SOCIAL PEDAGOGY AS PEDAGOGY IN SOCIAL WORK?
- THE CASE OF CHILD PROTECTION

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ABSTRACT
The proposed presentation will treat the questions of the possible meaning of social pedagogy in the context of child protection as a context which is dominated by logics of control and constraints on the one hand and of the possible links to historical and contemporary approaches to a theory of social pedagogy on the other. With reference to empirical research in this field the specific social-pedagogical challenges, needs and possibilities are discussed. The discussion, enlightened by the dichotomy of system and life-world as adapted by German theories of Social Work especially in the 1980s, reveals typical shortcomings of social-pedagogical approaches in organizational contexts. They are characterized as the application of system solutions to life-world problems. These life-world problems constitute the social-pedagogical dilemma in modern societies, and early theoreticians tried to propose adequate life-world solutions to them. In a concluding chapter further 'life-world sensitive' propositions are made for the Brazilian situation, looking at given structures such as the Conselhos in youth welfare as well as new approaches in research and theory.

Keywords: Social Pedagogy, Child Protections.
INTRODUCTION - EXPOSING THE PROBLEM

What is Social Pedagogy? - This is a question rarely posed in my usual ('life-world') German and professional context. However, I'm very conscious that this is a question of importance in the Brazilian, maybe more general, Latin-American context. In Germany a notion of 'Social Work' has become generalized, somehow referring to an US-American and international terminology, but at the same time embracing and including strong German traditions which consisted in a distinct and parallel development of social pedagogy (pedagogia social) and social assistance (serviço social). It is not the place here to give a detailed analysis of the phenomenon. As far as I can see, in Brazil there has been a long and quite powerful development of social assistance, as well in practice as in theory and research. In the last decade, a movement towards the implementation of social pedagogy emerged in Brazil, and in my eyes, as an observer from quite a distance, there seems to be a great variety and multitude of concepts and approaches of what might be social pedagogy 'on the market'. Certainly, there is no necessity nor legitimacy for me to tell you the ultimate answer to the question: 'What is social pedagogy?', but I'd like to propose and think about one possible approach, which conceives Social Pedagogy as pedagogy in Social Work, and doing so on the basis of some small-scale empirical research as well as referring to some lines of German traditions in social pedagogic theory.² In elaborating the following arguments, I have learned that it is useful to try to take a closer look at one's own social contexts assuming an 'outsider's' perspective on these contexts - for the moment I cannot be sure that my idea of the Brazilian situation is correct, but even the presumption was helpful for me to rediscover the systematic social-pedagogical point questioning the sometimes too much taken-for-granted universality of 'Social Work'.

In the following some specific and very basic characteristics of conceptions of social pedagogy as developed in Germany will be outlined and some fundamental and systematically inherent shortcomings and limits of these conceptions will be discussed.

I'll take four steps in my argument, first I'll draw a sketch of my empirical basis which is taken from a research project on conversations between professionals and clients in a specific child protection setting (2), then these insights will be discussed

² For a theoretical discussion on this topic see also Hämäläinen 2003.
RESEARCH ON CONVERSATIONS IN CHILD PROTECTION

In this part I refer to a small-scale research project undertaken together with Prof. Dr. Ulla Peters, University of Luxembourg. Our focus is on decision-making processes in the child-protection systems in Luxembourg and Germany. In Germany, there was substantial change in the decades before 1990 from an intrusive, authoritarian approach to an approach of support, service-delivery and participation in the youth welfare system. Luxembourg is right now undergoing a similar process, and that is why we have decided to have a closer look at what exactly could be meant by participation in the context of youth welfare, especially in the context of decisions which are at the borders of the youth system's credo of support, in the case of child protection when a rigorous state intervention in favour of the children might be indicated.

