15th Edition of the International Conference on Sciences of Education,
Studies and Current Trends in Science of Education, ICSED 2017,
9-10 June 2017, Suceava (Romania)

Studies and Current Trends in Science of Education

Epistemological Developments of Modern Social Pedagogy

Marioara ROTARU

<https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.icsed2017.37>

How to cite: Rotaru, M. (2017). Epistemological Developments of Modern Social Pedagogy. In O. Clipa (ed.), *Studies and Current Trends in Science of Education*. (pp. 334-345). Suceava, Romania: LUMEN Proceedings
<https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.icsed2017.37>

Epistemological Developments of Modern Social Pedagogy

Marioara ROTARU¹

Abstract

This study proposes a historic foray into the field of social pedagogy. It analyses origins, phases and the conceptual development of this area, based on the cultural model of modern society. Although social pedagogy has different emphases and approaches depending on particular historical and geographical contexts, a common theme is that it deals with the connections between educational and social dynamics, or to put it differently concern the educational dimension of social issues and the social dimensions of educational issues. Historical research methodology will be based on the principle of synchronism and diachronism social and human sciences in their own context- generally, pedagogical sciences- in particular. The historical approach to social pedagogy creates epistemological preconditions for identifying the axiomatic framework of Education Sciences, developed in the perspective of the sociocentrist paradigm. Updating and valorisation of fundamental pedagogical works and models in the history of education can help us to understand the current issues of education, in terms of the challenges of the knowledge society in a didactic, theoretical and operational perspective. The first part of this study analyzes the history of the field of social pedagogy since its german origins with a focus on two great tendencies: the kantian tradition (Paul Natorp) and the historicist-hermeneutics tradition (Herman Nöhl). The second part of the paper reviews the conceptual framework at the level of some opened epistemic models in the area of social pedagogy (axioms, laws, principles) as aspects of the process of understanding the essence of the phenomenon of education.

Keywords: Social Pedagogy, epistemology, kantian tradition, historicist-hermeneutics tradition, modernity.

1. Introduction

In order to allow the identification and the epistemology fixing of the modern social pedagogy as a step of the paradigm evolution of Education Sciences, the present study will work mainly with the concepts of *historical age* and *paradigm* on the level of the methodology of the research. From the perspective of the concept of historical age we will refer to *modernity* as a cultural model of the modern (industrialized) society and at the

¹ Ph.D Candidate, Chişinău Ion Creangă Pedagogical State University, Suceava, România, mari.rotaru82@gmail.com.

paradigm level, we will tackle on the social pedagogy which projects the theory and practice of education by focusing on the external, social requires related to the one who is to be educated, expressed by the society through the educator, as its representative.

The methodology of the historical research will focus on two categories of specific strategies, according to The Encyclopedic Dictionary of Pedagogy (Cristea, 2015, p.315):

- a) *Fundamental strategies of historical research* a.1) *syncronic (related to past time), Paul Natorp and Herman Nöhl's strategies have been drafted this way; a.2) diachronic (reported in the present tense), which are interpreted in terms of theories developed in the past.*
- b) *Special historical research strategies* b1) *bibliographical – analysis on the basis of the speciality literature, ordered on the values b2) monographical – analysis of the social pedagogy as a paradigm tendency typical for the sociocentrism ; b3) retrospection – the cumulative analysis of the concept of social pedagogy (historic origins, forerunners, theoreticians historically well-known in the axiomatical referential of this domain).*

The semantic field of the notion of *social pedagogy* will be developed by the syntagms scientifically related by Paul Natorp and Herman Nöhl, as historically established authors in the axiomatic referential of the process of creating the sociocentrism as a paradigm of modern pedagogy.

The importance of the analysis we are about to develop as following is objectified on the methodology level by epistemological obvious limitations of pedagogy , in the context of the chronic interferences maintained by the methodology based on a causative explanation, taken over unconditionally by the natural sciences and the interpretative methodology exposed to a teleological, historical and hermeneutical determinism, needed as a consequence of the depth, complexity and the special dynamics of the object under study.

2. Historical traditions of modern social pedagogy

On the level of the defining model of the contents of the instruction, the sociocentric paradigm reviews the encyclopedical aspirations, essential or ethnocentrist of classical education on various levels of technical approach (polytechnic, civic, political) emphasizing the following: a) *the increasing of the part of the skills and abilities applied to solve problems, referring to the theoretical knowledge; b) the implementing of social attitudes as resources of efficient instruction in different professional, civic, religious, community, economic, sportive contexts etc.* (Cristea, 2015, p. 628).

