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EMPOWERMENT OR EMANCIPATION? INTERPRETATIONS FROM FINLAND AND BEYOND

¿EMPODERAMIENTO O EMANCIPACIÓN? INTERPRETACIONES DESDE FINLANDIA Y MÁS ALLÁ

EMPODERAMENTO OU EMANCIPAÇÃO? INTERPRETACÕES DESDE A FINLÂNDIA E ALÉM

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ABSTRACT: The article looks at two concepts that have both an established and a disputed position in the field of educational and social sciences: the concepts of empowerment and emancipation. The guiding questions are: how empowerment and emancipation relate to each other and how they can be used in the field of social pedagogy in Finland and beyond both as theoretical conceptions in articulating the purpose of social pedagogical work and as guiding principles of social pedagogical practices. By exploring these questions, the aim is to provide one possible map through the conceptual maze around the terms of empowerment and emancipation, specifically from a social pedagogical perspective. The peculiarity of the Finnish language makes the Finnish discussion around the concept of empowerment a well-suited case example that makes visible how complicated a concept empowerment is and the kinds of problems related to the use of the concept. The field of youth empowerment is explored especially in order to map the diversity of the meanings addressed to the term. The place and role of the concept of empowerment in the theoretical discussion and practice of social pedagogy in Finland is also briefly analyzed. To broaden the perspective of this study, both conceptually and geographically, the relationship between empowerment and emancipation with the aid of international theoretical discussion around the two concepts is explored. The conclusion suggested is that when the concepts of emancipation and empowerment are analyzed in relation to social pedagogy, it is useful to take into account the different paradigms or traditions of social pedagogy instead of trying to approach social pedagogy as a consensual whole.

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RESUMEN: Este artículo aborda dos conceptos tan consolidados como controvertidos dentro del campo de las Ciencias Sociales y Educativas: empoderamiento y emancipación. Las cuestiones principales abordarán la relación entre ambos y cómo podrían utilizarse en el campo de la Pedagogía Social en Finlandia y más allá como conceptos teóricos a la hora de articular el propósito del trabajo sociopedagógico y como criterios orientadores de las prácticas en el mismo campo. Con el análisis de estas cuestiones nos proponemos aportar un posible mapa para el laberinto conceptual que conforman ambos términos, diseñado específicamente desde la perspectiva sociopedagógica. La peculiaridad del idioma finlandés hace del debate sobre el término de empoderamiento un claro ejemplo de lo complicado del concepto y de los problemas relacionados con su uso. En este estudio nos centraremos sobre todo en el campo del empoderamiento juvenil para delinear la diversidad de significados asignados al término. También analizamos brevemente el lugar y el papel del que el concepto de empoderamiento dispone en el debate teórico y en la práctica de la Pedagogía Social en Finlandia. Para ampliar nuestra perspectiva tanto conceptual como geográfica, estudiamos la relación existente entre empoderamiento y emancipación con la ayuda del debate teórico internacional existente alrededor de ambos conceptos. Concluimos sugiriendo que cuando ambos conceptos se analizan en relación con la Pedagogía Social es útil tener en cuenta los distintos paradigmas o tradiciones de la Pedagogía Social en lugar de intentar abordarla como un todo consensuado.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:
empoderamento
emancipação
pedagogia social
juventude
Finlândia

RESUMO: Este artigo discute dois conceitos tão consolidados como controversos dentro do campo das Ciências Sociais e Educação: o empoderamento e emancipação. As principais questões abordadas serão, a relação entre os dois, bem como eles poderiam ser utilizados no campo da Pedagogia Social na Finlândia e além como conceito teórico e articular o objetivo do trabalho sócio-pedagógico tanto como conceitos teóricos articulando o objetivo do trabalho sócio-pedagógico quanto como critérios orientadores de práticas no mesmo campoo. Com a análise destas questões temos a intenção de fornecer um possível mapa para o labirinto conceitual que fazem os dois termos, desenhado especificamente para o ponto de vista sócio-pedagógico. A peculiaridade da língua finlandesa faz com que o debate sobre o termo de empoderamento seja um exemplo claro de como o conceito é complicado e dos problemas associados à sua utilização. Neste estudo vamos nos concentrar especialmente no campo de empoderamento da juventude, para delinear a diversidade de significados atribuídos ao termo. Nós também analisaremos brevemente o lugar e o papel do conceito de "empoderamento" no debate teórico e na prática da Pedagogia Social na Finlândia. Para expandir nossa perspectiva conceitual e geográfica, estudaremos a relação entre empoderamento e emancipação com a ajuda do debate teórico internacional sobre os dois conceitos. Concluímos com a sugestão de que, quando os dois conceitos são discutidos em relação a Pedagogia Social é útil considerar os diferentes paradigmas ou tradições da Pedagogia Social em vez de abordá-lo como um todo consensual.