One of our main institutions of reference is a pilot project, and its characteristics in the context of the German child protection system should be outlined shortly: In Germany the protection of the family and the parents' right to educate their children is one of the most important fundamental rights, established in the 1949 constitution (Grundgesetz, Art. 6) in the light of the experience of Hitler's dictatorship and his abuse of state education and the instrumentation of family for his own ideological and power-sustaining purposes. That's why interventions in the family sphere, especially withdrawal of parental authority, are strongly restricted and clearly conditioned. In recent years, following developments to be observed more or less in a broad international landscape, German legislation, influenced by public discussions on cases where children were maltreated and even killed in their families while youth welfare/child protection services were involved and failed to protect these children, has extended the possibilities of intervening almost to the maximum, and there is an important debate to observe on how to protect children most effectively (Turba 2012). However, there are usually only two alternatives: To leave the children at home, normally under parental authority, sometimes with some restrictions, and
with support or control of state-financed public or private services of youth welfare or to place the children in foster care (in foster families - familias de acolhimento - or residential care facilities - abrigos), with or without parental consent, if necessary withdrawing at least partly their parental authority by a court decision (Höynck/Haug 2012). And the difficulty lies in the decision which alternative to chose exactly and how to establish a relation to the persons involved, especially the parents.

The specific setting of the organization where we undertook our research is a placement of whole families out of home, when it has been decided that it was too dangerous for the children to be left at home with their parents. Instead of placing the children alone which usually means that just little attention is paid to the parents' further development, the parents and the children are placed together, the professionals guarantee for the safeguarding of the children, at the same time involving the parents and enabling them to take responsibility. They also undertake a process of decision-making, because at the end of the scheduled stay (usually 4-6 months), there will be one of the two outlined solutions (being together at home or placement of children at risk in foster care); on the other hand, efforts are made to better understand the parents' difficulties in parenting and help them learn how to safeguard their children in the future autonomously.

Regularly, the professionals and the parents sit down together and evaluate the past weeks, they decide - supposedly together and in a participative manner - on whether and how to continue to work together within the next period. Transcriptions of these conversations build the empirical basis for our study.

Using the methodology of Documentary Method (Bohnsack 2010; Schütze 1997), we aim at getting access to the participants' 'social world' or their 'stock of knowledge' (Schütz, cited in Klatetzki 1993, 56) as enacted or evoked in the conversations. Therefore we adopt a mainly interactionist perspective which takes as a point of depart the idea of sense-making processes (Weick 1995) taking place in situations, an idea which reduces the social world to the situatively enacted life-worlds and submits them to these sense-making processes: they don't have substance in themselves but only exist insofar as they are enacted (Marthaler/Peters 2011). Therefore, we would not speak of professional knowledge in terms of 2nd order knowledge, that means, higher, more valuable or more universal knowledge, but in terms of 'different' enactable environments that might be more powerful in a specific setting just because in this setting it is defined, mutually accepted and
enacted as more powerful (see also Klatetzki 1993). So in the study we recontextualize 'participation' as the interactive performance of clients' life-worlds in the exposed sense.

The following examples are two extracts of a transcribed conversation between parents (father, 25 y.o., and mother, 21 y.o.), and two professionals; the parents have been married for more than two years, the first child is 1 year old, the second is a newborn baby; the family was in a family welfare program before. When the birth of the second child was approaching the professionals feared that the situation could turn worse with the parents being incapable of assuring care for the newborn child and its brother; as risk factors they defined the financial situation (debts, dependence on financial social assistance, so called 'Hartz-IV'), traumatisation of the father due to some time spent in prison, low age of the two children, psychological instability of the mother, who in their (the professionals') eyes is very nervous, easy to irritate if the children are too demanding.3

Pr ....so if you were at home now, how would you manage to nourish your children?

M See, for my children, they definitively would eat, I've already told you that I'd prefer not to eat anything, but I wouldn't accept that my children couldn't eat.

Pr Okay, but if there is no money there, you would not be able to buy anything, how would you then manage to buy bottled milk?

M Then I'd ask my mother for help.

Pr But your mother lives in (...), that's not really close.

M So what?

F And, see, she would receive food stamps.

M Yes, we would receive food stamps.

(...) 

Pr1 Well, somehow we start doubting that you, being cared of here ... see, here the children don't lack anything. We do have the money for the children and stuff. And there is no progress to be seen regarding your own financial situation.