2.1. The Kantian tradition

From the historical perspective, Paul Natorp may be considered as the initiator of the sociocentric paradigm, which projects the theory and practice of education by focusing on the external requests, on those social towards the one being educated, expressed by society on different referential levels (cultural, political, economical, religious, community level, management level, etc.), as a reaction to the individualist pedagogy, that was focusing on the individual and on his psychological particularities, ignoring the role of society in education. His reference work, *Sozialpädagogik. Theorie der Willensbildung auf Grundlage der Gemeinschaft* (Social Pedagogy. A theory of the cultivation of the will on the basis of community), promotes the thesis according to which the science of education must be founded on the science of the social life.

The suggested formative model that is typical for the sociocentrist paradigm involves: a) a general purpose – the forming of will/volition which is the self-consciousness, acquired based on the requirements of society; b) an educative process to achieve gradually the general purpose (instinctual orientation-spontaneous volition/will, empirical– rational volition/will); c) social fundamental activities: pedagogical, economical, judicial-political; d) taking part in *an education for the entire nation*. Being said differently, it gets to an obligation of knowing through experience, the whole content of knowledge must be subjected to the sign of the normative law, and the norm perceived in this kind of activity is the volition/will. The individual conceptualization of education is abstract, which has a limited value so as it must be overtaken. He rejects the theory of the individual being unique, that has long been promoted by the pedagogical doctrines, nurturing the belief that *the human being does not grow isolated or plainly said one by the other one almost in the same conditions, but each is under the multiple influence of the others and constantly reacts to such type of influence* (Natorp apud Albulescu, 2009, p.275). Being a social creature, that can not develop in isolation *the individual owes everything to society* (ibidem, 2009, p. 277).

Defining his ideas, note that he was influenced by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant and by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies. In his philosophical speech on *reason* and *morality*, Kant calls on an ethical community based on mutual trust tackled as a *sine qua non* condition for progress, which utters the fact that we should never stop at a certain level of knowledge as facing an ultimate limitation. One of Kant's basic axioms is *the absolute imperative* - that asks us to treat people as subjects with their own rights instead of treating them as means to achieve our goals.

While religion has previously stated that *human kindness* is an imperative of God, Kant claimed *the reason* is the birth of kindness.

Following the kantian moral imperative we should not treat others respectfully only because they have a higher status, but because this thing is reasonable to the extent we ourselves want to be treated with dignity related to other people. Thus, the social interaction involves *sui generis* an inherent value of the respectful good human behaviour. Natorp, who was a follower of the *Philosophical School of Marburg*– the neokantian school concerned with the fundamental ratio between philosophy and science– reiterates this idea in the *Social pedagogy*, elaborating a true theory of virtue within the logic of a norm that has its starting point in the striving, instinctual orientation understood as a choice of a direction starting from a certain point of experience.

On its inferior step, striving means instinct, which in the fight with the sensitive materials takes the shape of work (seen as social activity). Within the sociological analysis, Tönnies gives epistemological consistency to these ideas, publishing in 1887 *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Community and Society), an important book in which he dealt with the matter of the dichotomy *Gemeinschaft* (community- a family or a neighborhood in a pre-modern society) and *Gesellschaft* (society- a company or a state in a modern society). Tönnies's typology aims to build a general overview of energy, physiological and mental, of human forms and the forms of sociability and culture. He claimed that, while the first is characterised by individualism, the latter is guided by solidarity. Separating *the community* of *society*, present in germ in the anthropological structures, it causes a transformation of the nature will, from organic, gradually changed to reflected will. Organic will is that which supports all community events: *Organic will is the psychological equivalent of the human body or the principle of unity of life ... This reality includes thinking; Reflected will, on the contrary, is a product of thought itself, which is not for the own reality only in relation to his case – the thinker subject.*(Tönnies, 1944, p.82). The two wills have joint that are considered such as causes of activity and their content is liberty. Organic will must be explained by past, which supports itself, explaining his becoming; but reflected will can be understood only in and through the future, at which is reported as its own reality, carried to fruition- *In relation to organic will, the future is a seed, for the reflected will is an imagine* (ibid., p. 82) Thinkingdichotomous the two types- *community* and *society*- as being polar, opposite and outside each other it is an ideal type to accentuate the key elements of a historic-social change.

