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Social pedagogy and the "life-world" concept in the time of new media

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Social pedagogy and the »life-world« concept in the time of new media

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Introducing social pedagogy

There is a very interesting thought about social pedagogy which Swiss pedagogue M. Courtioux stated. He defined the profession of a social pedagogue as "professional life with others"¹. Indeed social pedagogical work is impossible to perform without friendly relationships and human contacts, which are fundamental for the profession of a social pedagogue². Already with its name social pedagogy implies that it covers the field of social education as well as teaching³. Significant

1 Courtioux M. (1983), as cited in: Uzelac S. (1998), *Social pedagogy – a question of identity (or: the urgent need for a return to some basic principles)*. Tematska številka: Identiteta stroke. „Socialna pedagogika“, no. 2, p. 28.

2 Frommann A. (2001), as cited in: Kobolt A. (2001), *Intervju z Anne Frommann: Socialna pedagogika v funkciji figovega lista*. „Socialna pedagogika“, vol. 5, no. 3, p. 375 – 386. Ljubljana.

3 Zrim Martinjak N. (2006), *Social pedagogy in the context of educational politics and the concept of social capital*. „Socialna pedagogika“, no. 10, p. 169-180.

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is also the claim of Uzelac⁴, that identity of social pedagogue is based on two equal elements: pedagogy and welfare.

It is important to have an overlook of what are the aims and goal of this profession. Zrim Martinjak⁵ among others defines an aim of social pedagogy as contribution to development of society and individual. A key goal and an element of social pedagogy is on the other hand with regard to Anne Frommann⁶ somewhat narrower and includes monitoring the development of young people growing up in various, mostly marginal and difficult life situations. All things mentioned come together and form social-pedagogical identity, which we can register in its connecting role with usually marginalized individuals and groups, who have difficulties in social integrations along the process of development. Difficulties in this context are seen in different distortions of their social behaviour⁷.

If we agree with Alice Salomon who in 1920 said that the first imperative of each work with people is to see and understand person in his life situation⁸, we could ask ourselves: what is today's life situation? An important part of our

4 Uzelac S. (1998), *Social pedagogy – a question of identity (or: the urgent need for a return to some basic principles)*. Tematska številka: Identiteta stroke. „Socialna pedagogika“, no. 2, p. 23-31.

5 Zrim Martinjak N., op. cit..

6 Frommann A. (2001), as cited in: Kobolt A., op. cit., p.1.

7 Uzelac S., op. cit.

8 Salomon A. (1920), as cited in: Kobolt A., op. cit., p.1.

everyday life consists of new media. Besides family environment, school environment and all the other “environments” which people are a part of, there is a new communication field in our lives which includes our life-world, interests, and people important for us and where our various environments can easily meet and intersect. New media space represents new territory where relationships form, maintain and are also reshaped, which is in my opinion strongly connected with identity of individual. New media are embedded in today’s world and for a lot of people have become, at least in some aspects, necessary in their everyday activities. What does all this mean for social pedagogy and how will it influence our society, people and education? The answer to this question is neither simple nor definite. In early 90s of the previous century Ulrich Beck warned in his works about how technological progress on one side brings goods and enables comfortable life but on the other side lays the foundation for so called “risk society”⁹. Although the world and situations change, mankind and pedagogy do not follow the same pace. Elisabeth Siegel said: “There is nothing new in pedagogy. Nevertheless, the pedagogy is constantly faced with all the changes in which adolescents are situated in”¹⁰. Changes mentioned contribute to forming the life-world of individual, concept which can be connected not only to social pedagogy but also to new media.

Life-world concept

The notion of life-world or in German “Lebenswelt” concept refers to the surrounding world that provides the grounds of conscious existence and within that world human beings

exist. It represents “the world in which we are always already living”¹¹ and also the way the members of one or more social groups structure the world into objects¹². The life-world concept which was firstly mentioned by Edmund Husserl in his work *Ideas I*¹³, William James called “the world of the street” in the contrast to the artificial worlds of academic philosophy¹⁴. It is important to mention although Husserl¹⁵ saw life-world as our ordinary natural concept of the world and as a correlate of all our potential future experiences, he later gave the term of life-world more technical meaning which described a world as phenomenon, as correlative to our intentional experiences. Even though in everyday activities we do not consciously analyze what we are experiencing and as a consequent our natural attitude remains basically unreflective, Husserl emphasizes the role of reflection. It is through reflection that life-world is examined and conceptualized and through phenomena of the world it is brought to awareness and made available for analysis¹⁶.

