2. Social Work Expertise and the Crisis of Modernity

Walter Lorenz – Free University of Bozen-Bolzano

Abstract

Social work as a product of modernity shares in the fundamental ambiguity of the principles that gave rise to the development of modern societies: the emphasis on individual autonomy and freedom as a means of breaking free from imposed obligations and constraints on one hand and the demand for universal equality in recognition of the mutual dependence in *organic solidarity* on the other. The conflict between both contributed to the severity with which social problems manifested themselves in the epochal structural changes of society. In striving to find a scientifically grounded knowledge base for its task of promoting social solidarity under these conditions, social work oscillated between reference points in positivist science and hermeneutic approaches to understanding human interaction, thereby also striving to hold together notions of care and control. In the current political climate, resonating in popular culture, which privileges individual autonomy over principles of equality, the social work profession is in danger of becoming polarized between a predominance of control functions in interventions concerning the public sphere and the relegation of care functions to the private sphere, particularly in the form of the privatization of services and a leaning toward counseling, therapy, and coaching in that domain. This split is also affecting the production of knowledge for social work practice, in which on one hand positivist approaches to research are receiving heightened attention and seek to satisfy the demand for the achievement of predetermined goals of intervention within the framework of evidence-based practice, whereas on the other expert systems are being challenged by the articulation of knowledge based primarily on direct experience and hence expressed in self-help and user-led approaches to services. Ed Mullen's contribution to social work theory can be regarded as a proposal that seeks to overcome this split and hence confronts the crisis of modernity manifesting itself therein to allow social work to return to its essential

Part of
Soydan, Haluk (Ed.). (2015). *Social Work Practice to the Benefit of Edward J. Mullen*. bu,press.
https://doi.org/10.13124/9788860461131

(cc) BY-SA

mandate under current political and cultural conditions, which is to contribute to the improvement of social conditions of human existence in modernity.

Central to the examination of social work's scientific and professional credibility is the notion of evidence, as Ed Mullen's reflections on the contemporary issue of evidence-based practice (EBP) continue to point out (Mullen, 2014, 2015). But in view of the controversies surrounding EBP in social work and the wider relationship of social work to science and its overall position in modernity, it is important to trace this concern back to the origins of social work and the way in which discourses on evidence were constructed.

Social work, in whatever epistemological and professional forms it emerged and under whatever titles, is a very particular social phenomenon. In contrast to other classical academic disciplines, it has its origins not in the academic world of theory formation and detached scientific enquiry, but represents a practical activity always in search of a theoretical basis. It was not so much the spontaneous human impulse to help less able members of society in difficult situations that gave rise to theoretical reflections regarding how the helping process could be made more effective, rather it was the experience of the limitations of spontaneous forms of helping that triggered a more profound quest for scientific explanations. Only with those theoretical and systematic insights could the complexity of helping be elucidated and promoted within the more coherent framework of a professional activity akin to the classical professions such as medicine or legal advocacy.

Even more so, the very nature and meaning of helping constitutes a progressively problematic subject historically. It is problematic because although helping appears to refer to a universal, timeless human gesture of people turning to others who are experiencing difficulties and require their assistance and given that over the life cycle everybody experiences periods of such dependence, a fundamental historical rupture occurred in the social meaning of dependence with the arrival of modernity, which revealed the

social complexity of that gesture. In the context of a fundamental transformation of social relationships, characterized by Durkheim (1893/1964) as the change from mechanical to organic solidarity, the helping process had to take account of the modern preoccupation with autonomy as constitutive of the dignity of a person while at the same time dealing with an increase in mutual dependence, as exemplified by the modern division of labor. Once the norms of social relations began to change from a deterministic to a voluntary orientation with emphasis on the free choice of the autonomous individual (Mill, 1859/2003), the very act of helping assumed a problematic social significance and required sanctioning through particular forms of social relationships. In the private sphere it remained largely an act that was integrated in traditional norms and rules of premodern social relations, but in the public domain it had to be safeguarded against representing an infringement of personal autonomy and therefore required particular sanctioning through a rationally legitimated professional approach.

