THE SEMINAR: THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE FOR SOCIAL EDUCATORS
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“... Man, therefore, becomes man through his own actions, that is, through his choices and decisions”
Jose Luis López Aranguren

WHAT IS A SEMINAR?
The word seminar comes from the Latin word “seminarium” which means nursery, plantation. Moreover, we find other meanings among which we point out the word seeder. A seminar is the place where the seminator, the farmer, throws away the seeds to be able to germinate and grow plants. For example, a seminar on philosophy is certainly an educational ground but the training, going back to its original meaning we are talking here, only reaches its maximum expression if the plant grows by itself. What is separated from this conceptualization will be something closer to information than to education.

What is really a seminar? It is the place where the worker throws away the seeds, water and fertilizer so that plants will grow, absorb naturally the elements that are given. They grow thanks to the care they received, but above all, and extrapolating it to the educational ground that will be here described, they grow thanks to their own effort.

This metaphor allows us to understand that a seminar is opposed, by definition, to a lecturing class. The participants of a seminar must attend and be responsible for their own education. The seminar organizer must be concerned that the work becomes productive, that it follows a good direction. Thus, adequate communication is dialogue rather than monologue.

The experience we here present has been taking place for seven years at the School for Social Education (EUES) – Pere Tarrés – of the Universitat Ramon Llull.

Our school is a university college characterized by, and at the same differentiated from, other colleges because of the personal attention given to the students.

This attention given to the students is focused on two aspects:
1. Academic development, taking a wide understanding of the concept.
2. Personal development, related to the behavioral aspects manifested in the seminar.

The main objective of the first aspect is providing elements, from life as well as reflective ones, in order to develop social action from a transformational approach.

In the behavioral aspect, we tend to emphasize more the normative or deontological aspects held by social education professionals than issues on fundamental ethics.

In order to achieve the mentioned objectives, begun as a diploma course, we designed a space for research and development that we called Seminar, one in which the educational emphasis is found in the

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3 A space where, as P. Feire said: the educational practice must not be limited only to the “interpretation of the word and of text” but must also include the “interpretation of the context and of the world.” (Freire, P. (1997). A la sombra de este árbol (In the shadow of this tree). Ed. El Roure. Barcelona. p.34.)
dialogic possibilities it offers. The exchange of ideas, points of view, observations, bibliographic data, etc., can take place in this space. Therefore, this is the place to find both the theoretical and the practical foundations of socio-educational interventions.

As mentioned, the term *Seminar* has been used in all kind of teaching and in almost all the periods in history. In EUES we particularly start from a idea found in Gramsci's work. From this author’s perspective, we can define a *Seminar* as an educational space in which through the literature, tutoring sessions, egalitarian dialogue, research, and discussions on the information obtained, we construct common knowledge. This knowledge is thus based on communicative action (J. Habermas), an action that requires an ideal speech situation. To promote this situation is not an easy job, although a good way of doing it is by promoting methodological agreements from the very group together with the person or tutor who co-ordinates, thus establishing agreements on working tasks, on top of discussions, and on schedules, as well as on its contents and procedures.

In the chapter dedicated to procedures, it is important to bear in mind in what the historical period our educational action falls. We have lived an important social change from the Industrial Society to Information Society. Therefore, education must fit in this fundamental change especially when we talk about people’s education that has an objective of overcoming social inequalities. Such education should lead to the knowledge of how to select, handle, create and disseminate information. And all this is just one more resource, both personal and professional, that can be transferred to other groups of people with whom they will work.

Another characteristic that we would like to emphasize is the possibility of including all voices in the educational act. Many professionals from the field of education talk about the students’ lack of motivation and the apathy that characterizes this epoch in comparison to a better past. We believe that it is important to put all the means and efforts together in creating opportunities and not to succumb to the stagnant culture of complaining. We believe that the interpersonal dialogue, which allows for contributions from all the group’s perspectives, leads to a motivational increase that promotes the development of knowledge and resources for social action.

The seminar\(^4\) is developed throughout the 3-year program, and although the parts that compose it are totally differentiated, they share complementary goals. In this way, we prevent fragmentation of knowledge. We thus reach a *corpus* that combines the acquisition of both theoretical and practical elements of the social educator’s professional work with a reflection process on the attitudes and values these professionals must take into consideration in the development of their work.

