems.
- Advisor on questions on the applications of social services policies.
- Consultant in situations with learning difficulties.
- Residential Wardens.
- Animators working with young people and children in their free time.
- Facilitator of social services interactions.
- Innovator/modifier of reform-educational procedures.
- Creative employees in variety of social services and reform-educational (reform) establishments.
- Reflective professionals.

In the sense of such societal changes, the applications and ability to find gainful employment also changes for social pedagogues – as does their social services-pedagogical preparation.

As regards the applications and ability to find suitable employment awaiting social pedagogues, this begs the question: “Do we currently have a sufficiency of social pedagogues, able to perform such social service – remedial behavioural education activities? At present, the theoretical bases of social pedagogy have been elaborated to a “solid level” (c.f. Kraus, 2001, Ondrejkoč, 2000, Hroncová 2000, Bakošová, 2000, Klapilová, 1996), similarly to the praxeological basis validated in the role of social pedagogues in contemporary societies (c.f. Kraus, 2001, Bakošová, 2000, Kratochvílová, 2001, Hofbauer, 2000, etc.).

Less investigation has been devoted to the personality traits and professional preparation of social pedagogues at universities. We understand personality and professional preparation to be the basic attributes in the course of fulfilling the targeted social – remedial behavioural education, as well as the basis of the further education of social pedagogues in everyday working practice (praxis).

The starting-point of such preparation is a Constructivist-oriented social - pedagogical approach to the preparation of future social pedagogues which places emphasis on the growth of students` professionalism and personality through the intermediary of reflexive experience. Their aim is to prompt and encourage students` activities and to create the right conditions intended to goad/stimulate them to discovering new educational, behavioural, and social observations, the development of pedagogical adaptability and professional competencies, and to self-reflection on their work and endeavours as well as how well they performed.

A social pedagogue is an expert – a professional, whose general competencies lie in aiding children, young people and adults (social andragogy) in situations of equilibrating socialisation deficits and looking for opportunities to improve the quality-of-life of children , young people and families by means of upbringing, behavioural education, general education, and prevention and advisory services.

Such a delimitation of these activities requires more precise use of terminology to best describe the term competencies – dividing them into general and specific, or the even more precise terms of knowledge and adaptability. Should we leaf through the professional literature, we would always come across terms like knowledge, adaptability, and competencies in close association with the teaching profession and teaching activities.

Competencies as a key term are characterised as a set of professional skills and abilities (Průcha, 2001), a preparedness to overcome the obstacles and demands of their profession (Slavík, 1993), the professional qualities of a teacher (Vašutová, 2001), complex ability or adaptability for the successful performance of the profession (Spilková, 2004), a summary of adaptability for effective teaching and remedial behavioural education and the perfection of pedagogical activities (Švec, 1999). T. Janík (2005, p. 14) draws our attention to the content overload and imprecision of the term “Competencies”.

As regards the scientific field of Social Pedagogy, it is necessary to state that the problems and issues involved with the professional preparation of social pedagogues and the development of key competencies are terminologically-speaking based on these “teacher” delimitations. The problems and issues of the competencies of social pedagogues has yet to be elaborated to any great extent, nor is it terminologically unified – and it is still at the very beginning of its further elaboration and terminological definition.

We consider the delimitation by Z. Bakošovej (2005, p. 15) to be the basic and content-wise, the most accurate delimitation of the key competencies in social pedagogy, in which the competencies of social pedagogues is understood in connection with the activities, skills and abilities, knowledge, and specific adaptability of a social pedagogue.

We understand competencies as a wide-ranging term which, within itself, even includes legal terminology (i.e. legal rights) – which has to date meant professional rights in line with the level of education. Social pedagogues` competencies represent their performance in their duties and profession, which are conditional upon their pre-graduation professional preparation and their practical abilities. In practice, this means that there exists – and for this very reason, demands legislative measures.

In our project, we will endeavour to elaborate a functional model of competencies, which will be verified in practice and subsequent reflection into the professional preparation

of social pedagogues. We shall base ourselves upon the knowledge and observations contained in current professional literature as well as working practices (i.e. praxis).

