Beyond objectivity and subjectivity: the transformative potential of social pedagogical research

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Abstract
Research in the field of pedagogy, particularly pedagogy in social contexts, is confronted with a constant dilemma concerning its methodological research paradigms and the relationship between research and practice. The following reflections seek to demonstrate that rather than this being a specific issue of this discipline which would constitute an inferior academic status, the dilemma has wider significance for contemporary research approaches. Research approaches need to be conceptualised in relation to their wider social and political context and overcome the polarisation between subjectivity and objectivity. Reflecting on the social dimension and responsibility of pedagogy can give a lead in this regard.

Keywords: Action research; Child welfare; Educational research; Evidence based practice; Social pedagogy.

Resumen
Más allá de la objetividad y la subjetividad: el potencial transformador de la investigación pedagógica social

La investigación en el campo de la pedagogía, particularmente la pedagogía en contextos sociales, se enfrenta a un dilema constante con respecto a sus paradigmas de investigación metodológica y la
relación entre investigación y práctica. Las siguientes reflexiones buscan demostrar que, en lugar de ser un tema específico de esta disciplina que constituiría un estatus académico inferior, el dilema tiene un significado más amplio para los enfoques de investigación contemporáneos. Los enfoques de investigación deben conceptualizarse en relación con su contexto social y político más amplio y superar la polarización entre subjetividad y objetividad. Reflexionar sobre la dimensión social y la responsabilidad de la pedagogía puede dar una pista en este sentido.

Palabras clave: Investigación-acción; Bienestar infantil; Investigación educativa; Práctica basada en evidencia; Pedagogía social.

**Historical considerations**

Education in all its contexts, whether in official educational institutions or in informal learning situations and settings, has the inalienable function in modern societies of contributing not only to the cognitive and skills improvements of individuals, but also of making a contribution to the overall cohesion and solidarity of society. This objective found expression in the introduction of compulsory schooling policies which the newly emerging nation states regarded as a political priority in the wake of the industrial revolution in the 19th century. It is also reflected in civil society movements of the period for the improvement of living conditions of the working classes by means of self-initiated learning projects\(^1\). Examples of the latter developments are the numerous educational activities instigated by the work-

ers’ movements in different countries in the form of evening classes and people’s education institutions with topics that were of immediate relevance to the learners\(^2\). Best known examples of these initiatives are the Settlement Movements in industrial inner cities like London, Manchester and Chicago, where leading intellectuals and students from privileged university backgrounds dedicated their time and knowledge to collaborative learning projects with local communities as their contribution to the reduction of class barriers\(^3\). The movement left permanent traces in the adult education and evening institute structures that characterised Northern European countries in particular and which follow a broad political agenda of furthering social integration\(^4\).

On the side of formal compulsory schooling, the educational agenda also had political implications. Here discipline and punctuality were ‘values’ to be instilled in the young citizens of the emerging nation states, together with a commitment to a shared national heritage in language and culture. This was directly related to maintaining a disciplined regime of factory production and subduing disorder and revolutionary unrest in industrial centres where people were thrown together


from very different cultural backgrounds without traditional social affiliations.

This dual perspective on educational processes in modern nation states draws attention to the pervasive presence of normative and particularly political agendas in the educational endeavours. This is mirrored in the search for the theoretical grounding of learning and teaching practices through modern scientific endeavors as well as in the cases of other modern professions like medicine or psychology.

Early educationalists like Carl Philipp Moritz in Germany demanded by 1783 ‘facts, not moralistic claptrap’, indicating that politicians tried to influence scientific research ideologically or to use it instrumentally to achieve narrowly defined learning goals. ‘Pure science’ represented the ideal that factual observations in terms of a value-neutral analysis of different forms of practice, using the empiricist principles of science in the tradition of Hume, would deliver the most effective teaching methods. But this approach could never be absolutely ‘neutral’; the rationalist-idealist principles derived from philosophical exponents of the enlight-


enment, and principally Kant, which praise the role of education in the perfection of human nature, always contained notions of ‘betterment’ and ‘civilising’ as the aim of schooling applied to the needs of industrialising societies. It was frequently the reliance on positivist models that opened the door to political (mis-)use of research in the interest of a control agenda, in education as in other disciplines like psychiatry.