All this is carried out in small groups, of a maximum of 15 students and one tutor, usually a person related to the practice of social education. This is done as to do not lose the close and complementary relation between theory and practice.

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\(^4\) As we will explain much later, the students of the diploma course during the 3 year program take a total of 6 seminars.
THE FIRST YEAR SEMINAR (Seminar I and II)

The Spanish educational system, within higher education, divides the academic year into two semesters, each one consisting of four months and a break that can last from two weeks up to a month. During break time takes place the evaluation of those contents taught up to date. The First Year Seminar is also divided into two semesters of three sessions of two hour class each, although both are absolutely related and not necessarily separated in time. These seminar sessions must develop introductory contents, due the nature of students' profile (the majority are between 18 and 21 and with a limited and informal experience in the field of social education). Contents, thus, focus on:

1. Contextualization and conceptualization of social education as a scientific discipline.
2. The Welfare State, from its origin to its crisis and reformulation.
3. The social educator’s professional role.
4. Characteristics of the areas of intervention of these professionals, studied from two different perspectives: age sectors and citizen assistance networks.
5. Social needs, studied also from two perspectives: its nature and its identification.
6. Data analysis and the formulation of hypothesis.
7. Implementation of an instrument for the knowledge of reality.
8. Attitudes related to responsibility and group work.

Although basically the contents have not changed throughout the seven years (eight, including the current one) the way of acquiring them and the procedures used for such goal did change. In the beginning, the acquisition of knowledge was carried out through a process marked by some direct instruction, but as the seminar and the contents developed and gained experience, the learning process became one of self-management. This has been possible because of a maturation process of the responsible persons of each seminar group, the tutors who know and master the group dynamics and work contents and who possess enough tools to guarantee students the best way of acquiring the objectives, regardless of their different methodological resources. It deals with the idea that each group decides how to organize and schedule the contents to be acquired by the end of the first semester. Moreover, they make decisions at the procedural level, in the same way they will have to decide in their professional work to be able to reach the minimum goals set by the tutors’ team. To this end, they have six hours of seminar per week, distributed alternately from Monday to Friday.

Throughout the course they must make two individual papers and two group papers, one of each type at each semester, in order to guarantee the fulfillment of the established didactic goals. In the individual paper for Seminar I, the students must demonstrate that they are capable of making links and developing a coherent discourse among concepts such as the needs, the rights, the welfare state and the role of social education, in addition to demonstrating their knowledge on these topics. On the other hand, the group paper must be centered in the knowledge of the three types of citizen assistance networks (health, education and social services) and the participation, leisure and culture network. The acquisition of this knowledge must be shared with the rest of group members, since it is of students’ responsibility to ensure that their classmates get to know these networks in depth.

Furthermore, in Seminar II, the seminar group splits into new working teams. These groups have two objectives. The first one is to know the different biological, psychological and social characteristics of the age sectors (children, adolescents, adults and the elders) and make them known to their classmates. The second objective is to create a resource map of their age sector in each of the aforementioned networks, and to discover, by complementing this information with the study of statistics and interviews with the experts from the different intervention sectors, the social needs of a particular given territory. To guarantee that the knowledge of the territory is exhaustive, the students’ individual work becomes of primary importance, as we require that each one of them get to know in depth the features of the resources that each particular network possess in one of the age sectors. In order to get a clearer picture, we can represent it in the following manner:
The decision of letting the students become the subjects of the educational and learning process implied an important exercise of abstraction on behalf of the First Year Seminar tutors’ team, who dedicated a large portion of last year to this effect. On the one hand, it was necessary to rearrange the original structured calendar for the contents. On the other hand, it was necessary to forget about procedural homogeneity and to allow the creativity and personality of each group to shape the development of the cognitive objectives and the patterns for the process. From this moment on, each group becomes a team that works on the fundamentals of these concepts and that pursues the didactic goals adequate to such concepts. The rest of the work is developed in autonomous way. At this point, it is worthy to point out that the persons in charge of coordinating each seminar group must have a wide experience and must be familiar with all the theoretical contents as well as the institutions, networks, circuits, resources and professionals related to the world of social education. Therefore, the tutor is not a mere observer or assessor of this work, but must be one who orients the process in addition to being a personal referent.