This constitutes the fundamental ambiguity of all forms of social work—on one hand it represents an attempt to stabilize or recreate forms of social solidarity that belong to spheres of life that have not yet come under the regime of organic solidarity, in which contractual arrangements aimed at securing the freedom of choice and the equality of partnerships are the rule. These spheres retain their value through their informal nature; they have a lifeworld quality and characterize taken-for-granted family and kinship relations but also other social relations at the level of civil society, such as associations that become increasingly important in modern societies. However, there is always a risk that these helping relationships assume a nostalgic or conservative quality and bring with them implications of paternalism, inequality, and dependence. In the face of the massive disruption of social bonds that industrialization, urbanization, and the general process of *disembedding* (Giddens, 1991) brought to whole populations in the 19th century, it is understandable that spontaneous voluntary associations, but also the established guardians of the old rules of social relations such as the church, attempted to hold on to those traditional

forms of social solidarity. They were concerned with strengthening family life, with helping people individually or in groups to repair bonds and keep the established forms of solidarity functioning. One stream of charitable, preprofessional social work has its origins and found its initial role precisely in that context.

On the other hand, progressive social work initiatives in the wake of the industrial revolution recognized the signs of the time and sought to put into practice the new principles of social solidarity based on contractual arrangements between partners. They aimed to foster the capacities of people to find their own role and develop their capacities for a life under radically changed social, political, and above all economic conditions. To be able to achieve this goal, the nature of the emerging structures of society needed to be understood, as did the psychological implications of that fundamental shift in solidarity, to arrive at methods that recognized the altered context and gave the helping process a completely different and in that sense modern meaning (Payne, 2005). This type of search for methodological foundations starts with a concrete task, a situation of or a person in need, and seeks to understand that situation or person not from a given theoretical and hence necessarily reductive perspective, but with full attention to the complexity of that situation or individual. Methodology needs to combine the sets of rules that can be constructed from universal scientific insights on one hand (Soydan, 1999) and the historically unique and culturally embedded meanings that frame the situation on the other.

Therefore, the conceptual paradigms guiding the formal helping process must reach beyond the lifeworld, explicitly or by default, and become related to the wider political processes that shape modern societies. More specifically, emerging social services had a mandate to create social bonds that foster the integration and identity of modern societies and prevent them from disintegrating. Social work, whether as a private initiative or as part of the emerging public system of social support, became an instrument of the project of defining the rules that build modern societies. Its search for a knowledge base and a coherent, scientifically grounded professional

methodology became embedded into the cultural and political project of modernity to promote its characteristic forms of organic solidarity.

This project of modernity, however, contains many fundamental ambiguities. One with particular relevance for social work is the discord between personal freedom and universal equality. Both demands are contained in the motto of the French Revolution of "liberté, égalité, fraternité" and drove the cultural and political transformations of the period, which resulted in modern forms of democracy. The demand for self-determination in a political sense, a guiding idea since the Enlightenment, also had implications for the psychological constitution of the modern self, which was conceived as autonomous in its political and personal preferences, including the forming of personal bonds unfettered by traditions and conventions, yet it depended on the realization of the existence of civil and political rights (Rawls, 1996). Equality on the other hand became a counterfactual ideal that also required corresponding political arrangements and legal securities for its realization. The legitimation of the concepts of liberty and equality was based on rationality, and therein lies the origin of the ambiguity; as Nietzsche (1886/1966) recognized with unflinching directness, the logic of autonomous self-realization has an enormous liberating potential but leads inexorably to the use of power over others that scorns equality, whereas the latter, pursued systematically, counteracts the effects of power exercised by individuals over others but curtails personal freedom in the pursuit of collective interests.

Social work's contribution to the project of modernity and the ultimate basis of its social mandate reside in its attempt to mediate between both demands. Although social policies develop very unevenly in different political contexts, they all represent a recognition that without a degree of compensation, the inequities resulting from the unfettered effects of capitalism and its emphasis on individual efforts and self-interest would threaten the integration of modern societies, cause unrest through deviance and rebellion, and impede economic growth. But the equalizing effects of social policies always had to stop short of the notions of equality in the form

advocated by communism, which were regarded by bourgeois governments as a threat to personal liberty and a disincentive to work. Social work as a modern institution had the function of fine-tuning (and in that sense, making) social policies at the level of individualized interventions. Professional discretion, based on the scientific study of human behavior and the effects of methodical helping, became a necessary instrument not just for helping people resolve actual social problems but also for the symbolic representation of social justice in modern societies in situations of moral ambiguity (Humphreys, 1995). The premodern question of morality concerning the *deserving cases* had to be reinterpreted in terms of modern scientific criteria of the effective application of methods.