1. Introduction

Empowerment is one of the so-called contested concepts in the field of social and educational sciences (Troyna, 1994). There are many meanings attached to the term, and nevertheless it is often used without specifying what is meant with it. Horochowski and Meirelles (2007, p. 488) write about a "conceptual umbrella" that refers to different usages, different intellectual and political perspectives, as well as different types of interventions done in the name of empowerment. This "mercurial nature" (Archibald & Wilson, 2011, p. 22) is strongly present in the discussion of empowerment in Finland, although rarely explicitly addressed. We will begin the article with a short overview of the different lines of definitions of the concept of empowerment in Finland, and then explore the field of youth empowerment in order to map the diversity of the meanings attached to the term. We will also briefly analyze the place and role the concept of empowerment has in the theoretical discussion and practice of social pedagogy in Finland.

In the second section of the article, we will broaden our perspective both conceptually and geographically by exploring the relationship between empowerment and emancipation with the aid of an international theoretical discussion of the two concepts. We will include the concept of emancipation in our analysis for two reasons. First, the strengthening of the critical tradition of social pedagogy in the 1960s introduced the concept of emancipation into the field of social pedagogy (Thiersch in Schugurensky, 2014), and it became one of the key concepts used to articulate the purpose of social pedagogical work. It also became one of the guiding principles of social pedagogical practices. However, it has been argued that emancipation has lost its charisma (Gross, 2010, p. 9) whereas empowerment has become a more prominent concept not only in general discussion and policy vocabulary but also in the field of social pedagogy. We argue that this conceptual shift, if there indeed has been one, has not been sufficiently addressed, at least not specifically from the perspective of social pedagogy. Second, we argue that we should not forget

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the concept of emancipation in the field of social pedagogy altogether, and for that not to happen, we need to better understand the linkages — and possible conflicts — between the two concepts.

The choice of the topic of this article comes from the conviction that language matters to education (Biesta, 2006, p. 13). The concepts we use have specific histories and meanings attached to them, and often behind the shifts in the use of concepts or in seeing some concepts as somehow more modern and timely than some others, there is the matter of more profound changes in society in what is valued and what is seen as desirable (ibid.).

Our guiding questions in this article are: how empowerment and emancipation relate to each other and how they could — and in our understanding should — be used in the field of social pedagogy in Finland and beyond. We analyze them both as theoretical conceptions in articulating the purpose of social pedagogical work and as guiding principles of social pedagogical practices. By exploring these questions, we aim to provide one possible map through the conceptual maze around the terms of empowerment and emancipation specifically from a social pedagogical perspective.

2. Empowerment in the Finnish discussion

When we first started to explore the field of (youth) empowerment in Finland, we had different possibilities to define our approach for the analysis. We could have chosen one of the topical definitions of empowerment in the field of social pedagogy (e.g. Soler, Planas, Ciraso-Calí & Ribot-Horas, 2014) and used it as a mirror to reflect projects in line with that definition, regardless of the specific denomination given to the practices within each approach. Alternatively, we could have focused on projects that explicitly identified with one of the possible Finnish translations of the concept of empowerment. Most probably these different approaches would have taken us to a different set of projects, because in many cases, the concept has been understood quite differently in Finland than, for instance, in the Spanish social pedagogical discussion in which the concept of empowerment (*empoderamiento*) is widely used. In sum, there was no straightforward route available for us to analyze the projects and experiences in the field of youth empowerment in Finland.