This became evident early on, for instance, when the introduction of psychology, a science which then rose to academic status, caused a split in the pedagogical underpinning of school education in American educational research. After the departure of John Dewey from Chicago University, who had developed his interactive, democratic approach to learning processes, Charles Judd, an educationalist with a strict quantitative and positivist approach to science, defined the course of educational research in this tradition with an increasing reliance on behaviourist psychology and hence a positivist agenda, and this had a lasting influence on official school programmes in the USA.

John Dewey left his own mark on the history of pedagogical sciences in the area of adult and informal education. He strove to combine his own empirical (and indeed biographical) knowledge of (community) educational processes, gained through his contact with the Chicago Settlement Movement, with a philosophical and sociological orientation towards an explicitly polit-

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ically committed approach to education. He promoted the phenomenological tradition with its emphasis on inter-subjectivity as the key to using research for transformative processes, not just in learners but in society. Instead of delivering the mere cultural reproduction of society, Dewey charges education with the task of fostering the learners’ capacities of forming integrated communities. In the face of the disruption of social bonds through industrialisation, Dewey states: «... the conception of the school-as-a-social-center is born of our entire democratic movement. Everywhere we see signs of the growing recognition that the community owes to each of its members the fullest opportunity for development»\(^{10}\).

Other pedagogical protagonists whose methodological considerations grew directly from involvement in the practice field, such as Friedrich Fröbel in Germany or Maria Montessori in Italy, also built their theoretical frames in the form of critical evaluations of existing practice and can therefore be regarded as exponents of inductive educational social theory formation (see Montessori’s ardent critique of the ‘School of scientific pedagogy’ spreading at the time in Milan\(^{11}\)). They could achieve this by emphasising the enlightenment ideal of liberation from external constraints as the key to meaningful and effective learning processes as opposed to the disregard for the subjective personhood of the learner represented in mechanical and in-


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Instrumental pedagogical approaches. The implication of this inductive approach was that these empirical pedagogues were not constrained by the disciplinary boundaries that structured the academic landscape. Instead, their work was geared towards promoting new forms of pedagogical practice in the context of a particular alternative vision of society and thus, it also had an essential interdisciplinary character. This also meant that their work and their theoretical reflections implied a transformative political agenda.

These initial reflections demonstrate that in the history of modern pedagogy there exists an intricate inter-dependence between social and political developments on the one side and theoretical paradigms on the other, with corresponding polarisations in both contexts. The methodological divisions did not only concern different pedagogical goals, one oriented towards the transmission of a fixed stock of knowledge and values that had to be transmitted, the other towards an experiential, interactive process of learning which prepared the ground for development and innovation; they also implied divergent notions of solidarity in society. The former presupposed that entitlements in society had to be earned by achievements and adjustment to existing norms, the latter was democratic in the sense that basic entitlements of belonging to a community or political entity had to provide the ground on which different ethnic and cultural identities could be negotiated. Theories in the latter tradition also proposed an

educational approach in which the emergent national identities as objects of (socio-)pedagogical efforts would not exclude but would instead accommodate cultural diversity as a source of transformative enrichment. All this indicates that in taking a particular theoretical stance, professionals are also taking a position on the political context and contributing to giving it direction as part of their wider pedagogical task.