Despite this orientation toward modern science and the value neutrality thereby implied, social work's methodological mandate was and has had to take a position toward and remain embedded in a political agenda. Social work cannot become detached from those influences; rather, the tension between professional detachment and political engagement constitutes a central characteristic of this profession, distinct in its acuteness from that experienced in other helping professions. The search for a fitting theoretical underpinning of the professional activities of social workers in various social and political contexts always carries political connotations, and the various dominant theoretical frameworks that developed in the social professions always make reference to the sociopolitical context in which they arose (Lorenz, 2006).

The push toward systematization and scientific neutrality was strengthened by the concept of social diagnosis, promoted by the social work pioneers Mary Richmond and Alice Salomon on both sides of the Atlantic during the first decades of the 20th century. To quote Mary Richmond (1917):

> Social evidence, like that sought by the scientist or historian, includes all items which, however trifling or apparently irrelevant when regarded as isolated facts, may, when taken together, throw light upon the question at issue; namely, as regards social work, the question what course of procedure will place the client in his right relation to society? (p. 39)

This represented a decisive step beyond the previous moral and educational program based on personal example, "friendly visiting" (see Richmond's 1899 handbook), and often control and coercion. Individualized charity not only failed to tackle the structural issues of poverty (Ziliak, 2004), it was also destined to fail for psychological reasons—people's behavior does not easily react positively to rational expositions of adverse or advantageous consequences but is shot through with irrationality, with defense mechanisms as they are called in the post-Freudian era. It was the work of Sigmund Freud, the scientist who had managed to explain the irrational side of human behavior with the paradigm of the unconscious and its defense mechanisms, that provided rational explanations for irrational forms of behavior and therefore widened the scope of scientifically grounded case observations, which in turn provided evidence for targeted interventions (Ginsburg, 1940). The psychoanalytic insight into the workings of the unconscious mind subsequently gave social work as casework its more solid scientific grounding and better prospects of success because it freed the notion of a relationship from its sentimental connotations and gave it a solid scientific base. Instead of issuing moral appeals, social workers could now seek to engage and strengthen a client's ego through the means of a professional relationship aimed at overcoming resistance not by persuasion or coercion but by shared insight into and understanding of internal, and external, emotional conflicts whose resolution could clear a path to better adjustment to the demands of reality in the form of prevailing social norms.

Psychoanalytic concepts are an interesting case of epistemological ambiguity. They can generally be applied either in the scheme of positivism, in which treatment is geared toward the successful resolution of internal psychological conflicts, or in a phenomenological sense, in which therapy becomes an intersubjective process of finding the meaning of certain behavior patterns in the lifeworld of the client (Bohleber, 2013). The reception of psychoanalytic concepts in the casework models developed particularly in the Anglo–Saxon context helped strengthen the scientific profile of the social work profession, particularly on account of the positivism emphasized in that tradition. This implied a leaning toward the

treatment of individuals based on objective criteria concerning deficits in coping and contained normative implications that upheld adjustment to the conditions of modern society as the goal to be achieved.

These developments indicate an affinity between methodological considerations and the political precepts of classical liberalism, which emphasize the following.

- In welfare matters, the state comes only into play as a last resort, and then in a largely punitive or controlling manner; individuals on their part seek to keep the state at arm's length because it appears as a threat to their personal freedom when it springs into action;
- the focus of attention and the locus of responsibility for the better functioning of society is the individual, and society is conceived basically as an aggregation of individuals; ideally, if all individuals act rationally and do their duty, society functions automatically and the state needs to intervene only on the margins, probably with the assistance of civil society organizations; and
- social work is basically relegated to situations in which deficits already became manifest; the profession develops its expertise in the direction of repair, rehabilitation, and prevention but this arises from the strength gained by people having coped with a crisis successfully.

This development contrasts in certain important respects with a phenomenological understanding of society found on the European continent and particularly in Germany. This corresponded more with a political culture in which promoting community processes was regarded as a public responsibility and a balance between individual and collective efforts was regarded as constitutive under the formula of subsidiarity. In this climate the paradigm of social pedagogy could find its particular role with notable differences in the approach to solving social problems and hence to the validation of evidence (Lorenz, 2008).

With a delay in the onset of industrialization in Germany, poverty and other social problems were, at least at the level of scientific debate, not treated

primarily as individual failings but articulated under the title of *the social question*. The social question concerns the specific modern conditions that weaken traditional social bonds so that those bonds had to be made the subject of organized efforts in collaboration between organizations of civil society and, once removed, of the state. Only with these concerted efforts could a sense of community be preserved, as was the objective of conservative policies such as those pursued by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, interpreting thereby the project of modernity with its promise of a better quality of life with emphasis on preserving old bonds. It is therefore of great significance that von Bismarck, although having excluded the Social Democrats from the first parliament of the newly founded German Reich, became the first political promoter of public social policies, a political step that liberal politicians eschewed for much longer (Kaufmann, 2013).