What is one of the significance of the concept is the duality between the world of individual and the world surrounding the individual. A person and the world are constituted by each other and

11 Burke (1969), as cited in: Rogers M.F. (1983), *Sociology, ethnomethodology and experience*. New York, p. 49.

12 Husserl E. (1950), as cited in: Beyer C. (2011), Edmund Husserl. [in:] Zalta E.N. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Stanford*. [online], [2011.07.25, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/husserl/>].

13 Husserl E. (1931), as cited in: Moran D. (2000), *Introduction to phenomenology*. Routledge.

14 James W. (1967), as cited in: McBride W.L. (1989), *John Wild and the Life-World*. „Analecta Husserliana: The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research”, vol. 26, p. 101.

15 Husserl E. (1950), as cited in: Beyer C., op. cit.

16 Ibidem.

9 Beck U. (1992), as cited in: Zrim Martinjak N., op. cit., p. 2.

10 Siegel E. (s.a.), as cited in: Kobolt A., op. cit., p. 1.

form an undividable unity, argues Gadamer¹⁷ and explains that to live means to be in a historical, cultural and social context which all together build wholesome. Moreover when focusing on the most vulnerable groups in the society while being a part of the profession who help these groups, we can take into consideration that “structures present in the society go into mental structures and that its power affirms and implements into the shape of symbolic, imperceptible violence”¹⁸. Surrounding environment therefore has a strong impact on a person, so strong it can even change someone’s way of thinking. Of course we can see positive and negative side effects of this duality that forms unity and unique individual experience. Husserl similarly as Gadamer describes the world of every individual as a world between the world of nature/environment and the world of culture/spirit which can also be explained as pre-theoretical experience which is that which allows us to interact with nature and to develop our own cultural forms¹⁹.

Another author who used the term of life-world and built on its basis was Alfred Schutz²⁰. In *The structures of the life-world*²¹ Schutz stated that the social scientist who wants to interpret and explain human action has to construct the model of an individual consciousness and understand reality, everyday life-world of someone. His statement can be related to social pedagogy in which one of the key elements is to cooperate

with marginalized groups and individuals, deriving from their strengths and through knowledge and understanding of their specific, unique life situation, empower them. Environment and everyday situation has an important value for social pedagogical interventions. Pierre Bourdieu wrote that the “social distances are written into the bodies, into the relationship to the body, into language and time”²². I would add here that social distances are “written” in new media as well. After all we cannot exclude our virtual “bodies” and interaction made through them. On the other hand we have to bear in mind the power of individual who also influences environment and is not merely trapped in it. Both, Husserl and Schutz, similarly write about life-world as open to changes made by individual who operates in it²³. Life-world is a part of individual’s reality and should not be seen as totally unchangeable and rigid. I believe its “determination”, as it is perhaps seen at a first glance, can be broken by capitals individual possess and new important experiences he or she makes.

One of the important capitals individual possess is social capital. To social capital is attributed an important role in the development of society and individual and in the understanding of specific social phenomena²⁴. The concept of social capital can also be interesting for our comprehension of life-world concept since it is an important mechanism in the life of the individual and his/her environment²⁵. Social

17 Gadamer H.G. (1989), *Truth and method*. New York.

18 Cf.: Bourdieu P. (2003), *Sociologija kot politika*. Ljubljana, p. 69

19 Husserl E. (1983), as cited in: Moran D., op. cit.

20 Schutz A., Luckmann T. (1989), *The structures of the life-world*. Chicago. [online], [2011.07.25, http://books.google.com/books?id=NoMdU5GunA8C&printsec=frontcover&source=gs_bse_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q].

21 Ibidem.

22 Bourdieu P. (2003), *Sociologija kot politika*. Ljubljana: cf, p. 83.

23 Schutz A., Luckmann T. (1989), *The structures of the life-world*, op. cit., p. 4.

24 Zrim Martinjak N. (2007), *Koncept socialnega kapitala*. Socialna pedagogika: Izbrani koncepti stroke. M. Sande et al. (ed.), pp. 37-53.

