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Considering Danish Social Pedagogy and its Possible Contributions to Costa Rican
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Considering Danish Social Pedagogy and its Possible Contributions to Costa Rican Public Education

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Abstract

This essay explores aspects that surround Danish culture and its social-pedagogical practices. It is shown that Denmark occupies top places in educational matters in Scandinavia and the world; on the contrary, Costa Rica displays critical numbers regarding its education system. A variety of critical concepts are reviewed: first, soft power, which is the strategy for Denmark to become less military and more technological, artistic and creative; second, hygge or coziness which is described as a national feeling; Danish social pedagogy and its implications for the community; and lastly, the educational concept of bildung, which is intended to integrate the individual as part of a community. The possible contributions of these concepts for the improvement of Costa Rican public education are explored in this paper as well.

Keywords: Community, Costa Rican education, culture, Danish education, inclusion social pedagogy

Introduction

As part of a living experience in 2018 in the island of Funen, Denmark, something that caught my attention, above many cultural aspects, is the education

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system of this country and how it, because of its deeply rooted traditions, is extremely effective and competitive. To focus on the English teaching and learning processes of this country as a whole, it has to be stressed that Denmark, in 2016, was shown as the second country with the best English as a second language proficiency in the world in the World Economic Forum (Breene, 2019).

It was identified, during my stay in the country, that the vast majority of people had the communicative competence to interact with foreigners in English with no problems. Also, parents spoke in English to their children in the supermarket. These actions denote a high recognition of the importance of the English skills for daily use with family, work or travel. Regarding the academic side of learning a language, Fernández and Andersen (2019) stated that, in Danish education, "it seems that primary school takes up the practice of everyday dialogue, upper secondary school is in charge of information exchanges about social matters and university undertakes the communication of academic stuff" (p. 62). As it is presented, since primary school, Danish children are positioned into places of language use.

Denmark is located in the northern part of Europe, what is called Scandinavia. Even though two out of the three countries that surround Denmark (Norway, Germany and Sweden) used to be part of the Kingdom of Denmark, nowadays, all of the countries mentioned speak different languages; however, all of them share a second language in common, English. It is widely known that European countries utilize English as a common communication tool for trading, business and pleasure.

After a brief contextual introduction of Denmark and its English proficiency, it is pertinent to say that this essay will focus on Danish social pedagogy and how

considering this idea may contribute to Costa Rican education. It has to be added that the intention of this paper is not to compare or to idealize the fantasy that Costa Rica, as a third world country, can reach the educational and cultural development of one of the most developed countries in the world; yet this essay intends to consider what can be learned from Danish social pedagogy and implemented in Costa Rican day-to-day pedagogical practices.

Danish Hygge and Soft Power

Danish culture has an enormous array of traditions that not only are different from Costa Rican culture, but those traditions may clash with our world view as a Latin American culture. Apart from this, there are some factors from this Scandinavian culture that can be understood and possibly adapted for the enhancement of Costa Rican education. To expand on the idea of these traditions and world view, I would like to present two important aspects from Danish culture that can be viewed as contributors for what can be explored and rethought in our culture.

Firstly, the concept of *hygge* (pronounced "hue-guh"); it is explained by Howell and Sundberg (2015) as "typically something akin to the 'national feeling' of Denmark" (p. 98). The authors continue by stressing that hygge is a Danish construct that, agreed by Danes and outsiders, has no translation into English; though, an equivalent of this term could be "coziness" (Howell & Sundberg, 2015, p. 98). Danish people may not start a conversation right away when they encounter someone else at the supermarket or the park, yet at the moment one asks a question or says hello, they do not hesitate to help in the kindest way possible. In social and family gatherings, the feeling described as

hygge is present; independently whether a Dane or outsider is part of the group, there is a feeling of inclusion and comfort around. regardless of people's communication skills in Danish, they adapt to English easily.

To elaborate on the concept and explanation of *hygge*, Howell and Sundberg stressed that "affective constructs such as coziness, relaxed fun, security, and the various other emotional components of hygge are certainly found in many cultures… However, the concept is not so specifically articulated as it is in Danish culture" (2015, p. 108). Hygge is, indeed, present in most of the Scandinavian countries; I would say that it is part of the Scandinavian culture as a whole although, talking from experience itself, I can only refer to Denmark. Go to a birthday party, have dinner with a Danish family, meet someone at the park, ask for help to find an item at the store, and Danes will always make sure you have a pleasant time.