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3 Acronyms: Pr: Professional; F: Father; M: Mother. I'm grateful to Ass. Prof. Dr. Ulla Peters for the kind permission to use these extracts here.
Pr2 Right, well, as for me, ....if I do have a family, if I take a decision to have children, I've got to ... well, I also told you last week-end... I've got to be able to nourish my kids. Well, and if then there is no money there for regular meals, ..., that you might be able to cope at times with situations of scarcity, I accept. But that mustn't be permanent, you've got an infant!

Without being able to go into a methodologically sound in-depth interpretation of these sequences, which ideas of the 'enacted social worlds' can we get looking at these extracts?

a) *Revelations concerning the professionals' identities, their roles and their enacted environments*

- little babies need bottled milk
- parents shouldn't rely on the help of other family members
- for the professionals, relying on the ultimate help of social welfare (food stamps) does not account for responsible behaviour - in other words, responsible parenting means being able to have money to buy food
- giving birth to children appears to them as a deliberative decision of autonomous persons
- the professionals are the experts for securing neglected children

b) *Revelations concerning the parents’ identities, their roles and enacted environments*

- for them, they are good parents because they always find ways to assure their children's nutrition, with priority over their own needs
- for this, recourse on their own parents' help as well as using the possibilities of social welfare in an intelligent manner are legitimate ways of coping with difficult situations

c) *General observations on the role of the artificial organizational setting and its interactively performed enactments*

- the parents underscore their ability to assure their children's physical needs against endeavours pronounced by the professionals who give a quasi final statement judging this as insufficient (in the further conversation we can see, that they search for hints at the parents' sense of responsibility as defined by themselves, trust and responsible behaviour becoming the main criteria for the decision on how to
get on with this family)

- in the eyes of the professionals the actual artificial life-world setting is the only place to safeguard the children at this stage and for them this might lead to irresponsible behaviour of the parents, they may get lazy in their efforts to show their will in taking responsibility themselves.

**SOCIAL- (SOCIAL-)** PEDADOGICAL ATTEMPTS AND NEEDS IN CHILD PROTECTION - A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

If we take a closer look at the pedagogical opportunities lying in the evoked situation and therefore take a normative, hypothetical approach, but staying in the mode of 'recontextualization' we could say that in this extract mutual understanding has not taken place, in the sense that an overlapping of the frameworks of reference could be observed. Moreover, the frameworks 'clash', or we could say that they interact in a way permitting to uphold the two respective frameworks or even sharpen their limits. Another approach could have been for the professionals to take into consideration their own position in the setting, the organizations' framework of reference as well as their own and to hermeneutically try to understand the sense of the explications given by the parents, to enter onto a level of understanding the underlying, documentary sense of these explications, at least to get a glimpse of a world strange to them. They could have explored the possibilities lying in the parents' life-world strategies of coping with scarcity, trying to develop, together with the parents, further socially accepted strategies, at the same time using the given setting to train and stabilize this kind of behaviour.

Couldn't we say that by pronouncing (enactment) of clients' life-world elements in a conversation and by certain attempts of the others to make sense of these, 'participation' is happening?

Couldn't we call the efforts of making clients reveal themselves, listening to them (enabling participation in our sense), proposing and training extended ways of acting 'social pedagogy'?

The twofold answer should be 'yes', we could. In such an attitude and action, we could see some basic traits Michael Winkler outlines as essential for social pedagogy (Winkler 2009): for him, *Bildung* in its broad sense (in Portuguese: formação) is at the center of the social-pedagogical project: "people need *Bildung*, the process of a self-directed upbringing which leads them to independence, which
enables them to act as free people - and also as people able to criticise and change their society and themselves, too." Such a project of Bildung requires spaces, a kind of community which allows these processes (and towards which personal development is oriented).

This sounds great, and who would not appreciate such action? On the other hand, why do our professionals not act in such an ideal manner?