By means of the main terms, we shall delimit the key competencies. In view of the fact that, for the time being in our professional literature there is – for the time being, a preponderance of summaries of these competencies, we have attempted to elaborate the key competencies not only in a summarised form, but also in a graphically-elaborated, cyclic model of the competencies of a social pedagogue which is a partial aim of project (see Fig. 1 – Appendix No.1).

We therefore rank (in our own definition framework) these key competencies thus:

- Educational.
- Social – remedial behavioural educational.
- Preventative.
- Re-socialisation and remedial behavioural.
- Advisory.
- Diagnostic.
- Methodological.
- Decision-based.

The secondary terminology (or sub-categories) that we shall subsume into the concept and term competencies will be the terms “knowledge” and “skills and abilities”. We understand knowledge to mean a cognitive structure which includes within itself both theoretical and practical knowledge. For us, the subject of the development of knowledge will mean the personality-professional preparation of the subjects (i.e. students of Social Pedagogy at universities), the quality of their skills and abilities, and their exploitability in pedagogical praxis. The basic characteristics of these subjects will be their theoretical-practical preconceptions and subsequent self-reflection.

Skills and abilities can be characterised as a set of four characteristics for the performance of activities, behaving in a certain way in concrete environments (i.e. context); and they require an orientation and precision in the realisation (implementation/application) process and the acquisition of trained and practical performance or application in practice. Decision-making competencies – on which our attention and activities are focused in this research project, are highly specific competencies. The decision-making competency is not understood (by us) as being from the perspective of technical, economic, or social policies, but rather from the perspective of key competencies – which are the load-bearing competencies, and at the same time, include within themselves a dimension of other competencies and these individual competencies intermingle to various degrees as does their content (Fig. 2 – Appendix No 2.).

The specificity of these competencies arises at the least from the impossibility of separating and describing the individual dimensions and aims of these competencies as compared to others and therefore, and even the actual act of the origin and development of decision-making competencies (i.e. determinants). The key activity is the assurance of a qualified orientation in the ranking relationships and activities of all of the participants in the social-pedagogical process of reform education and education within concrete environments. Students will learn to create suchlike environments in which children, young people and even adults feel safe and comfortable.

They will create a climate which requires engagement in further personal characteristics development, using the methods of comradeship and collaboration. They will learn strategies

for the organisation of their lives within concrete environments which are linked to the life of the community, town, or in cooperation with parents or with participating families about life in social-reform educational establishments. What is important is to be aware of the fact of assuming responsibility for the development of the skills and abilities of these clients (the incarcerated, guards, etc.). A further, no less important field of the development of decision-making competencies is the art - in one's thoughts, of preparing, realising, and evaluating the situation and to take responsibility for the origin and consequences for the majority of the participants. The responsibility for the gradual transference of responsibility of children for themselves is a component of the development of decision-making competencies in the course of their overall studies (i.e. preparation for the performance of their future profession).

We shall submit such an understanding and conception of the theoretical framework to further precision and characterisation.

Many approaches and models of university-level professional preparation of students – both at home and abroad, place the greatest emphasis on training exercises, whose thinking is the mastery of concrete skills and abilities and approaches and procedures.

While this corresponds to the model of socio-pedagogical training and “formative” (moulding/inculcating) content of the anticipated target category of skills and abilities, it however only deals with certain concrete situations, while lacking a sense of complexity – i.e. diagnostics, suggested solutions and actual solutions, and self-reflection over one's own activities. Little space is devoted to personality growth and a more complex approach to the professional preparation in which students become aware of all of the steps involved in the decision-making process, interventions and with all that is associated with this – both before and after.

In the suggested project, we wish to attempt to theoretically justify our conception and model for the competencies of social pedagogues keeping in view the key competencies, and to verify the functionality of this model empirically on a small representative sample (i.e. students of TBU and practising social pedagogues) for the creation of skills and abilities and adaptability. The second line of enquiries will determine by means of the use of so-called “content analyses” the current state-of-affairs relating to the development of decision-making competencies in the professional preparation of students` personality profiles and their views on the given problems and issues.