Together with Kant's philosophical approach and Tönnies sociological analysis, Natorp considers the *Gemeinschaft model* would have much more potential of building a world of universal happiness, where

humans are aware of their true humanity because *The human being is in reality an abstraction as well as the physicist's atoms. Regarding everything that the human is that he is and individual that connects with other humans, not being a human outside this communion* (Natorp, 1922, p.84). Therefore, the *Social pedagogy* suggested by Natorp implies recognising the fact that the individual education is socially conditioned in every essential direction, on the other hand, the forming of the social life is fundamentally conditioned by an adequate education of the individual. So it must be determined the last task, the most comprehensive of education. Consequently, the topic of this science represents *the social conditions of education and the conditions of the education of the social life* (ibid., p. 94) and the content of the education is always a common asset of all the members of the community.

a. The historicist-hermeneutic tradition

A systematic review of speciality literature reveals a second phase of the evolution of *Social pedagogy*, historically related to the period after the First World War, within the political context of democratic reforms from Germany.

During the evolution phase, the *Social pedagogy* gets much more epistemological consistency due to the ideas of another German educator and philosopher-Herman Nöhl (1879-1960). Combining theory and practice, Nöhl played a key role during the 1920's, for the development of the basis of the social pedagogy as an autonomous subject as well as an ideology through the medium of the *New Education Movement*.

The development of his ideas prove a decisive influence of the philosophical thinking of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), historian, philosopher and sociologist, the founder of *philosophy of life* (*Lebensphilosophie* in Germany), most well known as one of the brightest interpreters of the sciences of the spirit and historiography.

One of his concerns was to establish the theoretical and methodological basis for the human sciences, distinct but at the same time scientific as well as the natural sciences. He suggested that any human experience has two parts: *the one of the surrounding world* led by the laws of the objective necessity and *the one of the inner experience*, characterized by the domination of human will, responsibility for actions, capacity to obey everything to reason and to fight anything from the fortress of each person's freedom.

In order to support the usage of the term *science of the spirit* in his works, he claimed that any other equivalent term (social sciences) refer only to one aspect, but clarifies the central phenomenon through which all the others are perceived and closely connected – the human spirit. Dilthey outlines a whole program in the sense that *the science of spirit* has to solve three

major issues (Dilthey, 1999, p. 63): 1) *to determine the overall logical structure of a knowledge in this field*; 2) *to explain how takes place the construction of spiritual world*; 3) *to determine the conditions under which knowledge in this field can become objective, namely to establish the cognitive value of the science of spirit*.

If we regard things compared to Kant's ideas, we notice an extension of the Kantian critical belief, objectified by the attempt to draft a critique of the historical reason and a category corresponding theory, since for Dilthey the spirit is not an abstract entity which lacks substance, but must be understood within the context of the actual individuals' social lives. Paul Ricoeur, one of the most important contemporary French philosophers, draws attention on the fact that Dilthey's age is characterized as a historical moment of total rejection of Hegel's concepts and that of the apology of the experimental knowledge. For this reason, the only way to do justice to the historic knowledge seems to be giving it a scientific dimension, compared to the one of the natural sciences. He says a science is part of the social-human sciences only if its object has become available in a life context since the leitmotif of all human sciences is the individual. We quote his saying that *we may explain nature, yet the life of the soul we may just understand* (Ricoeur apud Hügli, & Lübcke, 2003, p.41).

If we relate to psychology, Dilthey looks for the distinctive feature of comprehension as a way of intuitively, synthetically and globally knowing unlike the analytical and discursive knowledge. Any science of the spirit, so all human's strategies to knowing which imply a historical report, assume an absolute ability, the one of transposing into the psychological life of another human. When getting to know nature, man does not actually touch phenomena which are distinct from himself, whose fundamental reality evades him. If in the human domain man gets to know other man, no matter how unknown that man is to him, then he can not be a stranger the way the physical unknowable is. So the difference of status between the natural thing and the spirit imposes the difference of status between *explanation* and *comprehension*.

The opposition between comprehension and explanation had a great impact on the attempts to define the specificity of knowledge of human sciences and in this point of interpretation it had a certain historical significance, worthy of our attention, with all the limitations that undergo from it being exploited. In agreement with these ideas, the *Social pedagogy* founded by Hermann Nöhl- as a follower of the historical hermeneutics will interpret the reality through a hermeneutics perspective by elaborating a structural analysis of the causes which lead to social inequalities and human sufferings.