Secondly, the concept of soft power refers to a shift from the hard or military power such as Russia or the USA to a softer and more intellectual power (Howell & Sundberg, 2015). Companies and the government are betting for a more technological approach to strengthen their economy and improve life quality, which is already in very high standards. Engineers are being brought from other countries, and top job offers are created for creative and digital media. Howell and Sundberg added that "the wielding of various cultural products like design, music, and artwork; socio-economic policies like public social support, urban planning, and the notion of 'knowledge economies'; and tourism programs [are intended] to achieve geopolitical goals" (2015, p. 98). It has to be emphasized that Denmark invests in its education as it does in the aspects mentioned in the previous quote. OECD (2017) denoted that Denmark is in the top in regards to its

performance relation and socio-economic profile on science in PISA tests. Furthermore, the website "Study in Denmark" (para. 1) published a news article which highlights that "Denmark has the fifth best higher education system in the world... And the second best in Scandinavia. U21 Rankings has released their 2019 report ranking 50 countries on resources, environment, connectivity and output."

Danish soft power and hygge have been a valuable aspect for the development and culture of the country; they have been, as shown previously, key items for the country's education. One of the negative sides of attaching to this model is that, as Howell and Sundberg (2015) stated,

> [as] Denmark has been utilizing the soft power tools of hygge, it runs the risk of appearing hypocritical to the very people, businesses, and exchanges it is trying to attract if it cannot extend the offer of coziness to residents already living inside its borders. (p. 114)

Defining Danish Social Pedagogy

Based on Rothuizen and Harbo (2017), social pedagogy, as a concept, surfaced initially around the year 1850 in Germany, being used first by Karl Mager and Adolph Diesterweg . Nivala argued that social pedagogy has historically been connected to kindergartens and to residential care of kids and youngsters; moreover, the author explained that social pedagogues worked in institutions with children, teenagers and young adults with social, physical and psychological complications (Nivala, 2019).

Going back to Karl Mager and Adolph Diesterweg's idea about social pedagogy, on one hand, Mager compared it to democracy because its framework is designed to

promote the participation of and for citizens as "free persons in social, cultural and political life" (Rothuizen & Harbo, 2017, p. 7). It is safe to mention that the activities/actions performed form a social-pedagogical perspective affect the individual and the group or community they belong to; therefore, the promotion of participation has to be reflected from both perspectives, that of the individual and that of a group. Rothuizen and Harbo continue with a similar idea by stating that "social pedagogy is concerned not only with the individual and their social connections, but also with developing a connected, productive society, relevant for the modern age" (2017, p. 7). The authors elaborate further on this idea, commenting that "reform pedagogy stresses individual flourishing and strives to reform social aspects" (Rothuizen & Harbo, 2017, p. 7). On the other hand, the authors argued that Diesterweg "used social pedagogy as a framework for the pedagogical tasks that could contribute solutions to the social and pedagogical problems that appeared in the modern, emerging industrial society" (Rothuizen & Harbo, 2017, p. 7). It can be noticeable that both pioneers of the concept had a similar perspective of its attributions and limitations inside the education field; however, Diesterweg leaned towards the industrial revolution side of the time; the author was projecting towards the solutions that had to be offered to a transforming society.

Cleary (2019) proposed a definition for social pedagogy that, as the previous ones, views the individual as a person that needs support other than just medical and psychological:

it refers to professional work with people who have 'problems' that undermine their ability to exist, interact and live with self-dignity, i.e. homeless people,

substance abusers, children in care, children in need of care, senior citizens in

need of care, people with disabilities etc. (p. 3)

Jensen (2015) expressed that social pedagogy is referred to as an academic

discipline because it is a social science that bases its procedures in social life and living

conditions. The author continued by saying that it is a reality science given that it is

founded upon empirical research (Jensen, 2015). it is an extension of pedagogy, which

deals with understanding people, their roles in the community and how their abilities can

be used to develop people and their surroundings. It can be confidently said that social

pedagogy is a formal social science as are pedagogy, social work and education.