Modern anxieties between liberation and control

The hypothesis for the following reflections is that pedagogy today, in all its practice contexts of school, family, and even community, is under pressure to reduce or relinquish its explicit social responsibility in lieu of a functional understanding of ‘education’. Educational processes, however, always take place at the interface between individual and communal interests, and this implicates the realm of ‘the social’. Currently prevailing political agendas and pressures point in the direction of a one-sided emphasis on individual efforts and gains in the shape of achievements, the transmission of technical know-how or the activation of a person’s own resources. They also tend to favour research on performance-enhancing didactic and social approaches and encourage professionals to orient their practice on such research in the name of ‘evidence based practice’.

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The background to this are politics that directly and indirectly seek to weaken solidarity structures and arrangements in society and cancel the welfare state consensus in the name of neo-liberalism\textsuperscript{14}. When research uncritically pursues projects aimed predominantly on performance enhancement and behaviour adjustment, it is in danger of playing into the hands of these policies. However, confronting these trends by fundamentally questioning the link between research and practice would allow pedagogues to maintain a research approach that has a transformative quality and thereby fulfil their fundamental pedagogical mandate in view of rapid global changes that are inimical to those principles.

These political changes happen in the context of and contribute to a renewed phase of ‘disembedding’ as Giddens\textsuperscript{15} characterised the process of modernisation generally and which occurs in a more pronounced way in this phase of modernity which Bauman termed ‘liquid modernity’\textsuperscript{16}. Social relationship patterns that would have given people their place in society and in private contexts are becoming increasingly diversified and are the subject of personal choices. Market economics exhort people to be flexible concerning their career choices; marriage patterns change towards temporary commitments; personal identity characteristics, including


gender categories, become ‘projects’ people have to actively pursue and shape rather than accept as simply ‘given’\textsuperscript{17}. This trend even includes the transformation of the body as a kind of last frontier of biological determination that has to be ‘flexibilised’ and individualised through tattoos, beauty operations and sex change operations.

These developments are driven by a combination of political and economic factors. After the fall of communism in the years following 1989, and with the advance of economic globalisation, collective approaches to social integration and solidarity assumed a negative ring in politics\textsuperscript{18} and were substituted with appeals to enterprise, self-assertion and personal rational choice. These openings are on the one hand being welcomed and praised as the culmination of the emancipatory achievements of modernity and as liberation from the constraints imposed by traditional social conventions and political strictures. On the other hand, they bring with them increased insecurities as people are incapable of coping with the pressure to make constant choices or do not have the means to realise such lifestyles of choice. This leads to a backlash in the form of nationalism and essentialism, including racism, which emerge as expressions of the search for

\textsuperscript{17} Cfr. A. Giddens, \textit{op. cit.}

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seemingly fixed and secure reference points for belonging and identity\textsuperscript{19}.

This uncertainty manifests itself simultaneously at the political and at the personal level. Boundaries are constantly being questioned and opened up physically and mentally or tightened in the wake of globalisation. Independence movements like in Catalonia or Brexit in the UK are symptomatic in this regard, as are fences on national borders. Social networks and the clamour for belonging and for popularity in the face of largely anonymous ‘communities’ exemplify this ambiguous trend further. In such virtual communities ‘belonging’ essential and young people in particular invest a lot of effort and time in creating a distinct profile that causes ‘followings’, but at the same time it is also totally ephemeral and contingent as friendships can be cancelled with a swipe on the touchscreen\textsuperscript{20}.

\textit{Can practice be ‘value neutral’?}

Social work, social pedagogy and to an extent school pedagogy as well have become drawn into this polarisation in many ways as the work invariably touches on issues of identity, belonging and solidarity and therefore has to confront issues of cultural diversi-


ty ever more acutely under the impact of globalisation\textsuperscript{21}. The historical dilemmas mentioned above present themselves in these fields with renewed urgency. Professionals are faced with the alternative: Do they take a particular social order or a given social structure and the prevailing values as largely given and strive to enable ‘learners’ to best come to terms with such realities? In this case they would seek to apply the most effective techniques available to achieve those given objectives and a corresponding sense of belonging based on such criteria. Or, they seek to engage in change processes and to create ‘learning partnerships’ that address the prevailing uncertainties in a spirit of openness towards conflicting normative assumptions and seek to strengthen the sense of belonging through active participation in finding a negotiated consensus instead of passive adjustment.