However, the orientation role of the tutors does not end here, as they must also give a personal attention to each student, mentoring him or her in the personal processes of learning and development. The tutors must analyze each student’s working method, that is to revise it with them so as to guarantee its full operation. They must also orient students in relation to other subjects they might have, and they can also orient them in other facets of their life that are not necessarily related to academic world in case the students need and/or ask them to do so. This attention is done through individual tutorials normally with a group of not less than five and developed throughout the course. This number may vary in case the student needs it explicitly.

We must not forget the foundations on which the seminar is based, which inspired this learning environment and our seminar model before the Delors report was published: what has got to be known as the four pillars of education. On the following, we will relate them to what we have explained up to now about the First Year Seminar:

- **Learning to be**: in relation to the attitudes that come to play within context of the seminar and that revolve around the personal and professional aspects. Basically, it deals with the fact that the contents they work on, and the way in which they do it, allow for a change in students that transcends the pure academic aspect. They learn to be persons and to be professionals.

- **Learning to do**: in relation to the fact that often students are the ones who prepare the seminar sessions, planning the contents, defining the objectives and developing methodologies. It stresses especially the need to develop these processes in a way that will break with schooling assumptions and will work with participation and shared creation of knowledge.

- **Learning to learn**: in relation to the contents the group decides they want to acquire, thus the contents they need to create by finding information resources and discussing their relevance.

- **Learning to live together**: in relation to the aspects of the seminar where there might be different points of view that must be respected by all the members of the group. Moreover, the group must make many decisions collectively, students need to prepare sessions in order to present diverse knowledge to their classmates and they also must learn to work in groups.

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5 SS.SS. is an abbreviation for Social Sciences.
6 Although we enumerate these principles as relevant to the First Year Seminar, obviously they are present in all the seminars.
THE SECOND YEAR SEMINAR (SEMINARS III and IV)

During the second year, Seminars III and IV take place.

In Seminar III, the group have already overcome the contextualization of the work in the field of Social Education and therefore, the task of the group will be the research work in the different working environments. The Seminar gives priority to the action fields that are not included in the courses of this diploma program, or those areas that are either transversal themes to Social Education or novel or special themes.

The objectives to be fulfilled will be:

- To learn to do a team work research
- To take the shared responsibility of preparing or contributing instruments and strategies for the functioning of the seminar
- To create a group dynamics of independent and responsible work
- To reflect on the interpersonal attitudes manifested in the group work
- To look deeply in the study of socio-educational intervention and the role of Social Education

The socio-educational fields of action that are being studied during the academic year 1999-2000 in three two-hour sessions per week are: Ethnic Minorities (EM), Childhood and Social Services (CSS), Justice: childhood and adolescence (J:C-A), Assistance to Women (AW), Mental Health (MH), Socio-labor Insertion (SLI), and Penitentiary Environment (PE).

Every student decides a field of action that he or she wants to study, knowing that in Seminar IV all the fields will be put together, thus ensuring the shared information. In this way, each small group will be formed by the persons who chose each particular field.

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The research that each group carries out is focused on three sections: the definition of the field and conceptual framework, the action addressees’ profiles or the knowledge of those who take part in a particular action, and the type of resources available. For example, if we think of Socio-labor Insertion, we have to determine the socio-educational action in a particular society with some particular problems according to a given area or territory, to find the public, private and organizational resources (unemployment assistance offices, training centers for the unemployed, vocational orientation centers, employment clubs, etc.). We must study as well the groups of people who participate in these resource sites or those who coordinate the work with them.

In order to carry out this task, a series of elements of ethical nature which will be the basis of the group work, come to play. Only through the creation of a solid environment and a belief of the group possibilities, information will be generated in a shared way. Therefore, it is crucial to be able to work on the basis of three essential elements to the group: communication as the principal core that assures dialogue and listening. The debate about the need of these elements in the group work often lead to deep discussions. Often, those of us who work in the social arena agree that when we think and discuss about the conflicts we have experienced in our fields of action, they are usually of ethical nature. When the conflicts are based on communication, they are likely to have a quick and positive outcome. It is in this sense that we need to learn ways to dialogue with and to listen to other people. Communication must take place without forcing it, although it does not emerge spontaneously, it needs to be promoted. Thus, the seminar becomes a privileged place for doing so.