We shall attempt to formulate, on the basis of the results attained, a framework programme for professional preparation as well as to delimit the conditions under which the given programme would be provided and administered at TBU in Zlín, in the study discipline of Social Pedagogy – with its orientation on ancillary professions. These aims would be implemented according to the following steps:

1. The creation of a theoretical basis – a conception of the competencies and making the model of competencies even more precise – bearing in mind the key competencies.
2. The verification of a functional model for working practice (praxis) – in the course of creating the requisite skills and abilities -
  - Creation of the pre-concepts.
  - Experience drawn from practice.
  - Reflective pre-concepts and own activities based on one's own experiences.
  - Alterations and changes to the pre-concepts.
  - Creation of a knowledge-base – both theoretical and practical knowledge.
3. The elaboration of the results and outcomes in the form of recommendations intended for working practice and teaching materials, expert treatises and a monograph.

As a new approach to the problem of creating and developing skills and abilities, I would recommend providing students with the opportunity to attempt to embed their own notions of the teaching process and remedial behavioural education into pedagogical reality.

Students will become aware of their own reactions to the given situation, and the reactions and feedback of other students and teams will dynamise their activities. This will happen when the student runs up against an unplanned “obstacle” in the planned activities which they could never have anticipated. We consider this approach to be highly important in the process of mastering and developing the pedagogical skills and abilities of self-reflection over their own activities.

### **Project aims and timetable for its resolution**

When conceiving the project aims, we set ourselves the following questions:

- How do we delimit and terminologically encapsulate the problems and issues of social pedagogues`competencies – and which of these can be considered as key ones?
- How have other institutions involved in the professional preparation of social pedagogues come to terms with the problems of the development of competencies?
- What are the basic determinants for the creation and development of decision-making competencies?
- Is it possible to build a theoretical base on the basis of pre-concepts and previous experience?

The main aim of this project is the scientific/academic study of, or seeking out of starting points, the creation and development of determinants for decision-making competencies, and subsequently – their further development in the professional preparation of future teachers` personalities from a constructivist and holistic approach point-of-view.

The concrete aims are the theoretical justification of a framework approach to the given topic, in the sense of a more complex professional preparation, the suggestion and verification of the functionality of our social pedagogues competencies model and the ensuing research, which would reflect the possibilities for understanding the given topic on the theoretical, practical and methodological levels, and which would also be an important element for the extrapolation of results which would then be implemented into the professional preparation of social pedagogues.

The subsidiary aims of the project are:

1. The study of the determinants governing the creation and development of social pedagogues` decision-making competencies, unmasking them and the resolution and suggestion of a framework for a constructivist conception of professional preparation.
2. The elaboration of diagnostic methods and determination of their effectiveness in practice.
3. The empirical verification of the effectiveness and possibilities for resolving the given topic in practice (praxis) - both among students and practicing social pedagogues.

The final aim is the creation of a strategy on a theoretical basis (i.e. description, tracking) as well as a practical basis (i.e. development and monitoring). Then to elaborate this strategy into methodological materials (i.e. a manual) which would serve as an example for further work, and then to inventory and process the knowledge and skills and abilities base in

the form of expert treatises and casuistic or model situations in a digital form (e.g. MOODLE and such like). This research aim is however, of a longer time horizon character than is the herein submitted grant application.

### **Design of the research project**

When conceiving the aims and determining the orientation of this research study, we attempted to arrive at an explicit expression of these aims on a content and methodological level:

1. **Content level aims** – To diagnose and describe the basic determinants for the creation and development of decision-making competencies in the undergraduate preparation of social pedagogues.
2. **Methodological level aims** – To assess the priorities and insufficiencies of the techniques used for the mapping of the knowledge and praxeological bases of the given topic.

By projecting the aims into the research study questions, we can get a more concrete characterisation of the given problems and issues and even more precise aims:

1. **Research questions at the content level** – In what ways and by which methods can the problems and issues associated with the creation and development of social pedagogues' decision-making competencies be grasped and elaborated for their undergraduate studies?
2. **Research questions at the methodological level** – What priorities and insufficiencies will the research techniques show up in the course of diagnosing the knowledge and praxeological bases of the given problems and issues?

