

## **SOCIAL PEDAGOGY - AN INTEGRATED ACADEMIC CURRICULUM OF THEORY AND PRACTICE**

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**Abstract:** *Subject of this article is a specific higher education study program of the Cooperative University Baden-Württemberg, Germany, in the field of social work. There are two important aspects to be recognized: (1) With the term “Social Pedagogy” we indicate a professional way to deeply understand the life world of the clients and to interact with them in their every day surroundings. The social pedagogue tries to empower the client to deal with his problems and takes over an advocatoric position to him. (2) In the course of the 3-year-program the students are passing alternating phases in the university and in the social institution. Theory based courses are followed by practical trainings in different fields of social work. Thus the students are able to develop competencies not only based on lectures but also on permanent reflection of their practical work.*

**Keywords:** *Social Pedagogy, study program, practicum, life world*

### **1. What means “Social Pedagogy”?**

There are very different views of how social work should be taught and performed. Today I would like to offer an understanding to you, as we try to carry it out in our university in Baden-Württemberg.

"Social pedagogy" means first and foremost support for children, young people and families in dealing with their everyday lives. We assume that the decisive contribution to the solution of educational problems must be carried out in the daily life of children, young people and families. Daily life poses problems which must be solved at the place, where they arise.

The social pedagogue is available for the clients as helper and partner. At this point is crucial, how he or she performs in the immediate interaction with the client. The client himself is not so much interested in management operations of assistance. Rather, he needs people who engage directly with him and deal with him face to face as his advocate.

Of course, this specific assistance needs also an effective administration in the background. Only where the helping arrangements are well, but also flexibly

organized and equipped with sufficient expertise and financial resources, only there can help be effective. But the center of the socio-pedagogical activity is the needy human being.

Theoretical foundation of our concept is the theory of the life world. It states that people construct their own reality. What meaning poverty, exclusion, education, work and performance have for them, all this is only to understand if we look at the world from the eyes of our clients.

Key concept of social pedagogy is thus understanding. Understanding means primarily: watching, listening to, requests, tracking the client in his way to overcome his problems. But also it means to recognize the competences of the client to deal with and to solve challenges.

If we really want to understand, we at first must forget all concepts which provide the explanatory Sciences of psychology or sociology to. Not that they were not important. But we should distance ourselves from ready-made patterns of explanation to the world of the clients.

Not till then in the second step, if we really have comprehend, how our clients experience their difficulties, only then we can develop concepts and make reasonable offers of help.

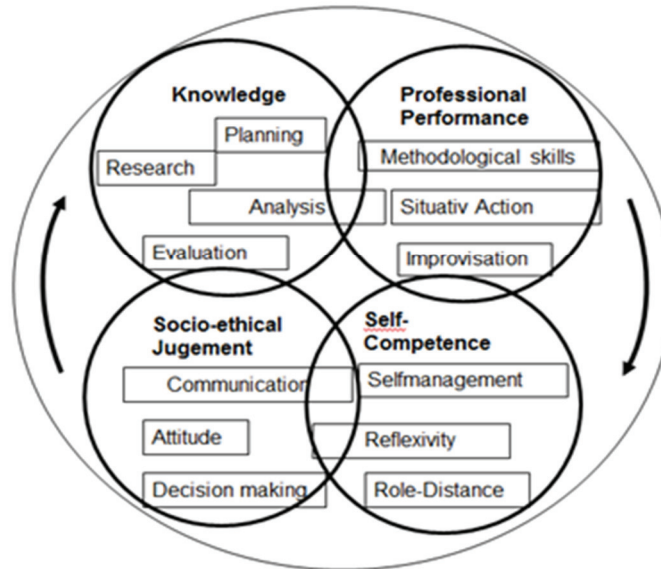
## **2. Promoted competences in the study program**

Students at the School of Social Work at DBHW Stuttgart acquire appropriate cognitive, methodological and socio-ethical skills to understand complex problem situations and contribute professionally to their solution.

The study program of the social pedagogy gives of course first and foremost the necessary knowledge on the basics of the social sciences. The students should analyze problems and plan measures. This also includes that they know how the living conditions of the clients are and why they are so. In addition, they should know how to research and how the course of action can be evaluated.

But knowledge alone does not enable to act. Therefore concrete methods of action need to be acquired: for example: interviewing, group management, parent counselling, social training. All of these methods should be used in situation. In addition, there's the ability to improvise in open situations.