One acute example of the pressure to reach certainty is the area of child welfare or, rather, child protection, in the face of much greater public awareness being given to the vulnerability of children in care situations\textsuperscript{22}. Here, the identification of universal criteria of manifest risk factors and corresponding safe conditions for children in families and in substitute care settings is an important tool, and much progress has been made in establishing clear indications of harm for children.


dren which had previously not been given the appropriate attention\(^\text{23}\). Harmful practices can be diagnosed using objective criteria of evidence and cannot be excused with reference to culturally varying norms and values. At the same time, the culturally determined practices surrounding a child’s upbringing form an important part of his or her identity, ranging from dress and eating habits to forms of discipline and punishment, and social workers are exhorted to pay attention to their specificity and to act in a ‘culturally sensitive’ way\(^\text{24}\). This cannot be achieved, however, in a mechanical way through regulations, as was the case in a first reaction to demands for culturally sensitive practice in the UK in the 1980s when as a consequence of the ‘turn towards identity’ black children, who had been happily cared for by white foster parents, were often removed to black families for fear of the negative impact on their search for identity\(^\text{25}\).

What this example shows is that the split between having to base practice solely on objectifying, largely positivist research results or on those approaches which emphasise cultural relativity can lead to paralysis and indecision. In order to overcome this paralysis,


it is important to recognise that the polarisation between universalist and individualist perspectives has a political agenda and the context-detached bifurcation between objectivity and subjectivity is fruitless. Only when researchers and practitioners take factors of ideological interests and power into consideration and take critical position towards them can they avoid their findings and practice decisions becoming instrumentalised in support of particular interests and ideologies. Insisting on ‘value neutrality’ with reference to scientific detachment and objective evidence is justified, but could also provide ammunition for policies which intend the exact opposite of what the research was trying to demonstrate.

This can be illustrated by research on young people leaving residential care institutions. On the one hand, empirical research has accumulated sufficient evidence that shows the crucial importance of structural factors in giving young people entering adult life a chance for independence. Suitable housing and work conditions, access to further education resources and generally access to social capital play a crucial role, as do procedural factors such as continuity and stability of relationships with significant others. On the other hand, studies on resilience demonstrate that some young people with the appropriate psychological disposition can confront adverse conditions successfully and find

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their own pathway to independence despite considerable structural obstacles\textsuperscript{28}. But in practice, the reference to resilience can be politically exploited to reduce or deny care-leavers the resources needed to become independent, just as the automatic provision of structural assistance can lead to these young people doubting their personal abilities.

\textit{Achieving certainty through ‘evidence’ from research?}

Two main drivers for this divisive development can be distinguished on the side of current research trends in the social professions. One is the now widespread preoccupation with “evidence-based practice” (EBP), which in itself seems to have two roots. The ‘pull’ from within the social professions themselves stems from the aforementioned comparison with academic disciplines like medicine and psychology, which have achieved greater public recognition through the adoption of a clear natural science orientation in research and have widely adopted the EBP approach\textsuperscript{29}. Here, the pragmatic examination of results of empirical studies which statistically evidence the efficiency of various therapies has now more or less superseded the adherence to particular ‘schools of medicine’. Instead, the positivist research approach declares double blind


randomised tests as the ‘gold standard’ for what can count as evidence because they can ensure the highest degree of causal correlations between measures taken and outcomes achieved. Single case studies or qualitative research findings occupy the opposite end of the scale. Websites such as the Cochrane Library\textsuperscript{30} or the Campbell Collaboration\textsuperscript{31} give easy access to compilations of studies concerning the effectiveness of treatment approaches and such sites proliferate also for the social professions\textsuperscript{32}. Practising on the basis of such research-proven evidence promises to provide security in professional decision-making which has come under intense public scrutiny\textsuperscript{33}, and thereby protection from the risk of litigation which is looming in all professional fields.