Rothuizen and Harbo related to this point by expressing that "social pedagogy is

concerned theoretically with new forms of marginalisation, and practically with efforts

that aim towards integration, inclusion and citizenship" (2017, p.10). As stated

previously, as a formal subject, this field deals with the two sides of the matter, the

theoretical part in order to identify the issues and the practical side to find solutions and

apply them. Another pertinent aspect that can be added to this line of thought is that in

social pedagogy, "they [people] are not seen as objects for treatment, but as active

participants" (Rothuizen & Harbo, 2017, p. 8). It is particularly interesting to dissect the

phrase "objects for treatment" because the vast majority of work is done with people

that need support in order to improve themselves and integrate into their community.

The role of the pedagogue within social pedagogy is, without question, determining

when it comes to supporting the person transform and recreate their communal sense;

Rothuizen and Harbo stretched this idea by arguing that "the pedagogue sees the other

person, not as a bearer of symptoms, but as a participant who has the right to an everyday life with autonomy and community" (2017, p.15).

Rothuizen and Harbo (2017) embraced the idea that "Danish social pedagogues in their work pay attention to developing internal and external qualities, processes, experiences and understandings about participation" (p. 10). Participation is a relevant aspect to note when it comes to social pedagogy; the core idea is to foment inclusion and functionality of the individual into the society they live in. Additionally, Nivala (2019) insisted that "social pedagogical work is the idea of supporting the personal and social growth processes of everybody in their everyday life" (p. 6). Nivala stressed that in social pedagogy, every member of the community is included, the ones who are leaders, who take the initiative, creative, participative and strong-minded, without excluding those who live adverse situations or suffer from social problems (2019). Finally, Jensen claimed that, in a process of transformation, an extremely beneficial point to social pedagogy is that it has a touch that keeps an idea of integration and inclusion for those citizens that expected segregation as the outcome (2015).

Social pedagogy connects three different factors: practice, theory and discourse. The first refers to the reality of the society in which people act and the structure and institution of such society. The second relates to the fact that reflection is involved in social pedagogy. The third one is associated with the idea that it is built upon speaking and writing about it (Jensen, 2015). These three pillars construct the subject of social pedagogy as a formal object of study that concerns the empirical understanding of it, as well as the practical form through different communication and documentation forms.

The social pedagogical approach connects to factors such as inclusion and independence which are highly important for personal and communal development. The academic and political side of the equation are as well influenced by the trends of pedagogy and social pedagogy as they affect the rights and well-being of the individual and the community (Rothuizen & Harbo, 2017). The authors followed the idea by pointing that the social pedagogical approach is intended for children and adults to create themselves when facing what is around them, this means that the individual has to act upon what they know or what is new and the pedagogue has to allow room for engagement and interaction (Rothuizen & Harbo, 2017).

Figure 1 shows that the individual and the community cannot exist without each other; nevertheless, they can entangle. As an individual, the person has to be also part of a community; if this person falls into selfishness, the dynamic fails as it does when the person gives too much to the community because "it can be difficult to remember who you are". Rothuizen and Harbo (2017, p. 17) added that the model has to be read from the inside to the outside, then, the other way around. In simple words, there needs to be a balance between the two layers in the figure for the individual to be mindful with themselves and get the sense of belonging and participation. The social pedagogue has two paths to follow: accompany the individual to be integrated in the community or work with the community through activities that can include the individual into the community. Therefore, "social pedagogy is about both bonding and bridging" (Rothuizen & Harbo 2017, p. 17).

Figure 1.