**Figure 1: Model of Competencies in the Program of Social Work**



In the everyday work of the social pedagogue are many situations to deal with, in which large uncertainties and no unique solution is possible. Basis for any social work is therefore the ability to make secure judgments on their own and foreign action in weighing different alternatives. Thereby it is important, to think about the reasons of the action and to communicate. Pros and cons must be evaluated and decisions must be made on this basis.

Students of social pedagogy need great skills, to reflect upon themselves and their work. Self-competence means to use purposefully and efficiently the own energies and not to stop in establishing professional distance from the own role. The study program provides many ways to train students their own learning behavior.

### **3. The Faculties of Social Work in the Cooperative University Baden-Württemberg (DHBW)**

In the following I want to give a short overview on the structure of our school of social work. Our University is organized in the manner of a state university. The DHBW includes 9 different Universities represented in – overall – 13 campuses.

We have three schools of social work in our University: in Stuttgart, in Heidenheim and in Villingen-Schwenningen. In this three schools we have – overall about 2000 students.

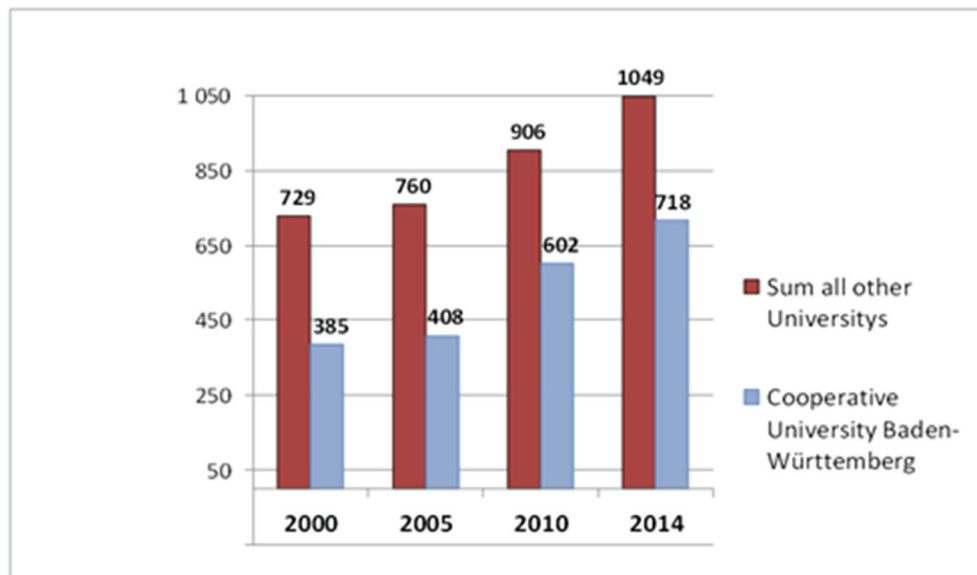
The requirements for the enrolment are:

- an A-level examination of school (Abitur)
- a contract with a social institution where the student will undertake his or her practical phases.

In the last 15 years we can notice a huge increase of enrolments in social work in the 14 Universities in Baden-Wuerttemberg from about 1100 in the year 2000 to about 1800 in the year 2014.

In the three schools of social work we had 718 new students in the last year. As you can see the enrolments in DHBW makes about 40% of all enrolments in social work in Baden-Wuerttemberg.

**Figure 2: Beginners in Social Work at Universities in Baden-Württemberg**



#### 4. How the DHBW-curriculum works

An University is not just a place of study. Here also new concepts can be developed, how necessary skills can be taught and acquired. How is the concept of our "dual degree"?

The dual study concept or cooperative higher education combines academic learning with workplace training. The innovative study concept of our University includes alternating theoretical phases at the university and practical phases at a specific training partner. Students are not only taught theoretical knowledge, but also learn to apply this knowledge in practice.

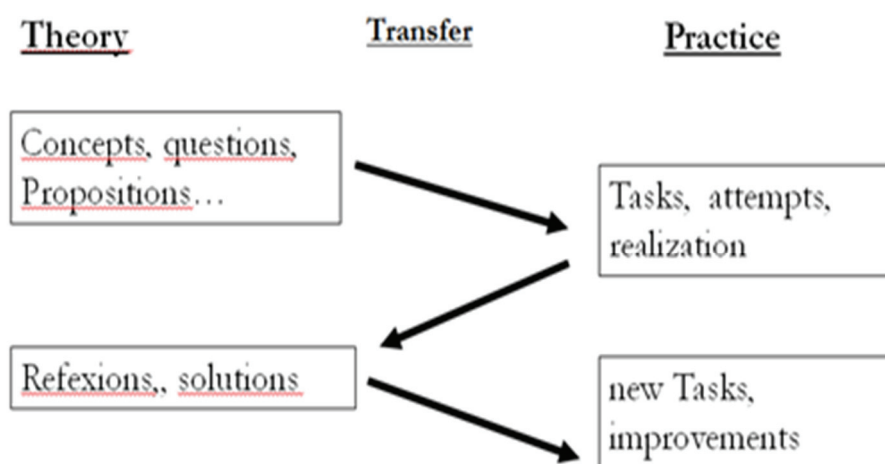
So the cooperative degree program is designed according to the real requirements in social institutions, and guarantees a unique combination of theory and practical work.

