

Lesson 1 What is social education?

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We will start with the first content block. If you have a look at the Course guide, you will see that the first block concerns to the introduction to the subject. In this first block, we will study and analyze the role of social educators, including the definition of the profession, its meaning and the competencies that a social educator must own.

Specifically, the issues that will be addressed are... (see slide 2). This subject intends you to learn how to communicate with an international audience to explain them the basic notions of Social Education, that is, to make other people understand your profession

Slide 3: Concerning the question about the presence of social educators in other countries: from the sixties and the seventies different European countries have been recognising the figure and competencies of social educators. This recognition has been paired with the emergence of the Welfare state in countries like France, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

Slide 5: The situation depicted in Slide 4 is an example of society's ignorance about what a social educator can do. That's why it's so important that you are able to explain the competencies that you must learn to work as a social educator and the areas in which you can work.

Slide 7: A good question that we can make us is whether social educators help or support other people.

Slide 8: Having a look at the definitions, we can understand that helping means a temporal action, that is, it is not constant. Helping is time bound and involves offering your services or resources, for example, your time, your knowledge, your skills... Instead, supporting someone means giving him or her more constant assistance. When you support someone, you have the intention to make him or her feel more comfortable, more confident, more motivated to face some situation.

Slide 9: Other way to understand both concepts is by looking at the direction from which assistance comes from. In supporting, assistance comes from below. In helping, assistance comes from above. One example of support is a self-help group, where the members support each other. One example of help is a workshop to educate young people on healthy leisure activities.

Slide 10: So far, we have been arguing about the meaning of the profession. In this slide I present a definition of social education. We can define social education as the theory... (as noted in the slide). According to this definition, social education works toward achieving integration of the community, and then it focuses on marginalized and excluded people. The goal is to prevent marginalization by helping and supporting people at risk. Other implication from this definition is that social educators must have some knowledge about psychological and social factors that are associated with people's development, life quality and welfare. An example of psychological factor that influences people's welfare is mental health. An example of social factor is the social support network that a person has.

Slide 11: Other features of social education that define the discipline are:

1. General development: it means that social education intends to improve the social and personal competence of the person. For example, to promote people's physical and mental health, and to improve their education and their employment opportunities.

2. Inclusion into social networks: we have learnt that supporting means assisting people constantly. As social educators, you should work towards achieving that people count with social support provided by the belonging to a social network.

3. Environments for citizenship. Social educators must know and face the mechanisms that produce exclusion and must communicate their knowledge to public authorities. Social educators have the responsibility of changing the social factors that undermine people's general development (for example: economic inequality produces social disadvantages).

4. Mediating actions. Social educators are themselves tools for the intervention: they promote the conditions needed for improving a situation. They define the methods, actions, and contents, and they commit themselves in the interpersonal relationships that they establish.

5. Pedagogical profession. It has its roots in several disciplines related to the humanities, like developmental psychology, social psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Social education connects the analysis of the theory with the practical application of it.

Slide 12: Today we will start with a true or false game. The goal of this game is to check how many things you remember from the last Tuesday lesson. This game is also a way for consolidating your learning about the concepts. Right answers: 1 – False; 2 – True; 3 – False; 4 – True; 5 – False.

Slide 13: As we saw the last day, social education is a profession that receives the contribution of different disciplines (as noted in the slide). This means that social educators must have knowledge from different disciplines, because theories from those disciplines contribute to achieve the goals of social education. For example, a social educator should have notions about the normative psychological development of people in order to design an effective intervention to promote people's development.

Nowadays, social educators work with all kinds of social groups (as noted in the slide). The action field of a social educator is not limited to prevention of problems by intervening in the initial developmental stages (that is, infancy and adolescence); instead, social educators also intervene with at risk groups or groups that need rehabilitation or specific aid for their social inclusion or social reintegration (e. g., inmates, imprisoned people). Then, the work of a social educator targets at primary, secondary and tertiary preventions. Did you know these concepts? What do they mean? They refer to the moment at which a social educator intervenes: before the problem and without risk (e. g.: workshops for positive parenting), just before the problem with an at risk population (e. g.: suicide prevention workshops for adolescents with mental health problems), or after the problem to decrease its impact and consequences (e. g.: interventions with juvenile offenders).

Slide 14: By gathering all the exposed information, we can summarize the goals of social education as indicated in the slide.