25 Bourdieu P., op. cit., p. 4.

capital in Bourdieu's opinion represents "the whole of actual or potential resources which are dependent on whether an individual has a permanent network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual understanding and mutual recognition"²⁶. In other words foundations for social capital represent maintained social networks²⁷. What I see as very useful for social pedagogy is findings of researchers who discovered important correlations between social capital and numerous social phenomena, as for example achievements in education, delinquency, crime rate, health and quality of life²⁸. If social distances permeate into lives of individuals, social capital draws attention because it is the cause of social inequality between members of the networks that benefit from it²⁹. Bourdieu also argues that the lack of capital is the reason why people become enchained at one place and that among other things also influences their poor performance³⁰. At the same time social capital has a bright side; it enables individuals to change the situation in their social space or their life-world. "The social world is not presented as a pure chaos, totally devoid of necessity and capable of being constructed in any old way. But this world does not present itself as totally structured either, or as capable of imposing on every perceiving subject the principles of its own

construction" wrote Bourdieu³¹. Each individual certainly constructs their own world view, but this structure does not take place in a social vacuum, but is subordinate to the structural constraints³². For this reason it is necessary to take into account the wholesomeness which builds the experience (in the widest sense) of an individual, including family, environment, time, gender, etc.

When we talk about life-world of the individual, we do not have in mind only the social and institutional networks, but also concrete physical places or locations where individual moves and retains³³. Our engagement with the internet, which now has become an important communication tool that in a way mirrors our real lives, established new media as a location where individual can spend both his or her professional and leisure time. But how much do we really know about this "location" and what does it represent?

New media – new world?

As a part of Digital Youth project researchers involved in it used the term "new media" to describe "media ecology where more traditional media, such as books, television, and radio, are "converging" with digital media, specifically interactive media and media for social communication"³⁴. People involved in this ethnographic study which

26 Cf. ibidem, p. 99.

27 Dragoš S., Leskošek V. (2003), *Družbena neenakost in socialni kapital*. Ljubljana.

28 Zrim Martinjak N. (2007), *Koncept socialnega kapitala*. Socialna pedagogika: Izbrani koncepti stroke. M. Sande et al. (ed.), p. 37-53.

29 Dragoš S., Leskošek V., op. cit.

30 Bourdieu P., op. cit., p. 4.

31 Bourdieu P. (1990), *In other words – Essays Towards a Reflective Sociology*, Stanford, p. 132. [online], [2011.07.25, http://books.google.si/books?id=Y6KIUp2XLbYC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false].

32 Bourdieu P. (2003), *Sociologija*..., p. 4.

33 Bourdieu P. (2004), *Oblike kapitala*. Kompendij socioloških teorij, p. 311-322.

34 Ito M., et al. (2008), *Living and learning with New Media: Summary of Findings from the Digital Youth Project*. Cambridge, p. 12.

lasted for three years and was focused on youth and new media, decided that the term “new media” is more appropriate than the terms such as “digital media” or “interactive media” because they could not reduce changes in media technology to single technical characteristic³⁵. Of course “new” represents practices “new” at this moment and, concerning research Digital Youth, practices which were most clearly associated with youth culture and voice³⁶.

So where is the common ground where social pedagogy, life-world concept and new media come together? Social pedagogy as a profession focused on people, especially the one from the margins of the society, can find in life-world concept firm background for better understanding of problems and challenges which individual or/and community face. As the vast majority of young people in many European countries has access to the internet and uses social networks, instant messaging or content sharing sites³⁷, the new media has become an important part of life-world of many adolescents and also shape everyday of many communities. I believe it is very important to explore the use of new media and an impact it has on people, society and social pedagogical field of work as well.

According to the article *The digital natives debate: a critical review of the evidence*³⁸ there has been an important debate present concerning new media. On one side there are claims of some scholars that at this moment distinct generation of “digital natives” exists and also that education must fundamentally change to meet the needs of

this specific generation. On the other side there are sceptics who criticise radical appeals to change educational system and who have their doubts over somewhat generalised statements of the opponents. For social pedagogical work two conclusions from article seem to be important, one is that young people’s relationship with technology is a complex thing which needs more attention and the second one which identifies highly technologised world as part of evolution rather than revolution³⁹. Interesting is that “while the pace of technological change may seem dizzying, the underlying practices of sociability, learning, play, and self-expression are undergoing a slower evolution, growing out of resilient social and cultural structures that youth inhabit in diverse ways in their everyday lives”⁴⁰. Everyday life of youth becomes an important part of understanding actions of the youth in the world of internet so we cannot really speak about “new world”, but rather about new communication field or platform where old practices and “real life” experiences meet. Therefore it does not come as a surprise the significance of the results of several researches⁴¹, which shows that virtual space is often marked with values, meanings, prejudices, cognitive and communication patterns which adolescent bring to this space from their everyday, real life⁴². Probably this is also the reason why researchers from Digital Youth project did not look exclusively on youth and new media but they have also put in the focus the context of broader social and cultural ecology⁴³.