It is undisputed that the acquisition of skills not only can be made inside the lecture hall. Certainly, the student first needs concepts and theories, he can think about that. But immediately for him the question arises, whether a theoretical insight can be successfully implemented in practice. The Students in our curriculum are given the option to change the place of learning every three months. For three months they attend the College, for the next three months they learn at work in practice.

Our faculty collaborates with many social institutions. In these facilities we stay in contact with selected specialists, which guide the students in their work. In this way, students on one hand get a practice field for their theoretical knowledge, on the other hand they receive practical instructions and will be accompanied and observed in their solution tests.

The study program lasts three years, during this time the students are 6 stages in the theory and 6 stages in the practice. A permanent exchange between theory and practice takes place so. In this way, the students bring their knowledge appropriate to into practice and take practical problems back to the seminar.

**Figure 3: Alternating Phases of Theory and Practice**



## **5. Contents of the Curriculum**

There is a broad consensus on the general curriculum of teaching in the study at the faculties of social work in Germany. Accordingly, all students acquire knowledge and skills in the core subjects sociology, psychology, philosophy, politics, law and so on.

This lessons includes a total of 1776 hours lecture visit in three years at our University. In this workload is included the basic study as well as the hours in the chosen area of specialization: so educational support, care for the elderly or family help. In the seminar the students thus spend 1776 hours of workload, about 28% of the whole workload.

A great amount of the additionally study time lies in the individual studies at home, in groups or on the bibliothek, i.e. 1625 hours, i.e. about 26% of the whole workload. 46 % or 1625 hours practice are practical training and reflection.

The study program includes therefore a total of 6300 heures workload and is rated 210 ECTS credit points. Within the Bachelor program students can specialize: depending on the practice posts, in which they are active, they take part in one of the following fields of study:

- Education and Learning Support – Child and Youth Care
- Child Care and Youth Services
- Youth, Family and Social Welfare Services
- Disability-Care and Rehabilitation
- Social Work in Healthcare
- Social Work in Early Years and Primary Education
- Forensic Social Work

We also have three master programs of social work:

- Social Governance
- Social Planning
- Intercultural Social Work

## **6. The cooperation between “theory” und “practice”**

For the concept of our cooperative study program is a good contact between theory and practice necessary. The students must be guided well in both areas.

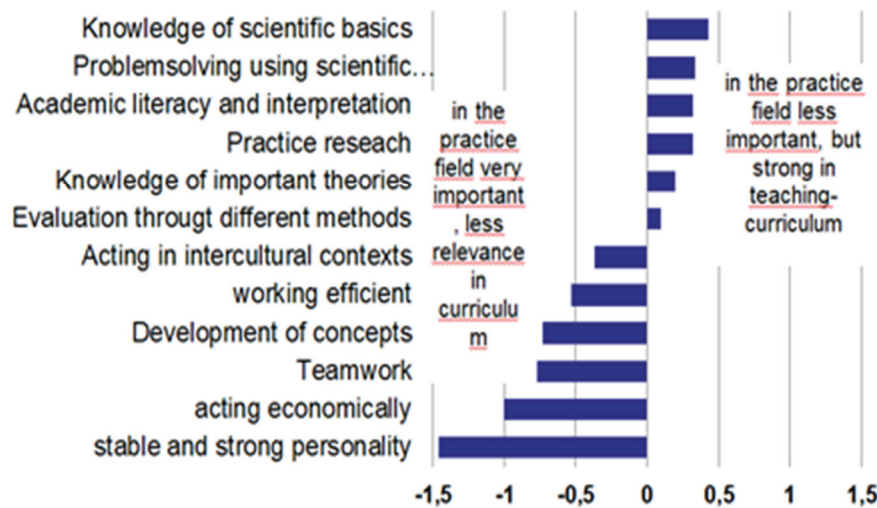
The cooperation between theory and practice is managed in the way, that a professor stays in contact with the practice institution by supervising the quality of the learning process. Therefore he or she visits the institutions and talks to the management.