The task of pedagogue: turning the negative cycle by means of contact and bridge-building
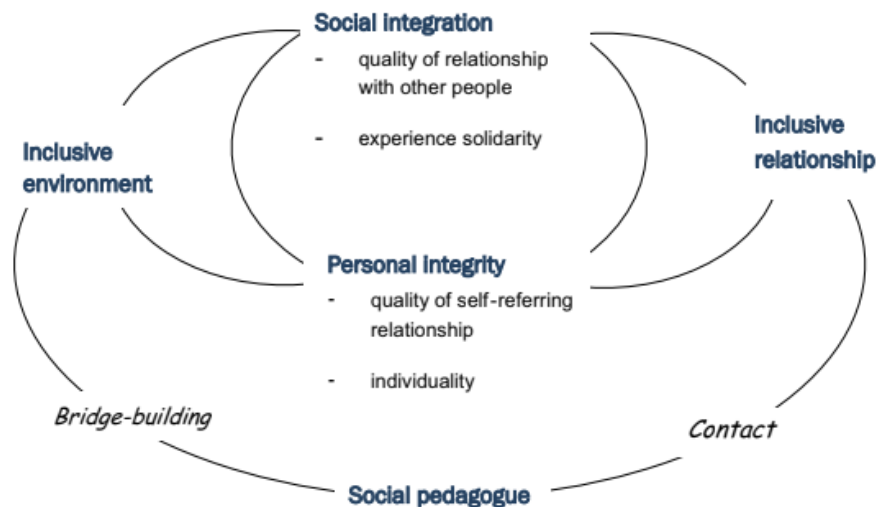
Note: Adapted from Rothuizen and Harbo (2017)

Key Features of Social Pedagogy

While doing the pertinent research in academic papers for the definition of social pedagogy, some explanations related more to a feature itself rather than a concept or definition; still, the line between these two notions, feature and definition, is not so well-defined at least for the purpose of this paper. The following section describes key features of social pedagogy.

Fox and Thiessen explained that it mixes a person-centered involvement or a group procedure inside a larger community and compositional organization (2019). As seen before in Figure 1 and the definitions of social pedagogy, it is a matter of balance between who the individual is as a person and what they do in and for the community as a group. It is always about including every individual to form a functioning society.

Creativity is seen as an important characteristic that needs to be present in every subject, discipline and career. Social pedagogy is not the exception. Cleary stated that this field incorporates creativity as one of its most important instruments for the promotion of relationship and community-based practices (2020). Continuing the idea of creativity as a tool, Fox and Thiessen expressed that "the social pedagogy approach embraces notions of informal, less-structured activities, and creativity in terms of music- or art-based interventions'' (2019, p. 3). Being informal and less structured is especially important for the growth of creativity in an individual or a community; in those moments of informality, it is when the pressure vanishes and comfort takes place to stimulate different forms of expression. In the same line of thought, Fox and Thiessen (2019) compared social pedagogy's approach to social work; as an example, the authors stated that practices such as forming and keeping long term relationships have been historically observed in other professional specialties (Fox & Thiessen, 2019).

Cleary (2019) stressed that there is a concept present in Nordic countries, especially in Denmark, called bildung. This educational concept is the foundation of what social pedagogy is in this country. In addition, the author expanded on the notion of bildung as "an integrative concept in that it designates a bringing together of various aspects of the individual into a whole; the whole being not so much a complete personality or identity but an integrated character" (Cleary, 2019, p. 6). In other words, there is a process or concept especially in social pedagogy that helps the individual be more complete in themselves and integrated in a community.

From the Danish social pedagogue (socialpædagogerne) standpoint, Cleary listed a code of ethics that present five values: "personal emancipation (of the service

user), social justice, compassion, cultural freedom (of the service user) and professional integrity" (2020, p. 4). This code of ethics may help the pedagogue be a better professional in its field; furthermore, it is valid to say that the five values stated by Cleary (2020) are not the only ones that professionals could implement in their daily practice. Although the values stated are proposed by and for Danish pedagogues, they are not strictly bound to be utilized merely in Denmark; on the contrary, every professional in the field of education should consider them as core values to practice.

Social Pedagogical Implications for Costa Rica

Costa Rica's reality in terms of education may vary depending on economic status, location, culture, family traditions and other related factors that can affect a community, family or individual. One side of the spectrum can be reviewed as the ones who have the resources to send their children to a prestigious school, full of growing opportunities and contacts to seek professional development in a proper educational environment. The other side of the spectrum regards the ones that do not have the resources to send their children to a school with an excellent education program; these are the ones that send their children to the nearest public institution hoping that someday those kids will be professionals and will get out of various difficult living conditions. Here is where inequality in Costa Rica takes place, and social pedagogy could be applied.