35 Ibidem, p. 6.

36 Ibidem.

37 Livingstone S., Haddon L. (2009), *EU Kids Online: Final report*. London.

38 Bennett S., Maton K., Kervin L. (2008), *The ‘digital natives’ debate: A critical review of the evidence*, p. 1.

39 Ibidem.

40 Ito M., et al., op. cit., p. 8.

41 Cerar M. (2007), *A comparison of adolescents’ social interactions and communication practices in the virtual and the real world*. „Socialna pedagogika”, vol. 11, p. 37-57.

42 Ibidem.

43 Ito M. et al., op. cit., p. 6.

What I see as very important in the new media context and which is at the same time an essential part of the life-world concept, it is the necessity of reflection. I would briefly draw attention to increasing number of “definitions” which are connecting youth to new media. So far young people are being labelled as: “net generation”⁴⁴, ““always on” generation”⁴⁵, “digital natives”⁴⁶, “digital generation”⁴⁷, “generation i”⁴⁸, “information society”⁴⁹. It makes me wonder if young people are really in fact so different or is this just a very subtle way to establish distance to group of people who are getting angrier and angrier, since the distance is allowing the rest of the society to think about how to “fix” youth instead of questioning why the anger is present. If we take a look at recent protests and even riots in different countries of the world where especially young people were involved, we can either start to think how their life-world looks like since it enabled this situation or on the other hand we can start seeing “problematic youth”, who are simply too strange to be understood. Lack of reflection can deprive us from an insight that perhaps self-fulfilling prophecy is taking place. Instead of being focused on differences we should take a closer look at the things that are similar

44 Brown M. (2005), *Learning spaces*. [online], [2011.03.20, <http://www.educause.edu/Resources/EducatingtheNetGeneration/LearningSpaces/6072>].

45 Ito M. et al., op. cit., p. 6.

46 Prensky M. (2001), *Do They Really Think Differently? „On the Horizon”*, vol. 9, issue 6, p. 1-6.

47 Aslanidou, Menexes (2008); Herring (2008); Prensky (2001), as cited in; Pyżalski J. (2011), *The digital generation gap revisited: constructive and dysfunctional patterns of social media usage*. [In:] Costabile A., Spears B. (ed.), *The impact of technology on relationships in educational settings*. Routledge (manuscript submitted for publication).

48 Ibidem.

49 Webster (2003), as cited in: Nayar P.K. (2010), *An introduction to new media and cybercultures*. Singapore.

between younger and older generations and be critical to all the “definitions”, which quickly gain on popularity but are poorly argued.

Digital divide and education

The concept “digital divide” is very often used in the context of new media and is also very much connected to Bourdieu and his concept of social capital. Although Pyżalski⁵⁰ mentions digital divide between the older generation and children/adolescent, there are also other digital divides which we can come across. Divides can potentially mean differences in use of technology among young people related to their social-economic status, cultural/ethnic background and/or gender and discipline specialization⁵¹. Norris⁵² argues that digital divide is actually a communication media divide and that diffusion patterns of the internet in various regions of the world closely reflect those of old media. Perhaps it is not so much the question how to change education to meet the needs of computer skilled students since this may lead to vicious circle of reproducing inequality, when only one segment of students is encouraged. We should look closer to the differences between youngsters connected to their socio-economical status for example and build on overcoming inequalities that are not threatening us from somewhere in the future but which are already here and are already present in this moment. If we keep in mind the concept of social capitals in relation to usage of new media features among youngsters, we could presume the adolescent with more capital and experiences that build their life-world are more likely to access various, useful information through

50 Pyżalski J., op. cit., p. 8.

51 Bennett S., Maton K., Kervin L., op. cit., p. 1.

52 Norris (2001), as cited in: Ciwicweb (s.a.), *Young People, the Internet and Civic Participation*. [In:] *Ciwicweb work package 5*. Institute of Education, University of London.

internet. The adolescent with less capital would have more difficulties with finding the needed information or even to choose from wide spectre of possible choices. What is needed is not ignoring new media and technologies but also not glorifying it. I believe it should be a topic discussed in schools and there should be a common ground when pupils could learn about information accessible to them on internet and “rules” (meant in the broadest sense) which internet possesses and are much more flexible and changeable as Danah Boyd points out in *Making sense of privacy and publicity*. One of the most destabilizing issues online in her opinion is “that people are not being good at managing how the system might change the rules on them”⁵³.