We've got to turn our attention to the settings where these ideal processes are supposed to take place. These settings (in our case, organizations in the context of youth welfare system) carry a structural burden which weighs heavily on interactions taking place in these settings. Thomas Olk (1986, 171) used the term of "Doppeltes Vermittlungsproblem" which we could understand as a paradox, imperfect and fragmented form of making frameworks of reference overlap, especially in pedagogical situations embedded in organizations of social assistance: The professionals must at the same time act in the mode of the social function 'technological people processing' balancing the functionally required (non-egalitarian) communicative forms and the (professional) requirement to establish quasi-egalitarian relations with the clients; second, they also need to find an equilibrium of social control and help "...understood as support of the clients' own efforts in re-establishing an autonomous life", therefore, the professionals are part of a space structured by different, at times even contradictory rationalities (Bode et al. 2012; Marthaler/Peters 2011).

We can reformulate the problem in a more schematic manner with Thomas Klatetzki (1993) by using some kind of vocabulary which has been very important in the development of German Social Work from the 1980s4; with the opposition of 'system' and 'life-world' as introduced into the debates by Jürgen Habermas, two modes of communication and two worlds of knowledge are distinguished; in the adaptation by social work theory, social work is part of the 'system' and an important instrument by which the system threatens to colonize the life-world as the sphere of natural relations which follow mainly a 'material' rationality (opposed to formal rationality, in the words of Max Weber).

Among the responses proposed to this problem, there is one approach to reconcile these two modes of communication in social work that has emerged and

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4 This was an important step towards the unification of social assistance and social pedagogy in Germany - at least in theory.
has influence on the debates until today, namely the so-called 'life-world oriented' social work. In this approach, however, Klatetzki critically identifies an idea of what he calls ,with reference to others, 'life-world-engineering', a hidden form of formal rationality which consists in the creation of a specific, artificial pedagogic setting which should be very similar to natural situations and at the same time allow social pedagogic processes to take place, it is seen as a soft form of the mentioned colonisation. However, this form of life-world engineering can only pretend to be effective; Klatetzki shows in his study that structurally, the professionals (social pedagogic staff) succumb to situations of extreme uncertainty - due to the complexity of the life-world they try to manipulate - permanently experience failure. Then, the study reveals, the professionals are permanently called to invoke their professionalism, 'celebrating' this professionalism with their superiors in an almost religious manner. Coming back to the cited examples of our study, we might ask the question whether similar efforts of the professionals to understand and valuate the clients' idea and performance (of their lives and of the best interests of the child) as they conceive them could not lead to solutions which would not necessarily end up in religion? Within the context of organized social assistance the answer here would be 'no' without any hesitation, and this is mainly due to the formal setting (and the life-world complexity Klatetzki refers to). Structurally the professionals are not in the position to really negotiate basic values in the best interest of the child, and at the same time they are not able to define hard criteria of the best interests either.

On the other hand, recent studies (e.g. Messmer 2012, 102) reveal that in conversations between professionals and clients (young people and their parents) the transformation of these young persons into 'clients' labelled with diagnoses and problematic attributes and the self-identification of professionals as such dominate the logic of these conversations. An encouraging attitude is hardly ever found there.5

Trying to make the transfer to the Brazilian situation, can we see any special advantages in this respect in the Brazilian (youth-)welfare system? The main difference seems to be the small distance of members of Conselho tutelar to the clients' life-world, as the Conselheiros are not professionals. However, on the one hand we can observe strong movements toward professionalization of the Conselheiros (e.g. higher levels of school certificates are required, organized training

5 See also Hitzler/Messmer 2010 for findings on interactional strategies aiming even at prevention of 'real' participations of clients in 'real' decisions.
on the job), and on the other hand, there seem to be quite similar forms of organizational inclusion, even some forms of the quasi-religious evocations of a professional Conselheiro's identity could be observed at the events I could participate in during my time at Pelotas.