During the second semester of Seminar IV new groups are formed with a duo from each of the former groups, thus ensuring there will be representation of the different fields of intervention. The task is for each of the duos to prepare a program plan, by which their classmates will have a wide and at the same
time concrete notion of the seven fields of action investigated in Seminar III.

Thus, in this second semester of the second year of the diploma program, the work consists in sharing this research and motivating the group in the seminar dynamics, on the basis of the previous work and the papers elaborated. Moreover, it consists in getting actively involved in the globality of the working sessions.

The objectives are the following:
- To assume responsibility for the group dynamics and motivation toward the work on new contents.
- To assume the group dynamics independent and responsible.
- To actively participate in the dynamics proposed by classmates.
- To design, carry out and evaluate the seminar sessions from the different fields.
- To acquire a deeper knowledge of the different fields of intervention.
- To reflect on the interpersonal attitudes manifested in the group work.

In order to achieve these objectives, several elements need to be put on work: the elaboration and implementation of one unit of the program plan. Each unit should include the group expectations within the field of action. Therefore, the objectives must be determined in order to know the field, thus balancing them with the expectations of the group. In this way, the work will be developed in a consented and dynamic way, with great involvement of all the members.

This work has, as a basic ground, a permanent work on dialogue and through dialogue, although at this moment other elements, such as empathy or assertiveness, can be put into play. These two elements will be the foundation that guarantees a respect for the work of other people, as well as the reflection process that takes other people, and not only oneself, into account. In social work, the priority is found in the action undertaken in order to improve people's lives -- in our case, the socio-educational action. For this reason, those actions that lead to protagonism, or that provoke the loss of illusion, or those that tend to complain rather than seek for solutions, will lead to the failed actions from the Social Education.

In the training of future professionals in the field of Social Education, we have to create debate as well about the ethics of our actions. Those social groups that fail, that are not democratic, are grounding their actions in egocentric practices, rather than in the people to whom actions toward the improvement of life conditions should be addressed. This implies that in their training we need to create the conditions to motivate reflection and public debate about their actions. In this way, people involved in socio-educational work will acquire the tools from dialogue and communication in order to do their work in a critical and transformational way. Otherwise, our practice could become a reproduction without elements for the debate.

In sum, these two Seminars are focused on the training of Social Education professionals, so that they learn research procedures, at the time they learn to implement critical elements of action, centering their work in argumentation and in permanent debate, turning their learning of a professional field of action into a constant reflection of reality and ideas.

THE THIRD YEAR SEMINAR (Seminar V and VI)

The training process of the social educators and tutors in the third year of the program has a special aspect. This is the last year of the educational process, which is focused on the contact with practice, with the professional experience. This practice is mediated through the theoretical aspects worked in the previous years at the university.

The Third Year Seminar work is organized into two cores:
- Individual work through the practicum tutorial
- Group work where students gather together to share own experiences

In contrast with the First-year and Second-year seminars, the Third Year Seminar group meets only once a week (on Thursdays, during the academic year 1999-2000) in a working session of 2 hours.

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7 Tutors of Third Year, *Documento de Prácticas* (Practicum document).
Seminars V and VI are especially related to the practical training process. The seminar tutor is the responsible for the control and assessment the students’ practicum, the one who signs the practicum contract, as well as the supervisor through field visits within the center. Students create groups in different seminars according to the fields of action they chose for the practicum. Broadly, the fields of action are the following:

- Drug dependency
- Childhood and adolescence at social risk
- Prisons and juvenile justice
- Assistance to women
- Elderly people
- Labor insertion
- Handicapped people
- Mental health
- Health education
- Environmental education
- Socio-cultural education
- Adult education
- Social services

The students' groupings also follow fields' closeness (handicap and mental health; environmental education and socio-cultural education, etc.). Once in the seminar, the work is similar to what has traditionally been called the practicum supervision.

The style we put forward is the self-management of the seminar. The first day begins without any preset program, only the details on the evaluation procedures and required memos. The themes to be discussed throughout the year will be decided upon by the groups and their tutors. Usually, the themes emerge from the experiences that the group members live within their diverse practicum sites, but also other specific topics are discussed, issues that will be useful once they finish their university education to become professionals.