The formative model suggested by Nöhl, typical for the sociocentrist paradigm, is built taking into consideration the following axioms:

- 1) Focusing the efforts of the adult generation in order to integrate the young into society: *The basis of the education is the passionate relationship between a mature person and a human being who is growing up, only for his/her sake, to adapt to the life and form of the community* (Nöhl, 1965, p.22); in other words, social relationships between an adult and a young man are the basis of educational activities.
- 2) *Social pedagogy* is a genuine pedagogy of the social cultural emancipation needs of individuals.
- 3) The starting point of the analysis of any educational fact means an actual reality in the history of the community.
- 4) Empiric knowledge has its roots in experience, so the scientific action brings about the configuration of the scientific status of *Social pedagogy*.

For the framing of his theory, Nöhl claimed that the starting point of developing the theory in the social pedagogy is an actual reality, which should help integrating all the initiatives focused on the young people's needs so that we can draft educative programs whose main purpose is promoting the general wellbeing of the participants. For Nöhl, the specific interventions of social pedagogy should focus on helping one another, his idea being that of a holistic educative process of awareness, based on love and deep respect for human dignity. Helping each other should be seen as an educative mean of educating the citizens.

The educative action ought to take into consideration the historical, cultural, personal and social contexts in which education takes place, therefore we may conclude that Nöhl's theory is a holistic one.

Theory can not be separated from practice, it has its origins in practice and it is mutually interconditioned, fact that leads to a developing of pedagogical science in the sense of *a posteriori implicit knowledge- that knowledge which can not be separated from the activity in which making intervenes* (Flona, 1994, p.21).

The educational experiences in the sense of the historical hermeneutics tradition are founded on the analysis of all data provided by experience regarding human actions within a limited time and space community, closely connected to social, political conditions, etc.

3. The scientific character of *Social pedagogy*

We will continue our study with the conceptual framework on the level of some open epistemological patterns (axioms, laws, principles) in the *Social pedagogy*, as an aspect of the process of understanding the educational phenomenon. We emphasize the aspect that historical research in the field of pedagogy (in our case- social pedagogy) requires a conceptual approach (general and special philosophical perspective) and also a methodological one (the analysis of the relationship between history and social theory) of the characteristics of the past of the human society as an object of historical explanation.

The scientific character of *pedagogy* (generally speaking) – and that of *social pedagogy* (in particular) that is historically validated on the level of epistemology-is demonstrated to the particular extent of the identification of the following postulates: *specific research object*; *specific research methodology*; *specific normativity*.

Table 1. Epistemological developments of modern Social pedagogy

Factors	Problems	Stages	Values	
Industrial development	Inequality	1. <i>Kantian tradition</i>	Equality	
	Social isolation		Mutual trust
	Self-confidence	
			Solidarity	
Social awareness	Social conflicts	2. <i>Historicist-hermeneutic tradition</i>	Respect	
	Work patterns		Empathy
	Empowerment	
			Wellbeing	

Fundamental theses:

1. The foundation of the science of education on the science of the social life, based on the belief that social circumstances can be decisively influenced through education.
2. The interpreting of the educational fact through a hermeneutics perspective and the promotion of the general wellbeing of the participants of education.

3.1. The Subject-specific *Social Pedagogy* is **social learning** as a process of social change, where the individual is part of society and depends on society.

3.2. The axiomatic framework

At the paradigm level, the formative model of Social pedagogy is built related to the following axioms:

- a) *Social pedagogy is a practical theory developed under a methodological aspect by the medium of the complementarity between pedagogy and sociology.*
- b) *The specific study object of social pedagogy is the education which facilitates participating experiences, interpreted as social fact (analysed by sociology) considered as an epistemic bench mark superior to the individual fact (analysed by psychology) seen as a psycho-social training for the future citizen.*
- c) *The research methodology is based on the analysis of the social reality.*
- d) *The central function of education is the one of methodical socializing of the young generation by conveying some fundamental rules of social life (norms, traditions, habits, prohibitions, mentalities, beliefs, etc.).*
- e) *The basic structure of social education implies the relationship between educator (the adult generation) and the those being educated (the young generation)—that must be taught to integrate in the socio-cultural environment, on the economic, political and moral level, etc. The final purposes of social education reflect the society's requirements, and the society—at the general level or the community—at the restricted level provide the means to achieve all these.*

b. Specific laws

In spite of the elements of historical tradition, Social pedagogy does not transpose itself into a set of methods validated on the theoretical level, yet it anticipates a process always unique related with particular or specific conditions (historical events, social conditions, political/religious doctrines, technology evolution, scientific discoveries of the referential age, etc).