This peculiar conceptual context has led us to concentrate on the concept of empowerment itself, instead of focusing on concrete projects or practices of youth empowerment in Finland. We will proceed in the analysis by exploring the different uses of the concept and its derivatives in the Finnish scientific discussion in general and in the youth sector in particular. We will show that there is quite a lot of confusion surrounding the concept, and that the Finnish language makes the conceptual maze even more challenging. In a way, the peculiarity of the Finnish language also makes the complexity of the concept more visible, as we do not have one single word for the conception as in many other languages, such as the English *empowerment*, the Spanish *empoderamiento* or the Portuguese *empoderamento*, but many. For this reason, we will use the Finnish discussion around the concept of empowerment as a case example that shows the kinds of problems that can be related to the use of this type of contested concept. These are problems of conceptual obscurity and indeterminacy but they can also become ethical problems when the use of the concept is restricted to some narrow or biased understanding that does not take into account the contested nature of the concept.

In Finland, as well as in many other countries, the concept of empowerment has been used widely in different fields and with different meanings (Hokkanen, 2009, p. 315; Horochowski & Meirelles, 2007; Inglis, 1997). This popularity makes the use of the term anything but easy. In the Finnish context, the complexity of the concept starts when choosing the best translation for the English term: there is no straightforward translation for empowerment, nor is there an equivalent Finnish word that would have the same etymological roots. The term empowerment is, thus, sometimes used as such: an English term in the middle of a Finnish text. This manner has its roots in the history of the concept. It appeared in the Finnish discussion particularly from the rhetoric of the European Union, and it was taken into use without any reflection on its actual meaning and without further definitions. As a result, the concept was unclear even for its users. (Kuure, 2015, p. 13.) Even today, the English term is often used when the writer does not want to take a stance on some of the different ways of understanding the concept. When choosing the Finnish translation for empowerment, the writer must choose between different interpretations of it, but, nevertheless, often without being aware of the different undertones of the different translations. (Juhila, 2006, p. 120)[1].

There are about a dozen different Finnish concepts that can be and are widely used as translations of empowerment. Some of the concepts are somewhat field specific: for example, in the field of health promotion, the translation that is often used refers to (inner) reserves of strength (*voimavaraistuminen* or *omavoimaistaminen*, Savola

& Koskinen-Ollonqvist, 2005), whereas in the field of social work it is more common to use a translation that refers to power (*valtautuminen* or *valtaistuminen*, Juhila, 2006, p. 120). The picture is not that simple, though. For instance, social work is one example of the fields in which empowerment is a very popular concept in many of its translations, both in theory and in practice (Hokkanen, 2009; also Kaljonen, 2008, p. 56).

In the Finnish empowerment discussion, it is possible to identify the same two main approaches as in international literature (Soler *et al.*, 2014, pp. 52-53). The more structural understanding of empowerment looks at inequalities and hardships in individual lives and sees them in their societal connections. Empowerment is understood as raising awareness of the structural conditions of individual lives and finding possibilities for change. The individual-oriented understanding of empowerment concentrates on life situations and on how people experience them. Empowerment is seen, first and foremost, as an individual process of finding one's inner strength, of supporting personal development, and strengthening personal capabilities in order to survive difficult life situations and to find paths to well-being. The individual-oriented understanding may also stress the importance of community in the process of empowerment, but it does so by regarding the community as the primary context and by giving only secondary importance to what happens outside the community, that is, on the structural conditions for well-being. (Hokkanen, 2009, pp. 318-319, 329-332.)

Accordingly, there are two main lines of translations of the concept of empowerment, and they are based on two different root words: power (as authority or influence, in Finnish: *valta*) and strength (as energy or vigor, in Finnish: *voima*). The Finnish term *valtaistuminen* is based on the word power and refers usually to the more structural understanding of empowerment, whereas the term *voimaantuminen* is based on the word strength and refers to the more individual understanding of empowerment. There are several other forms of these two basic concepts, but all other formulations can be grouped under these two roots. For example, different forms of the terms point to different sources of power or strength: Is power to be found and taken by the people themselves (*valtaistuminen*), or can it be given to them in some kind of a process (*valtaistaminen*)? Does "strength" stem from inside the individual (*voimaantuminen*) or can/should it be given to her/him from outside (*voimauttaminen*). The main difference between the concepts is to be found in the notion of power and concepts based on the notion of strength. (Hokkanen, 2009, pp. 329-332; Juhila, 2006, p. 120.) On some occasions, people seem to be very sensitive to the selection of the Finnish concept, and they put a lot of energy into the analysis and reasoning of their choice (Hokkanen, 2009). However, quite often the translation of the concept of empowerment is chosen without further reflection on the specific definitions and the implicit ontological assumptions attached to the concept itself and its particular translation.