The term social question gained prominence in the political debates leading up to the 1848 revolutions and produced a dual but closely interconnected understanding of the term *social* (Steinmetz, 1993). It could either emphasize the aspect of human beings living in communities as a result of their anthropological condition of being dependent on others; social arrangements were therefore a precondition of human existence. Or it could highlight more specifically the means of assistance needed to provide safety nets with which to ensure the integration of strata and classes of people threatened with exclusion from society. The founding of political parties that used *social* in their title, such as the numerous social democratic parties of the second half of the 19th century, emphasized the latter aspect, leading to the particular orientation of socialist politics, whereas communist parties deliberately avoided the term on account of its ambiguity. Socialist political demands, and proposals for remedies, centered specifically on removing the inequalities created by capitalism and therefore promoted structural changes of a radical kind. The social question more generally became an issue for members of the middle classes in Germany in the sense that it declared a concern for the plight of the neediest and most disadvantaged members of society to be a public matter. Solving it affected the stability and hence the quality of life of the entire society, and the social question was a central issue

for the German School of Political Economy. To quote a leading economist of 1872, Gustav von Schmoller: The state must care "to raise, educate and reconcile the lower classes to such an extent that they integrate themselves in peace and harmony into the organism of state and society" (as quoted by Nau, 2000, p. 509).

Parallel to these developments in social legislation, the project of education, or rather of *Bildung*, also had different connotations and a different value in German modern culture than in the United Kingdom. Inspired by the principles and ideals of the Enlightenment movement, education in the continental cultural context meant a social civilizing process that engaged the whole society in efforts of renewal and progress based partly on references to nature (a line of thinking in the tradition of Rousseau) and partly on humanistic ideals as best exemplified by Wilhelm von Humboldt, the educational reformer and founder of the modern university ideal (Sorkin, 1983). The quest for Bildung went beyond the pragmatic, functional intentions behind the introduction of compulsory schooling as preparation for the needs of industrial society and upheld instead the value of education for its own sake or even of education for a better world, and not only at the level of the newly founded universities with which Germany set an example in Europe (Siljander, Kivelä, & Sutinen, 2012). Pedagogy became recognized as a means of cultural and to some extent spiritual renewal and thereby the precondition for economic and technological progress. The formation of humans and the formation of society, the unlocking of their respective potentials, went hand in hand.

Hence there was an intricate link between the pedagogical movement and the social reform movement in 19th and 20th century Germany, with many of the key figures in pedagogy, theology, and philosophy such as Pestalozzi, Schleiermacher, Herbart, Natorp, and Nohl also becoming key theoreticians of social pedagogy (Reyer, 2002). This is not to say that all pedagogical approaches in that period converged on the goal of promoting personal autonomy in a context of progressive, equality-oriented social solidarity. A more restrictive notion of school pedagogy was frequently subsumed under

the alternative title of *individual pedagogy* (Lorenz, 2008). But social pedagogy in the cultural and political context of the emergent modern German nation, which fostered the social policy principle of subsidiarity, meant a comprehensive concept for the renewal of society and hence did not primarily focus on remedying deficits, as was the tendency of the social work approach in correspondence with liberal political principles. To quote Natorp (1899/1968):

> The concept of social pedagogy thus involves the fundamental recognition that an individuals' education is socially defined in every significant aspect, just as the human formation of social life depends fundamentally on a corresponding education of the individuals who share this social life. This needs to be taken into account in defining the ultimate and most comprehensive function of education for the individual and for all individuals. The subject matter of this scientific discipline are, therefore, the social conditions of education and the conditions for the formation of social life. We consider these to constitute one single rather than two independent tasks. Society exists only as a union of individuals, and this union in turn exists only in the consciousness of its individual members. The final law is thus necessarily one and the same for both individual and society. (p. 9)