The ‘push’ factor for the adaption of EBP arises from the service agency side and the increasing demand that professional practice should substantiate its claim to accountability with reference to scientifically documented effectiveness. Principles of New Public Management in the human service sector including social services and education promote these approach-

\textsuperscript{30} https://www.cochranelibrary.com/
\textsuperscript{31} https://www.campbellcollaboration.org/library.html
es. In pursuit of cost-effectiveness the ability to rationally distinguish between various intervention types forms the budgetary justification of a planned intervention.

This preoccupation with certainty has however the paradoxical sociological effect of producing a greater awareness of the always still remaining risks in what Ulrich Beck characterised as “Risk Society”. The preference for the use of ‘evidence’ derived from quantitative empirical studies underlines both the vulnerability of people living in complex modern societies and the limitations of methods of prevention and intervention, particularly in the social realm. Every new epidemic, (like HIV, Bird-Flu, Ebola or the Zika Virus) triggers a crisis of public confidence and a search not just for causes but also for culprits who have caused or failed to prevent the disease. At the psychological level for instance the exponential growth of diagnoses of ADHS (Attention deficiency hyperactivity syndrome) among school pupils and the corresponding prescriptions of

\[34\text{ Cfr. S. Waslander - C. Pater - M. van der Weide, Markets in education: An analytical review of empirical research on market mechanisms in education, OECD Education Working Papers, 52, 2010.}\]


Ritalin can also be attributed in part to this spiralling link between seeking to master uncertainty scientifically and the realisation that ‘treatment’ can cause secondary complications of stigma, exclusion and loss of agency.

*Research that values subjectivity*

It is therefore not surprising that the efforts to use positive research to reach certainty ‘objectively’ have been greeted with a great deal of skepticism by a critical part of the scientific and professional community, especially in the humanities. This led to a corresponding counter-movement to EBP and the re-affirmation of research traditions that place more emphasis on subjective meanings that people attribute to their life circumstances such as poverty, deprivation or violence. This approach to research echoes the growing strength of citizen and user movements in terms of self-representation, but it also links with an historical core principle of social work and pedagogical practice, referred to above, which is to pay attention to the personhood of the client or learner and his or her capacity for ‘agency’\(^\text{37}\). This recently gave a strong impetus in social work research discourses to ‘de-objectify the research subjects’ (i.e. clients) and to enlist them directly in the research process\(^\text{38}\) and particularly to understand


\(^{38}\) Cfr. P. Cotterell, *Exploring the value of service user involvement in data analysis: ‘our interpretation is about what lies below the*
the meaning they attribute to various dimensions of their condition\textsuperscript{39}. A showcase edition of current social work research\textsuperscript{40} illustrates that participative research models are gaining great credibility and that the role of the practitioner as researcher is not an inferior version of research that thereby would risk losing objectivity but can be witness to the immediacy of processes which do not become apparent ‘from a distance’. These developments underline the importance of social research as a means of giving voice to people\textsuperscript{41} who in view of the inequality of power built into research (and service) arrangements would otherwise be subsumed under categories and perspectives over which they had no control\textsuperscript{42}.

A second factor in the critique of positivist research models was skepticism concerning the power assertions implied in objectifying scientific epistemologies. Discourses in the line of post-modern deconstruction since the 1980s also came to assert in social


work and social pedagogy the value of the diversity of knowledge sources that can and have to be utilised in conducting practice-relevant research\(^4\). New ontologies advocated ‘situated knowledge’\(^4\) as ‘the recognition that knowledge is grounded, embodied, contextual, partial, complex and based on engagement and interconnections rather than on disembodiment and transcendence’\(^5\).