As an emancipating action, the process of connection with the other – is engaged among more human beings seen as empiric and rational entities that exist in vectors and predictors in order to give an elevated status to human condition. Social education facilitates the development of the will/volition, the hierarchy and disciplining of the whole individual's behavior to the purpose of setting in order the life of the entire community.

c. Promoted principles

The holistic vision on the human being: *building positive relationships with one's self, with the others and the environment, starting from the premises that each*

person finds his/her identity (becomes aware of himself as inherent unrepeated value), his/her calling and purpose in life by connecting to community/society, to nature and the spiritual values (he becomes aware of himself as a constitutive part of the whole world).

Promoting the holistic education: *it aims at theoretical knowledge, emotional and spiritual connection with other human beings, empathy, deep respect for human dignity, cooperation, creating of practical abilities.*

The wellbeing of the participants of the education: *facilitating positive experiences in order to strengthen the state of happiness, inner satisfaction for a long period of time, to create a world of universal happiness.*

Promoting the values of democracy: *education for the whole nation, following the principles of equality and community.*

Investing children and the young with responsibilities, as future adults having full rights in the community, *to prevent and abolish social problems.*

Establishing authentic relationships implying empathy and passion (according to Nöhl) between the adult members and the young members of the community: *developing trust in the others is a necessary premise for building a firm relationship, a complex one as an essential factor for the developing of a positive emotional life (emotional management –related to the stages of the development of the volition in Natorp's social pedagogy, optimism, self confidence).*

d. Epistemological legitimacy

The evolution stages previously stated related to the historical methodology which is typical for the social-human sciences are an integrative part of an epistemology complex process, an innovative one sustained by philosophical and historical arguments, necessary for the logical, practical building of the social pedagogy as an autonomous status that can be proven by: 1)**specific research object** – education as a social fact in the historical, synchronic, diachronic evolution, which requires interpretation; 2)**research methodology** specific for sociology – developed according to the characteristics of education that facilitates participating experiences as a psycho-social training for the future citizen, undertaking the epistemology model of social human sciences based on the interpretation and historical analysis; 3)**specific norms** promoted by recognising the social and epistemological authority of the axiomatic framework theoretical and practical methodology.

4. Conclusions

The present study, based on the specific methodology of historical research and hermeneutics analysis of some pedagogical texts which have a

historic value for the axiomatic referential of this domain, represents a premise needed to prove the epistemological status of social human science of *Social pedagogy*, where thinking and action, theory and practice are mutually conditioning. Historical knowledge, in terms advanced by Jean Piaget - *History is a way of knowing* – is indispensable to every social-human science, being complementary to that of axiomatic approach (logistics), developed by defining and analyzing the fundamental concepts.

Therefore we conclude that no matter which axiomatics is historically and culturally conjured, the *Social pedagogy* is a practical theory with ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions.

References

- Albulescu, I.(2007). *Doctrină pedagogică* (Pedagogical doctrines). Bucharest: E.D.P.
- Cristea, S.(2015). *Dicționar enciclopedic de pedagogie*. Vol. I, Literele A-C (Encyclopedic Dictionary of Pedagogy). Bucharest: Didactica Publishing House.
- Dilthey, W.(1999). *Construcția lumii istorice în științele spiritului*, traducere de Virgil Drăghici (Construction of historical world in science spirit). Cluj-Napoca: Dacia.
- Flona, M.(1994). *Cognitio - o introducere critică în teoria cunoașterii* (Cognitio - a critical introduction to epistemology). Bucharest: All.
- Hügli, A.& Lübcke, P.(2003). *Filosofia în secolul XX*. Vol. I, traducere de Andrei Apostol et al. (Philosophy in the 20th Century). Bucharest: All Educational.
- Natorp, P.(1922). *Sozialpädagogik. Theorie der Willensbildung auf der Grundlage der Gemeinschaft*(Social Pedagogy. A theory of cultivation of the will on the basis of the community). Stuttgart: Frommann (1stedition published in 1899; later editions published in 1904, 1909, 1920, 1922).
- Nöhl, H. (1965) *Aufgaben und Wege der Sozialpädagogik* (Tasks and Ways of Social Pedagogy) . Weinheim: Beitz.
- Tönnies, F.(1944). *Communauté et Société. Catégories fondamentales de la sociologie pure*, Introduction et traduction de J. Leif. Paris: P.U.F. (1st edition *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* published in 1887; later edition in 1935. Darmstadt: Verlag von Hans Buske).