It is important to remember that these educational principles were not confined to Germany and that their equivalents are also found in the 19th century United Kingdom. Or rather, as Mark Smith (2012) noted, these equivalents are found very specifically in the Scottish approach to education and welfare in contrast to the principles on which English education was founded. This can be traced back to the Scottish Enlightenment, which promoted a much more comprehensive, community-oriented understanding of education in general and a greater appreciation of the value of science for the improvement of society (Soydan, 2012), reflected for instance in the considerably greater number of universities that existed at that time in Scotland than in England. This tradition also sustained the particular importance that community education gained in Scotland from the 1960s, explicitly in the Alexander Report (Scottish Education Department, 1975), which triggered a restructuring of youth and adult education services under

the heading of community education, and more implicitly in the Kilbrandon Report (Scottish Education Department, 1964), which recommended a community pedagogical approach to juvenile delinquents in need of care and guidance. Particularly the latter's emphasis on bringing the educational needs of delinquent youngsters under the same pedagogical umbrella as those of "normal" young people expressed perfectly the core message of continental social pedagogical concepts in their effort to start from universal educational needs rather than the behavioral deficits of particular groups of young (and older) people. It demonstrated that only correspondence between methodological traditions and a particular social policy agenda can inform the respective practice initiative.

Endorsement of this observation is also provided by the fate of the equivalent of social pedagogy that germinated even under conditions of liberalism in England and the United States. The methodological tenets of the settlement movement can rightly be related to social pedagogy because the aim was not to teach people living in poverty an individual lesson regarding how to make the most of their situation, but to develop collective learning processes to understand the nature of impoverishing processes and to explore in groups ways of overcoming such debilitating conditions. It is interesting to note that although the movement directly inspired leading pedagogues, chief among them John Dewey, who had been in direct contact with Jane Addams and Hull House in Chicago, the movement itself did not produce a coherent theoretical basis. The theory formation that did take place in the ambit of the settlement movement emphasized more the importance of understanding the interchange between individuals and society from a sociological perspective and the use of this knowledge, in the positivist tradition of Durkheim, for functional improvements in terms of social policy demands (Koengeter & Schroeer, 2013), building on the demands of the Fabian Society in the United Kingdom.

In this regard, the strongest political impetus in social pedagogy developed in the oppressive Latin American political context, epitomized in the work of Paulo Freire and his iconic text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). It advocated

pedagogical principles as a means of engaging in a political transformation process. Its reception in North America and Europe in the 1970s gave a decisive impulse not only for a renewed interest in community work and particularly community action as a model of social work but also a coherent theoretical grounding of community work through the link it established with the pedagogical tradition. But also in this case the reception of an inspiring methodological framework took place in the context of fundamental political changes exemplified by the civil rights movements and demands for political participation and the expansion of social rights to the marginalized groups of society.

This is not to say that the pedagogical paradigm, with its reference to the social sphere, is solely associated with progressive, emancipatory political movements and that it operates necessarily with a democratic notion of a political community as its goal. Here the case of Germany also provides an example of the fundamental ambiguity of theoretical concepts based on the assumed neutrality of science and the oppressive potential contained in the project of modernity, which was the subject of the analysis of authoritarian tendencies in German politics by scholars of the Frankfurt School (e.g., Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/1994). This further underlines the importance of political context for all methodological proposals, which influences their use in one or the other direction.

Social pedagogy in particular makes reference to community, which can constitute the social sphere in very different ways, basing it on essentialism or democratic, constructivist processes. In this respect, German social pedagogy in the 1920s showed a leaning toward a folkish conception of community. This meant that community was taken as a quasi-natural entity, an organism whose higher principles of functioning determined the role and destiny of its members. Whereas Natorp's social pedagogy concepts some time earlier had conceived of community both as the medium of pedagogy and as its goal, emphasizing therefore the need to base notions of community on an inclusive and creative coming together of the interests and aspirations of its individual members (Keck, 1971), community in the

writings of Nohl, who decisively influenced the development of youth and family social services in Germany in the 1920s, already assumed a high degree of essentialism. Writing in the hermeneutic tradition, Nohl stressed the primacy of practice over theory and postulated that overcoming the deep cultural crisis of Germany, exemplified by the end of the monarchy and the conflict between different political factions, required a collective effort from below toward cultural and therefore educational renewal, which to him reflected a collective aspiration of the people (Bollnow, 1980). Although Nohl's role in promoting the nationalist Nazi pedagogical ideology that followed the Weimar years is contentious, the fascist idea of a healthy organic body of the people certainly picked up on the enthusiasm for a communal cultural renewal, signaling a return to principles of nature and an idealization of the collective will of the nation to which individual interests had to be subordinated. In the context of Nazi ideology, the notion of community in all its practical applications was subjected to the control of the party in its effort to coordinate all efforts of formal and informal community building with party politics of indoctrination (Sünker & Otto, 1997).