We understand the following of the first aim as a contribution to discussions on the topic of the development of social pedagogues' decision-making competencies and the possibilities of understanding them at both the theoretical and practical levels; whereas, we understand the second aim to be like an "observer" of the question of its methodological nature and character, and it is bound to verify the techniques used and the concrete statistics (using the STATISTIKA software programme), structured concepts (SLT) techniques, techniques for capturing decision-making competency processes of the actors in timed progressions (ILKHA), unfinished sentences techniques, and protocolling situations techniques (i.e. the use of the ATLASTI – HYPERTEXT software programme from Berlin, Germany), as diagnostic methods (viz. Tab. 1 – Appendix No.3).

The suggestions for the design of this research project are based on the personal observations of the author of this project and the results and outcomes of the research activities of the author as well as those by others in the Czech Republic (i.e. Lukášová – Kantorková, 1991, 2000) and abroad (e.g. Wang, 1999, Willis, 1993, Bauer, 2004, and Hyde, 2005), where decision-making competencies have been investigated for the teaching profession.

As regards the individual steps of the research study, we decided to take the path of a more complex research strategy, which contains within itself not only a qualitative, but also a quantitative view on the analysis of the data acquired.

The research study will be broken down into three individual and self-contained blocks:

#### *Block.1: First Phase of the Research Study*

In the first phase of the research study – the acquisition of theoretical bases for the research study – we will concentrate on the collection of information and knowledge and observations regarding the given problems and issues. We shall make use of available professional literature resources as well as Internet data-bases. We shall set the subsidiary

tasks and precisely delimit the time frames for the individual self-contained sub-stages of the research study in the individual blocks. In the conceived research study strategy that will be elaborated in the course of processing the results and supported by software, we shall determine the basic and ancillary methods of the research study itself. The last phase in this part of the research study will be to elaborate the research tools/instrumentaria – i.e. the questionnaires and to process the results using content analysis. Block.1 will be culminated by an interim sub-report on the project's outcomes so far.

*Block.2: Second Phase of the Research Study*

In the second phase of the research study – the collection of empirical data – we shall concentrate on the collection of data with the assistance of research tools and instrumentaria, viz. Tab. 2. We shall use the methods available to us (Protocolled Situations, the Unfinished Sentence technique, SLT, etc.) and tools for the collection of data and we shall attempt to analyse this data. Block.2 will be culminated by an interim sub-report on the project's outcomes so far.

*Block. 3 Third Phase of the Research Study*

In the third phase of the research study – the collection of empirical data – we shall concentrate on the pre-concepts and techniques for capturing the decision-making processes of the actors in timed interval progressions – ILKHA – and we shall verify the knowledge-base on the basis of making the pre-concepts even more precise. The last part of the research study will contain a summary and elaboration of the results obtained in the form of publications, which will be conceived as theoretical-practical reflections. The final part of this research study will be concluded by a Final Report.

**Timetable:**

2007

1. Study of the literature and the concretisation of the subsidiary aims of the project.
2. Preparation for the research study – elaboration of the first part – description of the terminology.
3. Elaboration of the strategies and selection of the methods to be used.
4. Content analysis and its evaluation.
5. Comparative studies of the results and outcomes.
6. Elaboration of the Interim Report.

2008

1. Elaboration of Block .2.
2. Elaboration of the results and outcomes of Block .2. – i.e. video-recordings, terminological maps, statistical sets.
3. Preparation for Block .3 – the creation of a methodological plan.
4. Comparative studies of the results and outcomes.
5. Elaboration of the Interim Report.

2009

1. Realisation of Block .3.
2. Elaboration of the results and outcomes.
3. Comparative studies of the results and outcomes, and the creation of an electronic database in an e-learning environment like MOODLE.
4. Elaboration of the Conclusions of the research study – Final Report.

**Significance of the project**

It is anticipated that the resolution of this project will positively influence the current possibilities and realisation of the professional preparation of future social pedagogues, and that it will project itself into qualitative improvements in the further modification and improvement of such processes in the near future. We consider its benefits to include the suggestion of a new conception for this professional preparation process, including new content, methods and forms of professional preparation, as well as the possibilities it affords to verify them in the research and thus to optimise them and convert them as required.

Last but not least, this project should also provide us with a methodological foundation and the possibility of working with audio-visual equipment and provide access to the results to a wider spectrum of the general public drawn from the ranks of pedagogues, methodologists, students, etc. As far as we are aware, a similar project has never been nor even is being contemplated in the Czech Republic.

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