**Critique of idealising subjectivity**

All the wider social, economic and political developments referred to above emphasise subjectivity. Thus, individual agency, diversity and relativity have a bearing on social research and the way it is applied in practice, and this context has to be taken into consideration when evaluating this line of research. Participative and human agency promoting approaches to research must be subjected to the same critical scrutiny and should be seen in this wider social and political context before such research trends are idealised as indisputable alternatives to an over-emphasis on objectivity as evidence. Giving greater importance to the views of service users, when practised in a political


context shaped by neoliberal ideologies, can also implicitly or explicitly be used as justification of social policies that curtail welfare benefits and limit user entitlements and rights in order to enforce personal initiative instead of giving structural aid. Poor educational achievements can then be attributed to insufficient effort and commitment on the part of the learner or the parents, and research that highlights ‘wrong’ personal preferences or lack of motivation can supply the element of ‘personal agency’ to justify policies that leave it to the efforts by individuals to overcome adversity or achieve better educational results. As Böhnisch and Schröer noted, the emphasis on agency and self-help in social work research can easily be turned into a precondition for marginalised people gaining any recognition in society\textsuperscript{46}.

Overcoming the split between objectifying and personalising approaches to socio-pedagogical research therefore does not so much call for a compromise, as in the classical form of triangulation methods as the combination of quantitative and qualitative data; rather it requires a comprehensive understanding of professional responsibility in the area of social relationships, which means constantly negotiating the borders between private ‘troubles’ and public concerns\textsuperscript{47} and relating both aspects to each other.


Transformative research approaches and their value for practice

The polarisation between those contrasting research paradigms operating with either notions of objectivity or of subjectivity is ultimately an indication of a growing inability to conceptualise and constructively engage with the social dimension of human existence. This social dimension is primarily characterised by complexity and constant interaction which means that this vital attribute is at risk of being ‘squeezed out’ between an over-deterministic, regulatory perspective of social life and an under-determined, boundary- and structure-less reliance on individualism. Both the insistence on objectivity and the celebration of relativity can destroy the basis of solidarity, which, as Richard Rorty has famously argued in his lecture ‘Objectivity or Solidarity?’, requires a collective commitment: «For now the question is not about how to define words like “truth” or “rationality” or “knowledge” or “philosophy”, but about what self-image our society should have of itself».

It is the central consequence of living under the conditions of modernity that what constitutes ‘the social’ cannot be taken for granted but has to be communally and communicatively constructed, whereby ‘the social’ means the networks of social bonds that constitute sustainable social units. Ultimately, as can be seen

from the historical sketch at the outset, all public educational efforts converge on making the transmission of knowledge and skills pay a social dividend and all social work interventions have to do with actual or threatened social bond disruptions, whether they are primarily of a personal kind as in intimate kinship relations or at a group or political level, where owing to poverty, discrimination or exclusion a person’s terms of ‘fully belonging’ have been called into question. Taking care of the social dimension amounts to a search for that which is binding among people. Methodological considerations in these professional fields, whether in practice or in research, are therefore immediately linked to ethical questions which in turn form part of cultural and political conventions that define the validity of such norms.

Facing up to this task involves a transformative process at the theoretical and the practice level and not simply a reproductive orientation in the sense of fitting new challenges into existing patterns. Social work and pedagogy as academic disciplines illustrate that when considering knowledge in the context of human relationships attention to processes of change and hence a transformative approach to research is required. Every person’s developmental course over a lifetime needs to

combine the necessity of assimilation and accommodation to given realities with that of engaging with and changing those realities and in the process transforming the self while also ensuring its continuity.

Tuning into these processes in research and professional practice means going beyond establishing objective facts and causal connections, but also going beyond merely stating the subjectivity and relativity of a variety of perspectives and opinions on those facts without making a commitment in terms of consolidating relationships with the persons to whom such data should matter. Pure data, even when confirmed through numerous trials, is a mere starting point and has to be brought into lived contexts, especially the prevailing political contexts through critical reflections, and into relationships, particularly those that engage those about whom the issues investigated are concerned and to enlist them in a negotiation over the meaning of such findings.