Identify and fight against social exclusion: as we saw before, social educators must work to create appropriate environments for full citizenship. They therefore have a responsibility to raise awareness of governors about social exclusion factors and to persuade them to implement positive changes in social policies.

Achieving inclusion for everyone: that is, social educators work to meet the needs of different social groups (as commented, at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of prevention).

Promote a full citizenship: this goal relates to the first one.

Facilitate the means: by using the help and support tools.

Slide 15: Other features of the profession are:

Facilitates the inclusion through social interaction processes. Social educators are a tool for the intervention; when they engage in social interactions, they unfold their knowledge and skills and become a key element for achieving the desired outcomes.

Planned process and goal-oriented: intervention is intentional, that is, social educators design the intervention with the intention of reaching several planned goals.

Ethical effort: social educators base their practice on ethical values and on the acknowledgement of human rights (UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights). In their work, social educators take the responsibility of people's development and understand and respect people's diversity.

Social actions to individuals and groups: social educators intervene with different population sizes.

Slide 16: In connection with the help and support concepts, what a social educator does is to provide people with tools for their empowerment. Through his/her work, a social educator tries to promote people's autonomy, motivation and self-efficacy. For example, social educators help people learn coping strategies and problem-solving skills.

Slide 17: Empowerment refers to... (as noted in the slide). Then, an empowered person may take responsibility for his/her own life.

Slide 18: Social educators make use of different methods (multidimensional methodology) to achieve people's full citizenship.

Slide 19: Social educators usually work in direct contact with few people. Moreover, the contact tends to be frequent and stable (over a long period of time). Due to this direct and frequent contact, social educators get to know very well the users they assist. The educational process occurs in the framework of the interpersonal relationship between the social educator and the users. Due to this close relationship, social educators must commit themselves to his/her work. Commitment is necessary for the intervention to be successful. However, close relationships may entail conflicts, like losing objectivity and mixing the personal and the professional life facets.

Slide 20: This is an example of a frequent mistake during the professional practice.

Slide 21: Examples of competences are... (as noted in the slide). Competences of social educators may be classified in fundamental and central competencies. Let's begin with the fundamental ones.

Slide 22: Intervening: a competent social educator will know how to intervene and will adapt the intervention accordingly to each situation; moreover, he/she will not have to dedicate

too much effort to identify the best way to intervene. This competence improves over time, as a social educator gains professional experience.

Evaluating: a social educator must be able to detect whether the intervention leads to the planned results, assessing if the implemented actions are successful or if, instead, some changes should be carried out.

Reflecting: a social educator should think about his/her professional practice with the goal of improving it. Social educators must be aware of the common problems of their profession and must work to try to solve them. Examples of common problems are: difficulties for making public authorities aware of social exclusion factors; and difficulties during the intervention.

Slide 23: central competencies are more specific than the fundamental ones and are related to the conditions of the social education practice. We can identify several central competencies, as noted in the slide.

Slide 24: Personal and relational competence is crucial in social educational work. Social educators should be empathetic people/emphatic people. Another personal competence is conscientiousness: it means to be a scrupulous/meticulous/careful/responsible person.

Slide 25: The relationship between the social educator and his/her users is not symmetrical. It is a relation of power where the social educator is the power holder. Social educators must know how to manage their power because it could be destructive. For a good power management, social educators must be aware of their own values, norms and views. Social educators must work according to ethical codes and values.

Slide 26: this piece of news represents a likely example of mixing personal and professional life. Moreover, we should analyse it considering ethical codes.

Slide 27: social educators do not work on their own. In their work they must interact with other colleagues, the users, parents, the authorities... Social educators work in teams, so they must have skills to collaborate and work with different agents. Social educators must be prepared to work in areas where there is not always harmony and agreement (e.g., with public authorities and politicians). Moreover, social educators must have several competencies (communicative, theoretical, practical and methodological) to do different tasks. Finally, as social educators work in interdisciplinary teams, they must know specific terminology of related professions (like psychologists).

Slide 28: social educators must adapt their language to the characteristics of the individual. Moreover, they perform as counsellors, which means that they provide with guidance, and they give advice.

Slide 29: a social educator must know the context in which he/she works and must be able to relate to it. The context includes the community, the public system, the political agenda, other professional groups and the users. Moreover, social educators must know how bureaucracy works.

Slide 30: social educators must work for the continuous development of their competencies; in that way, they can work for the development of solutions and methods.