It is politically significant, therefore, that we perceive today a renewed interest in the contribution that social work methodology can make to society, at a time in which the conditions of social solidarity are being once more radically reworked and redefined. However, the preceding historical reflections indicate very clearly that in dedicating themselves to a particular methodological orientation in social work research and practice, social workers cannot remain neutral but have to consider the relationship between their scientific and political responsibilities.

The effect of post-1989 neoliberalism on societies globally has been profound. Neoliberal principles influenced not just certain political party programs but also became the basis of a cultural project that, starting with similar premises as early capitalism and driven by technological transformations comparable to the industrial revolution, penetrates every aspect of life and hence changes the nature of human social bonds once more. What is at stake is the very balance between the two principles that are

constitutive of the project of modernity: the emphasis on personal liberty and the concern for justice as equality. With the confrontation between capitalism and communism ending apparently in favor of the former, a one-sided emphasis on individual freedom and autonomy has come to enter economic, political, and popular cultures, which makes the promotion of collective processes toward equality always suspect of being a throwback to communism.

This one-sided emphasis on individual efforts, combined with the politics of privatizing public services and the importance given to measures of economic efficiency in services, confronts social services with issues and dilemmas reminiscent of the pioneering era of social policies (Rodger, 2013). Finding solutions to social problems under those conditions is not merely a matter of scientific detachment but must also involve considering and addressing the wider political context, which becomes thereby defined in one direction or the other at the level of individual interventions. In this sense, the issue of evidence has to be dealt with not just in a technical sense but in consideration of the wider value structure that inevitably forms part of the complex set of criteria that constitutes valid indicators of the appropriateness of a line of intervention. Taking a position toward the nature of evidence is therefore in itself a policy-making decision, as Ed Mullen (2014, 2015) rightly pointed out. Therefore, although the current interest in evidence-based social work methodology is perfectly justified, responses to this interest must not be guided merely by technical and instrumental criteria, as is often the case in medicine, but need to take account of the wider social responsibility that the social work profession has come to occupy in modern societies.

In this context, the duality between the methodological traditions of social work and social pedagogy in Europe assume renewed relevance, and not in the sense that one would serve as an ideal model with which to confront the current dilemmas. Rather, this duality of approaches draws attention to the intricate connections between methodological and political considerations in the field of social work precisely because the methodological traditions

demonstrate such context dependence in their historical development. For instance, the current interest in social pedagogical approaches, which is particularly noticeable in the United Kingdom (Petrie, 2013), appears to be related to three general factors, which turn on the phenomenon of individualization as exemplified in the ideology of neoliberalism: (a) the emphasis on individual efforts as the key to coping with life tasks and challenges in general; (b) the inadequacy of the pedagogical reach of the school system in terms of solving behavioral and relationship problems that threaten the stability of school and society; and (c) the growing demand for skilled and licensed care providers to fill the void caused by the further decline of informal social support networks within and beyond the family (Penna & O'Brien, 2009).

Hence this interest reflects a demand for delivering effective substitutes for diminishing social solidarity structures in society. There is a real danger of care services, based on the methodology of social pedagogy, being enlisted in the task of making the project of individualization work in areas in which economic pressures alone cannot reach. Indicative of this pervasive agenda is the emphasis on the concept of activation as a key element in the delivery of social services in a multiplicity of contexts, be they in *workfare* projects with unemployed people, with people in rehabilitation, with single parents, or with people with disabilities. Activation is being promoted as a key educational tool in social services to stimulate self-help in people portrayed as being otherwise in danger of becoming dependent (Wright, 2001).

Seen from a detached methodological viewpoint, the reference to social pedagogy as a method for influencing people's behavior through learning processes geared toward achieving set goals could appear as a considerable advance over a reemergence of what could be called naïve or moralistic and instrumental educational operations that, in the absence of a deeper theoretical understanding of change processes, are aimed at shaming or coercing people into compliance with expected norms of behavior.

But by boosting the effectiveness of interventions, an instrumental use of pedagogy could also easily legitimate a particular political agenda. It can

divert attention away from the collective responsibility of society and politics for structural causes of a whole range of social problems such as poverty or unemployment onto the behavioral functioning of individuals, thereby shifting responsibility for solutions to the individual in question. This danger is even greater in a political context in which, with regard to social services, the more care-oriented parts tend to be privatized while the state retains or even intensifies control-oriented services, as evidenced in higher spending on policing and prisons. Whereas professional approaches to social work refer to an effort to bring care and control together, this split tends to subject both approaches to regulations more than to professional judgment.