Inside the practice institution every student is supervised through a social worker. With him the student has frequent counseling to reflect his work. Additionally our university organizes great conferences twice a year for the students supervisors. In these conferences they were informed about new developments in the university.

Not only in interaction between student and social worker but also in regard to the study content there are links between theory and practice: In special “transfer tasks” the students work out papers by reflecting special aspects of their work in the light of theory. Also in the written examinations they have to answer not only questions on knowledge but also they have to solve tasks of reflection. In the commissions of oral examinations we have also experts from practice institutions.

In a special research study we have asked the practice supervisors how relevant several competencies are in their daily work and to which amount they are imparted through teaching in the seminar.

**Figure 4: Differences between estimated Relevance of Competencies in Institutional Practice and in Academic Curriculum at University**



The figure 4 shows the differences between relevance measures of competencies in institutional practice and in the academic curriculum at the university. In the right upper edge you see the competencies, which the social workers see as taught well at university, but are less relevant in the practice field. These are for example:

- Practice reseach
- Academic literacy and interpretation

- Problemsolving using scientific methods
- Knowledge of scientific basics

In the lower left edge we can see competencies, which are necessary in the practice but are not best imparted through teaching in the seminar:

- stable and strong personality
- acting economically
- Teamwork

The results show that there is the need of acquirement of skills which can not be taught sufficiently through academic teaching.

### 7. Employment after examination

The last subject which I want to mention shortly is the professional career of students after leaving university.

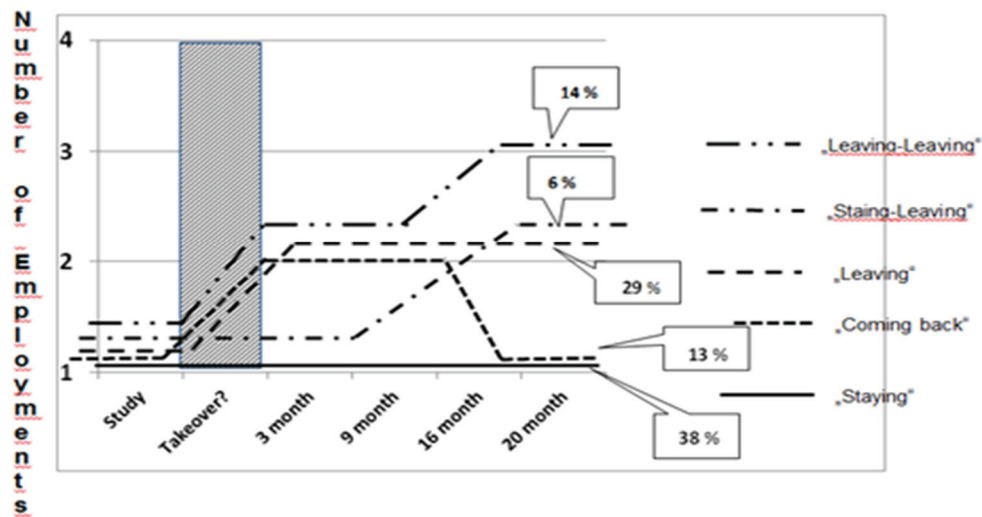
Two thirds of all alumni start their first job immediately after their final examination. About 10 percent continue studying in a master program.

Three month after their final examination 90 percent are employed or are in further qualification programs.

When we look at the first 20 month after the final examination so we can recognize:

More than one third of the alumni stay in the institution where they had their practicum during studying. 13 percent come back after about a year. 29 percent change the institution after examination but stay in the new institution for a long time. Overall we can see that 80 percent of the alumni have reached a continuous employment.

**Figure 5: Typology of Careers after Examination**





## **8. Conclusions**

I will come to some conclusions.

Social Pedagogy – as I have said - is not only a principle of work. It is the attempt to overtake the perspective of the people, who address themselves to us and to whom we are addressed to.

Why do we need academic professionals in solving problems in the clients every day life? Why do we need Social Pedagogy at the university level?

The answer is very simple: The study program as well as the training in practice enable the students to reflect the underlying problems on an abstract level. Professionals are able to manage the helping processes inside the small units and arrangements of help, so as counseling units, foster families, youth clubs and houses of residential care.

In direct interaction with children, young people and with families they act as specialists not far away from the places where the families live. They bring in the innovations, which are individual and adequate for the situation.

The academic training expands the view of possible solutions on the basis of new scientific insights. The university offers for the professionals an excellent platform to develop and discuss concepts of treatments and intervention, not only in the administration but also in the helping institutions themselves.

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