We can understand the Practicum Seminar in the way Michel Lemay (1965) brings it up, on the basis of the following general notions:

- To teach the student how to present a fact lived or observed in the practicum site.
- To reflect on the different attitudes that might be adopted from the assessment or from the observations made.
- To think and propose possible educational interventions to an observed situation.
- To reflect on the pupil's answers through the proposed interventions (connected with the empathy attitude that the educator must hold).
- To recognize one's own emotional resonance that relationships with others might cause to the educator.

The sessions are organized through this self-management model; some of them are thematic sessions led by one person or a small group formed of students (for example: The current situation of socio-cultural work in Catalunya; New trends in environmental education; The employment center for disabled persons; etc.). They can also be specific topics that seminar participant should connect with the reality and the experience gained in his or her practicum site (for example: the resolution of conflicts, the work in pedagogical dyads, the tutorial action, the team work, the educational projects of their center, etc.). The seminar chooses which topics they will work on, the organizational schedule, the literature that might be useful to support the working activities, etc.

One of the aspects of the Third Year Seminar that is probably worth to mention is the flexibility in the program planning and in the activities that take place. Each seminar group is different, it depends on the context, but also, it depends on the very group, the tutor, and the general needs of a given group.

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8 Practices take place during the Third Year, two days per week, five hours each day. University reserves Tuesdays and Fridays as non lective days for the students to be able to attend the practicum class.
themes can be also changed and the program restructured depending on current events, and the lived experiences of the students.\textsuperscript{10}

The main purpose of the seminar is to reflect on the practical work done in the practicum site and to share it with the classmates in the group. This “sharing” is useful to see other points of view about a particular happening or event, an activity or a reflection.

Concerning to the attitudes, the work consists in discussing those attitudes that have been worked, in both theory and practice, during the first and the second years. Watching the scenario and the contrast of how different attitudes come to play within group work, listening to others, empathy, etc., will allow the students to get initiated in the "educational relation", that is, the foundation for the practical work within Social Education.

Combining the group meeting sessions with the internships in the practicum institutions allow students to realize different ways of working, to discover different educators’ styles (each participant can explain his or her own experience and the different ways to work in his or her institution of practices).

"Education needs as much technical, scientific and professional training as it does dreams and utopia"

Paulo Freire\textsuperscript{11}

CONCLUSIONS
The seminars are organized throughout the diploma program on the following way:

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\textbf{SEMINARS}
\end{center}

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1\textsuperscript{st} YEAR & 2\textsuperscript{nd} YEAR & 3\textsuperscript{rd} YEAR \\
\textbf{SEMINAR I} & \textbf{SEMINAR III} & \textbf{SEMINAR III} \\
\textbf{AND} & \textbf{AND} & \textbf{AND} \\
\textbf{SEMINAR II} & \textbf{SEMINAR IV} & \textbf{SEMINAR IV} \\
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Historical and conceptual introduction to Social Education \\
Frame of intervention from the Social Education \\
Research about the different contexts of action \\
Socio-educational relation and professional attitudes \\
Socialization in the practice of Social Education \\
Space for reflection and debate about the lived experience \\
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This is the explanation of the nature of the seminars, in the way we understand and organize them in the School of Social Education EUES -Pere Tarres-; we are using the word “seminars” in plural, but we could have used the singular tense, as although each seminar has its own separate entity, they gain its highest expression when viewed as a single body, as the result of a process of continuity that ends at the same the three-year diploma program ends.

\textsuperscript{10} If a student has lived a stressful experience in his/her practicum site, he or she can expose it to the seminar and give his/her point of view, looking for solutions or opinions about what he or she could have done. At the beginning of each class, ten minutes are kept for such activity (if the group agree).

The authors of this article, who are also tutors in the different seminars, hope that what we have presented so far has resulted into an interesting experience to you. We start with the idea that communicative learning, both the learning of procedural aspects as well as conceptual and attitudinal aspects, is more significant than other methods, especially if think of our profession, one that requires developing the capacity for critical reflection, the capacity to relate diverse concepts to different realities, the reflexive capacity and, especially, the capacity for team work. Therefore, we firmly believe that the learning space created in the Seminar is the most appropriate to reach all these learning goals.

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