In the 1980s critical reflexions on life-world oriented social work reveal further shortcomings which might affect any presumable recontextualization in Brazil as well: according to Thomas Olk (1986) we have to note that there is a basic fiction underlying pedagogical processes in the field of social assistance which is supposed to present a solution as well to the 'Doppeltes Vermittlungsproblem' as well as to the colonization of the life-world: It is the fiction of the coincidence of the intentions of an autonomous subject (individual good) and a kind of public interest (common good). However, if a subject does show behaviour or expresses wishes that are in contrast to an identified common good, in accordance to the basic fiction there must be the assumption that the subject must have been mislead about its own wishes, or we must assume, that the individual enacts life-world values which must be considered as not reconcilable with system demands. In terms of our attempt of reconstruction we could say that the professionals - in the social-pedagogical way of thinking - must try to appeal to those elements of their clients' social worlds which constitute strong motivations for the clients to autonomously do what is good for their children (and for themselves), according to the respective definitions of society or science as represented by the professionals. This is the only acceptable way of making overlap the two social worlds. In some more 'progressive thinking' the elements which might hinder the clients to behave according to the 'public good' could be their own difficulties, their own charges which should be overcome by different - mostly non-pedagogic - interventions of the professionals (in the duality of "Lebensbewältigung" und "Bildung", see e.g. Thole 2005); if these life charges are in some way overcome, the moral expectation is an individually and socially healthy behaviour.

But in the end, isn't this nothing more than a somehow more sophisticated form of life-world engineering (obviously not really applied by the professionals of our example)?

Basically, we can conclude, the efforts therefore aim at creating autonomously responsible and socially integrated subjects, and as we have seen, especially within the context of organized social assistance, these efforts are highly contingent, and they are based on the fiction that in general behaviour and attitudes which reconcile
individual and social well-being and interests can be intentionally processed.

A SHORT HISTORICAL FLASH-BACK

If we identify, in the light of the - probably oversimplified but still plausible - distinction of system and life-world one major problem of the realization of social-pedagogical efforts in the context of social assistance (by definition the system which is supposedly dominated by Weber’s formal rationality intervenes in life-worlds which are supposed to be the realm of material rationality, such as natural and mutual responsibility (see Klatetzki 1993)) we could say that this paradox is the very fundament of social pedagogy itself. We should remember that the first concepts of social pedagogy as proposed by Karl Mager and Friedrich Adolph Diesterweg in the 1840s were nothing but efforts to create responses to a situation of social transformation, when masses of people were set free from their old social ties, when there was an erosion of traditional forms of life and values and in nation-building of a liberal state something new had to be created which could only rely on autonomous and at the same time responsible citizens (vgl. Dollinger 2006). They did not yet think of social pedagogy as pedagogy in social assistance, however, their problem diagnosis is typical of social pedagogy, and they, too, thought about how to form individuals getting autonomous and self-relying and at the same time showing strong social commitments.

In the 1920s, in the first German Republic (Weimarer Republik), after World War I which finished in defeat, the fall of the German Empire and the rise of Hitler’s Dictatorship, several theoreticians of social pedagogy, just to name two of them, Alice Salomon and Carl Mennicke, diagnosed exactly the erosion of material rationality in this sense in the life-worlds. They saw this erosion manifested e.g. in a systematic destruction of religious values, which appeared to be structurally inherent in modern, capitalist society and Mennicke called this the social-pedagogical dilemma (Sozialpädagogische Verlegenheit) of capitalism. For Alice Salomon (1908), as a consequence social pedagogy had to rely on persons who would exactly not practise social pedagogy in a scientific and technical manner, but, for her women in particular had to use their natural, maternal morality as their special contribution. Carl

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6 There is a typical kind of problem diagnosis underlying different social-pedagogical approaches which might converge in the Durkheimian terminology of ‘anomia’ (see Böhnisch/Schröer 2001; Dollinger 2006); the description of Mennicke also corresponds to this diagnosis.
Mennicke (2001), for his part, spent quite some efforts in elaborating and propagating a kind of, as he called it, 'synthetic religion' which more or less tried to embrace basic ethical elements of different religions, and in the center we can see the idea of forming autonomous, responsible, cosmopolitan citizens. So they both explicitly propose life-world-solutions to diagnosed life-world-problems. Contemporary efforts, on the contrary, deal with system solutions to life-world-problems, at the same time upholding the traditional objectives of linking morality and autonomy, whereas, as shown above, the efforts to overcome structural failure provoke life-world (quasi-religious) forms within the organizations.