The same danger of being instrumentalized applies also to the social work paradigm, and even more so on account of its basically individual, problem-oriented slant. In this regard, reflections on the relevance of the sociological tradition of phenomenology for all types of social work methods are apposite (Lorenz, 2012). In this tradition, processes of understanding and initiating change are closely connected in the awareness that the meaning of actions is a product of collective creative exchanges that can be replicated in specific interventions. Whereas the positivist tradition, to which much of social work is linked, tends to proceed in a linear fashion, phenomenological approaches center on reality as always interpreted. This places reflexivity at the center of social interventions and promotes a sharing of responsibility for achieving changes among all actors involved. It reflects a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of social relations and at the same time of the nature of personhood as expressed in meaning-creating activities (Lorenz, 2012).

Relating social work methods to human capabilities in the line of the capability approach developed by Sen (2009) and Nussbaum (2003) offers the possibility of relating psychological needs to basic material conditions and human rights that must be secured for the concept of coping to have any real practice significance in social work. Treating coping (and hence activation) in an exclusively psychological sense without reference to a particular political

context bears the risk of making entitlements to social support conditional on individuals in need proving themselves worthy of support by first coming to terms without or only with a reduced level of such support. If caring as a reference point for enhancing social solidarity in highly differentiated societies is not to lead to a return to charity and philanthropy, it needs to be integrated into structural supports and guarantees such as they were part of the project of establishing social citizenship in modern welfare states. 'Taking care of a child, an older person, or an immigrant is always an act that has highly political implications in as much as it is embedded in a wider value structure that either implies maintaining or even increasing the dependence of a person in need and hence leads to an erosion of human dignity or seeks to redress such imbalances and leads to inclusion. Furthering capabilities relies on an arrangement of material, legal, and normative conditions that are necessary to allow the flourishing of individual well-being (Otto & Schäfer, 2014). Bringing together those conditions and connecting them to the individual problem situation is indeed the task of experts and requires the careful, comprehensive, and scientific study of change processes that characterize human communities under the conditions of modernity. Whenever such a methodological approach succeeds, the two divergent aspirations of modernity, of individual autonomy and of social and legal equality, are being held together quite practically instead of appearing as oppositional alternatives as neoliberal dogma affirms.

The necessity to arrive at a comprehensive assessment of people's needs and of resources and methods needed to satisfy them is also reflected in Ed Mullen's insistence on an interdisciplinary approach to evidence-based practice, or constructing evidence from the following considerations for corresponding decision-making processes:

> With decision-making at the center, consideration is to be given to the best available evidence: (1) about benefits, harms, and costs of alternative interventions; (2) client system characteristics, needs, state, preferences, and values; (3) resources required and available including practitioner expertise and

> experience as well as team and organizational resources; and (4) relevant environmental and organizational variables. For informed decision-making then, evidence is required about variables in each of these information domains. (Mullen, 2015, p. 3)

All these dimensions are held together by ethical considerations that subject criteria of effectiveness to a critical examination of the wider implications of interventions, which might adversely impinge on the dignity of individuals and their rights. The end must never justify the means—a fascination with technical means of achieving results in modernity has all too often led to Kant's categorical imperative being ignored and people being treated against their will and their best interest. The debate on evidence in social work is an opportunity to affirm this profession's ethical commitment, professional competence, and critical political competence.

References

Bohleber, W. (2013). The concept of intersubjectivity in psychoanalysis: Taking critical stock. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, *94*, 799–823. doi:10.1111/1745-8315.12021

Bollnow, O. F. (1980). Herman Nohl and pedagogy. *Western European Education*, *12*, 89–106. doi:10.2753/EUE1056-4934120189

Durkheim, É. (1893/1964). *The division of labor in society*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Herder and Herder.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Ginsburg, E. L. (1940). Freud's contribution to the philosophy and practice of social work. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *10*, 877–879. doi:10.1111/j.1939-0025.1940.tb05759.x

Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, T. W. (1944/1994). *Dialectic of enlightenment*. New York, NY: Continuum.

Humphreys, R. (1995). *Sin, organized charity and the poor law in Victorian England*. Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Macmillan Press.

Kaufmann, F.-X. (2013). *Thinking about social policy: The German tradition*. Berlin, Germany: Springer-Verlag.

Keck, T. R. (1971). *Paul Natorp and the idea for a social pedagogy* (Master's thesis). University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI.