Against a naïve assumption of universalism and a glib reference to relativity and subjectivity, it is proposed here that a ‘radicalised’ version of phenomenological epistemology could point the way, based on the methodological tradition of action research\(^{52}\). This approach constructs a dynamic circle between theory and practice, between giving voice to people and framing their meanings within concrete structural conditions\(^{53}\).


Its core principle is that every process of research in a social context, just like every social work intervention, operates with an implicit or explicit act of recognition, which has an essential bearing on the findings. This means that knowledge and meaning, rather than being placed at an absolute, timeless and universal level, or being reduced to the relativity of a single individual’s biography or situation, contain an appeal to validity that has to be reflected upon and endorsed in specific societal contexts. Knowledge, established with an orientation towards truth, becomes binding through collective processes of reflexivity, and pursuing this objective requires a transformative learning process. It ties the single situation and the needs of an individual to concerns over what are binding values for that person in a sustainable community, be that the family, the classroom, the residential community or the political structures.

Concluding examples of socially committed research

Illustrating this with research in the area of child welfare and protection, the contribution of the applied social and pedagogical researcher must not stop at the point where regularities have been established that constitute objective indicators as to when a child is at

risk. In many countries this has led to procedural over-regulation of the actions of social workers and educators which constrains their actual professional competences and alienates those who are meant to benefit\textsuperscript{55}. Research needs to go beyond establishing these indicators and explore and promote ways for such knowledge to be made relevant to parents and caretakers whose behaviour towards children is inappropriate. Only then can those indicators trigger a transformative process between the actors and institutions involved. In this way social workers and educators are afforded the space to negotiate new, constructive boundaries of acceptable behaviour with those concerned, such as children, parents, teachers, fellow professionals and the judicial system. They are all participants in a learning process which, although at times very painful and with uncertain outcomes, establishes and re-orders social relationships in a realistic and binding way.

Similar research strategies are being developed in the area of disability and mental health where the dilemma is particularly acute between categorising people into diagnostic categories (and thereby potentially reducing their range of agency) and over-burdening them with assumptions of autonomy to which a particular person might not match up\textsuperscript{56}. Taking this into account in a research perspective, the tradition of social


pedagogy, now gaining momentum in Europe\textsuperscript{57}, has much to offer. It promotes a process of participative learning in which those competencies that make life in a social entity viable and productive are strengthened. Paul Natorp stated in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century that the learning process cannot be divorced from the community-building process\textsuperscript{58}. Equally for Martin Buber (who was in close correspondence with Natorp) the ‘I’ is always constituted through the encounter with the ‘thou’\textsuperscript{59}, a principle which he elaborated further in his writings on education\textsuperscript{60}. Pedagogical and social research methods have a central role in promoting these social competencies, especially in a political climate which seeks to reduce processes of community formation to matters of individual efforts.

It is this commitment to establishing, safeguarding and fostering social bonds that unites the social professions and is the ultimate goal of a transformative approach to pedagogy. This requires a commitment to an interdisciplinary view of social realities, or rather a


trans-disciplinarity\textsuperscript{61}, which is not merely additive but transformative. The insights from different theoretical perspectives hereby form critical yardsticks with which to question certainties that would otherwise appear, from doing research in isolation, to form the frameworks of other disciplines. This isolates research data from the meaning it might have for those using them in practice. This commitment needs no manifesto, it needs mutual support across the academic and professional communities for sustaining the daily dilemmas, doubts and hopes that accompany the challenging practices pedagogical, social and human sciences are today faced with.

References


\textsuperscript{61} Cfr. P. Cilliers - B. Nicolescu, Complexity and transdisciplinarity - Discontinuity, levels of Reality and the Hidden Third, in «Futures», 44 (8), 2012, pp. 711-718.
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