Badilla et al. (2018), for instance, developed a project in four vulnerable communities of Costa Rica: San Rita, San Gerardo, El Cachito y Punta Cortés, in which they found that there was a lack of a contextualized educational curriculum that allowed

students and the community to develop soft skills and new organizational abilities.

Additionally, they encountered that the cultural activities and the promotion of

community identity were almost non-existent. Moreover, the authors/researchers

noticed that any organizational, educational and artistic expressions that did not align

with the extreme conservative principles were evil and had to be subjected to scrutiny.

In contrast to these findings, social pedagogy promotes artistic expression, creativity of

any kind, integration, and organizational structures. If there is a community where none

of these practices are allowed, there will be no progress as individuals or society.

Examples such as this show that social pedagogy's work has to do more with cultural

issues than educational ones.

Badilla et al. (2018) suggested that there are an array of dynamics inside the

communities that stop the active participants from feeding their organizational

capabilities. The authors explained that some of those dynamics correspond to

decontextualized educational curricula that are far away from the logical and productive

ideas of the communities. While working with and for a community and as a functioning

individual, there needs to be a sense of direction; here is where the organizational

aspects of the community come to life; yet if there is no organization or the intention

there of, community development will never be present.

From a broader view of Costa Rica's educational situation, Barberousse-Alfonso

et al. (2018) claimed that the problem with the low level of schooling in the country is not

solely due to the low attendance by itself, it is caused by other factors such as school

dropouts, schooling failures or educational exclusion. It is evident that the factors that

drag the students out of school are linked to social aspects such as educational

exclusion. This can be produced by the teachers, parents, or any other member of the community. There is a need for social pedagogues to bring the community together or integrate the members that might be productive and functional back to the community.

OECD (2017) reported that the number of program conclusions and learning results performance is not positive; in addition to that, the level of school dropouts in schools and higher education is alarming. This organization continues by stating that education has a key role to reduce inequality and poverty, which are increasingly high in Costa Rica.

How can all these issues be worked on in order to achieve better educational and social performance in Costa Rica? There needs to be organization at a community level that permits the individual to feel part of the group. From Danish culture, the concept of hygge or coziness can be considered; besides, the educational concept of bildung should be taken into account. The integration and well-being that Danish social pedagogy lays its bases on must be thought of as a helper to have every single individual motivated and comfortable to be as functioning as possible. Finally, community means the neighborhood, the family, the classroom, the school or university. Wherever there is a group of people, there is a possible functioning community and its members.

Conclusions

To conclude this essay, I would like to cite Cleary (2019) who stated that "the challenge for a contemporary social pedagogy is to develop environments that inspire and nurture personal and cultural narratives" (p. 10). As was presented in the section of *Social Pedagogical implications for Costa Rica,* it was noted that the educational and

pedagogical problems of the communities are bound to a lack or prohibition of cultural and personal expressions that allow the individual and the community to be well organized and integrate everyone. There are factors that increase the number of school dropouts, such as educational exclusion which, as reviewed previously, do not comply with the principles that the field suggests.

Costa Rica's education, pointed out by the evidence, may not be the best; in despite of that, if we view the cultural aspects from a nation such as Denmark and start working as a community for the improvement of education and culture and the well-being of every single person, there might be surprising results that would inspire others to follow the same path. I am not implying that Costa Rica can pursue to become a Central American Denmark; what I am envisioning is a better education that starts from having a better culture as a community.

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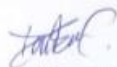
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DECLARACIÓN JURADA

Yo, Dawer Alejandro Esquivel Cascante, cédula de identidad 702150829, estudiante de la Universidad Nacional, declaro bajo fe de juramento y consciente de las responsabilidades penales de este acto, que soy autor intelectual del Trabajo Final de Graduación Titulado "Considering Danish Social Pedagogy and its Possible Contributions to Costa Rican Education", para optar por el grado de Maestría en Educación con énfasis en Pedagogía Universitaria.

Heredia, a los 5 días del mes de setiembre del año 2022.

Refrendo

Los abajo firmantes avalamos el Trabajo de Graduación del estudiante Dawer Esquivel Cascante, cédula 702150829, que lleva como título **Considering Danish Social Pedagogy and its Possible Contributions to Costa Rican Public Education,** dado que cumple con las disposiciones vigentes y la calidad académica requerida por el posgrado.

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