Is there really no way out? In my eyes, there are some newer efforts to deal with the problem, however, I'm sceptical about how satisfying they really are: One way may be to shrink the claims of social-pedagogical effects to the absolute minimum: "But first of all, Bildung in the context of social pedagogy enables you to look at your picture in a mirror without desperation, to find a small piece of happiness just with yourself and in yourself. Perhaps it might only give you a feeling if some small personal gain or of satisfaction however bad your living situation might be. To repeat, in addition to all the necessary social benefits that social work will offer, social pedagogy will try to strengthen the person, because he/she has a right to be treated with dignity" (Winkler 2009, 30).

Another, more optimistic attempt consists in another form of social-pedagogical reconstruction of social work as service-delivery (e.g. Schaarschuch 2010) which systematically conceives clients of social work as 'users' and 'co-producers', in our terminology as individuals who are enabled to work actively together with professionals to make overlap the respective social worlds of the clients and the professionals. Schaarschuch does not ignore that this idea might stay a fiction in the context of organized social work, but maybe it might be worthwhile working on upholding and realizing the fiction at least partly (and I'd add: in plain consciousness of the structural shortcomings we have just talked about).\footnote{The methodological approaches of Social-pedagogic diagnosis as introduced first by Mollenhauer/Uhlendorff (1992) and elaborated by Uhlendorff et al. (2008) seem also to be compatible to this approach.}
CONCLUSION

So, what is social pedagogy, what do we learn from our reflexions on social pedagogy as pedagogy in social assistance?

Do we have to state that it is more or less a fiction, a very contingent attempt to make - as in our example - parents take responsibilities for themselves and for their children, with the professionals measuring the effects of their interventions by the trust they have or have not in their clients?

It is remarkable that somehow all our reflections on social pedagogy as pedagogy in social assistance end up with religion. This should not be too surprising for us since the anthropological topic of linking the social integration of man with the development of his or her individuality and autonomy can be found in the center of religious responses of all kinds with a special response in the Christian approach. This does not need to be discussed here more intensely; but we have seen that the erosion of 'natural' or religious moral values in a given society can be conceptualized as a general social-pedagogic challenge if we conceive of social pedagogy as a form of secular-religious attempts to restore such a form of morality.

We have clearly seen the structural limits of these attempts, especially if they take forms of life-world-engineering within the context of organized social assistance. In my eyes, even if I cannot at all claim to have enough insight in the depth of Brazilian society, there might be found a similar form of social pedagogic dilemma, and the current discussions on social pedagogy might be a strong indicator that there is an atmosphere of social transformation and at times disintegration in society. One response might be to introduce social pedagogy as pedagogy in social assistance here, too: Despite my critical remarks but with strong consciousness of the difficulties and shortcomings identified in the German debates I have summed up, and here it might be helpful to think about the difficulties inherent in the offering system solutions to presumed life-world problems.

On the other hand, if I was asked for my opinion I'd like to take up an approach and a proposition made by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2002), insofar as we could see him on the way to identify life-world solutions for life-world problems. First of all, he proposes a much more differentiated theory of society than the quite raw distinction of system and life-world we referred to here (an effort worth while a closer look we can't take here). And second, he also proposes an empirical approach and a special sensibility for often forgotten and oppressed life-world-settings and practices.
which 'naturally' create a special balance of individual growth and community interests (e.g. in his research in Brazilian slums, however, do not ignore the risk of romanticizing these forms of life...) - and here the role of religious communities should, however, not be neglected. And, last but nor least: Couldn't we find in the Conselhos I have mentioned above, as far as they exist in Brazil in youth welfare but also in other fields, a type of social pedagogical institutions which develop their special role exactly in the combination and cooperation with the system of strong, individualizing rights?
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