Koengeter, S., & Schroeer, W. (2013). Variations of social pedagogy: Explorations of the transnational settlement movement. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *21*, 42. Retrieved from http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/1309

Lorenz, W. (2006). *Perspectives on European social work: From the birth of the nation state to the impact of globalisation*. Leverkusen, Germany: Barbara Budrich.

Lorenz, W. (2008). Paradigms and politics: Understanding methods paradigms in an historical context: The case of social pedagogy. *British Journal of Social Work*, *38*, 625–644. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcn025

Lorenz, W. (2012). Hermeneutics and accountable practice: Lessons from the history of social work. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *22*, 492–498. doi:10.1177/1049731512444167

Mill, J. S. (1859/2003). *On liberty*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Mullen, E. J. (2014). Evidence-based knowledge in the context of social practice. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, *42*(13, Suppl.), 59–73. doi:10.1177/1403494813516714

Mullen, E. J. (2015). Reconsidering the "idea" of evidence in evidence-based policy and practice. *European Journal of Social Work*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/13691457.2015.1022716

Natorp, P. (1899/1968). Erziehung und Gemeinschaft: Sozialpädagogik. In H. Röhrs (Ed.), *Die Sozialpädagogik und ihre Theorie* (pp. 1–10). Frankfurt, Germany: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft.

Nau, H. H. (2000). Gustav Schmoller's historico-ethical political economy: Ethics, politics and economics in the younger German historical school, 1860-1917. *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, *7*, 507–531. doi:10.1080/09672560050210098

Nietzsche, F. (1886/1966). *Beyond good and evil*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Nussbaum, M. (2003). Capabilities as fundamental entitlements: Sen and social justice. *Feminist Economics*, *9*, 33–59. doi:10.1080/1354570022000077926

Otto, H.-U., & Schäfer, S. (Eds.). (2014). *New approaches towards the 'good life': Applications and transformations of the capability approach*. Opladen, Berlin: Barbara Budrich.

Payne, M. (2005). *The origins of social work: Continuity and change*. Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.

Penna, S., & O'Brien, M. (2009). Neoliberalism. In M. Gray & S. A. Webb (Eds.), *Social work theories and methods* (pp. 109–118). London, United Kingdom: Sage.

Petrie, P. (2013). Social pedagogy in the UK: Gaining a firm foothold? *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *21*, 31. Retrieved from http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/1339

Rawls, J. (1996). *Political liberalism*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Reyer, J. (2002). *Kleine Geschichte der Sozialpädagogik: Individuum und Gemeinschaft in der Pädagogik der Moderne*. Baltmannsweiler, Germany: Schneider.

Richmond, M. E. (1899). *Friendly visiting among the poor: A handbook for charity workers*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Richmond, M. E. (1917). *Social diagnosis*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Rodger, J. J. (2013). "New capitalism", colonisation and the neo-philanthropic turn in social policy: Applying Luhmann's systems theory to the Big Society project. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, *33*, 725–741. doi:10.1108/IJSSP-02-2013-0022

Scottish Education Department. (1964). *The Kilbrandon report: Children and young persons*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Author.

Scottish Education Department. (1975). *Adult education: The challenge of change*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Author.

Sen, A. (2009). *The idea of justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Siljander, P., Kivelä, A., & Sutinen, A. (Eds.). (2012). *Theories of Bildung and growth: Connections and controversies between continental educational thinking and American pragmatism*. Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense.

Smith, M. (2012). Social pedagogy from a Scottish perspective. *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, *1*, 46–55.

Sorkin, D. (1983). Wilhelm von Humboldt: The theory and practice of self-formation (Bildung), 1791-1810. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, *44*, 55–73. doi:10.2307/2709304

Soydan, H. (1999). *The history of ideas in social work*. Birmingham, United Kingdom: Venture Press.

Soydan, H. (2012). Understanding social work in the history of ideas. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *22*, 468–480. doi:10.1177/1049731512441262

Steinmetz, G. (1993). *Regulating the social: The welfare state and local politics in imperial Germany*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Sünker, H., & Otto, H.-U. (Eds.). (1997). *Education and fascism: Political identity and social education in Nazi Germany*. London, United Kingdom: Falmer Press.

Wright, S. (2001). Activating the unemployed: The street-level implementation of UK policy. In J. Clasen (Ed.), *What future for Social Security? Debates and reforms in national and cross-national perspective* (pp. 235–250). Bristol, United Kingdom: Policy Press.

Ziliak, S. T. (2004). Self-reliance before the welfare state: Evidence from the charity organization movement in the United States. *Journal of Economic History*, *64*, 433–461. doi:10.1017/S002205070400275X