Lorenzo and Dziuban⁵⁴ share their opinion about student’s lack of critical thinking when using internet-based information sources. Education thus has an important role in fostering information literacies that will support learning⁵⁵. Weigel, James and Gardner⁵⁶ express similar concerns when they say that internet’s potential for learning might be curtailed if youth lack key skills for navigating it. Especially if “they consistently engage with internet resources in a shallow fashion, and/or if they limit their explorations to a narrow band of things they believe are worth knowing”⁵⁷.

Another important thing that seems to be neglected is including the youth into the educational

planning. I think there should be a team of experts who could critically look on all the data collected so far and on this basis that would also include needs of youth, unprivileged groups of people in the society and specifics of new media, a broader educational plan could be made if the need for it would be recognized.

Conclusion

New media does not represent a totally new world in the society and is rather a new space where all the practices that can happen in other “spaces” can happen in new media as well, although sometimes with some new characteristics. For example cyberbullying, which takes some different features, while expressed through new media⁵⁸, is in the core still very similar to traditional bullying. For the social pedagogy, as a profession closely connected to youth and education, it is important to be critical to all the “latest phenomena” that are newly discovered in the society, especially phenomena that include division of people. Social pedagogues should stay focused on the person, individual, who does not change as quickly as it may seem at the first glance and after influence of somehow rapid changes in environment. Starting from individual social pedagogy greatly benefits from the life-space concept which can help to explain people’s usage and behaviour in the limits of their off-line and online worlds. Exploration of life-world of individuals and groups enables us to learn more about “reality” as each person sees it. With a help of methods that derive from life-world concept, which are reflective and which we sometimes adapt to new media environment, we can find out more about online practices as well.

53 Boyd D. (2010), *Making Sense of Privacy and Publicity*. [In:] www.sxsw.com. [online], [http://www.danah.org/papers/talks/2010/SXSW2010.html].

54 Lorenzo, Dziuban (2006), as cited in: Bennett S., Maton K., Kervin L., op. cit., p. 1.

55 Ibidem.

56 Weigel M., James C., Gardner H. (2009), *Learning: Peering Backward and Looking Forward in the Digital Era*. „International Journal of Learning and Media”, vol. 1. [online], [http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/ijlm.2009.0005].

57 Ibidem, p. 10.

58 Kane J., Portin P. (2008), *Violence and technology*. [online], [2011.08.10, http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/daphnetoolkit/files/others/booklets/07_daphne_booklet_7_en.pdf].

I would emphasize two issues which social pedagogy has to face. One is how to prepare and train social pedagogues and youth workers for challenges new media brings into their work and which cannot be avoided. Special concern should be oriented to the vicious circle of socio-economic divide in society, which can re-affirm itself in new media especially since marginalized people usually lack social capital. The other challenge is how to educate youth in the way to encourage critical thinking while engaging online and so they could take advantage of positive aspects of new media and safely avoid the negative ones. We should not forget online activities that are even deepening divide among groups and individuals excluded from the rest of the society and the role of experiences coming from family and other non-internet sources.

Hopefully in the future there would be more researches which could bring answers in the form of successful new media interventions and conclusions, perhaps as a toolkit from which educators could benefit and would help to shape their interventions. In my opinion it would be extremely positive if we could connect knowledge we already have with new media. For example connect knowledge about life-world concept and new media. Or perhaps use our knowledge we have about bullying and see what kind of a form \square if any \square bullying takes in online world. It is important that we first acknowledge our own strengths if we expect to find strengths in people we work with. In this way we could empower ourselves, other social pedagogues and educators and moreover people seeking help. Let us not forget the thought of Siegel⁵⁹ that pedagogy does not change as quickly as the world does although it may appear differently. ■

59 Siegel E. (s.a.), as cited in: Kobolt A., op. cit., p. 1.

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Abstract

Social pedagogy is facing new challenges in the time of new media. Uncertainty which social pedagogues might encounter can become even bigger since some researchers claim we need a radical change in educational system due to emerging technologies in life of youth, while other researchers remain more cautious concerning changes in education. In the article the author introduces the profession of social pedagogy and connects it with the concept of life-world which can become a useful tool for social pedagogues and educators in order to understand specific individuals and groups better, especially in the way in which they engage with new media. Special concern is drawn to digital divide and education, which are one of the most important areas of social pedagogical work.

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