In many analyses, it has been stated that the individual understanding of empowerment has gained a stronger and wider acceptance among the different interpretations of the concept (Archibald & Wilson, 2011; Inglis, 1997; Wildemeersch & Olesen, 2012). This is also the case in Finland. This can be seen, for example, through a simple literature search from the national database of the Finnish libraries: The more individual-oriented term for empowerment that stresses the development of the inner strength of an individual, *voimaantuminen*, gets more than twice as many hits (over 2,260) than the more structural term that is more closely connected to power, *valtaistuminen* (less than 900). Of course the question is not that simple, and the separation of the two terms is anything but straightforward. Discussions of the more individual term dominate the discourse and can also contain some elements from the more structural perspective: empowerment as a process of emerging self-confidence and strengthening personal capacities can be seen to lead to a growing sense of agency and a more conscious attitude towards the structural elements of life (Hokkanen, 2009, pp. 333-334).

3. The question of youth empowerment in Finland

Tracing *youth empowerment* in the Finnish discourse is equally as challenging as tracing the concept of empowerment itself because there is no concept in Finnish that links youth, as a specific target group, to the notion of empowerment. However, there is a lot of literature about youth work and youth education that uses the concept empowerment — one of the Finnish translations — as a conceptual denominator.

According to the analysis of Tapio Kuure (2015, pp.10, 12), the empowerment vocabulary appeared in discussions of Finnish youth work from the youth policy of the European Union. The interpretation of the concept of empowerment in the EU context leans toward the individualistic approach, and this has initially set the tone for the discussion around youth empowerment in Finland. As in other fields, in youth work, the concept of empowerment has various meanings and

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various connections, but it often has an individualistic undertone. On a general level, empowerment is understood as a process of supporting young people's life management skills, responsibility, and self-confidence, and it is often defined as a key aim of youth work (Höylä, 2012, p. 9; also Kiilakoski 2015, pp. 160-161). What is notable, is that there is a lot of literature about different empowering methods and working models that have been developed to support this process. The nature of these methods is often therapeutic, participatory, and experiential, in addition to being creative and artistic, and they are defined by objectives like supporting self-knowledge, identity building, and self-confidence, enhancing coping and life skills, as well as promoting mental health and well-being. These individual-oriented aims, however, are often seen within a communal framework: the personal growth and empowerment of young people happens in a community, especially in a group of peers (Höylä, 2012, pp. 8, 12). This can also be seen in the methods described: they are often based on working in groups and communities, and they aim at creating feelings of belonging and togetherness that form a basis for peer support. One example of this kind of method is "Empowering photography," developed by Miina Savolainen (2008), which is characterized by the use of photography as a tool in the empowering process for individuals and for different groups (Tikkanen, 2009; also The Loveliest Girl in the World-Photography Project, n.d.).

It seems that most often in youth work contexts, the translation of the term empowerment is done with one of the concepts that stem from the word strength. There are also youth work contexts in which the word used for empowerment stems from the other root, power. Especially when dealing with issues of youth participation and giving young people opportunities to have their say in matters that concern themselves, the dimension of power comes to the fore in empowerment vocabulary. Sometimes both translations of the concept appear in the same context, for example, when the writer wants to emphasize the nature of the process in which young people get a feeling of involvement in matters important to them. The process then has to provide young people with opportunities to both feel empowered and to be able and competent to act in a community in a given situation (Gretschel, 2002, pp. 91-94). Empowerment has a more structural dimension here: it is not understood as a solely personal process of gaining self-confidence but as something that can lead to action in an individual's societal environment. However, the image of empowered young people acting as citizens seems to be in line with the images of active citizenship fostered by the ruling government: "An active citizen is a person who is well informed and empowered to engage in decision-making and dialogue with decision makers or authorities in power", as one critical commentary states (Levamo, 2014, p. 20).

In the field of Finnish youth work, one interpretation of the concept of empowerment is specific to this field only. The Youth Act (72/2006) that became effective in 2006 defined social empowerment *(sosiaalinen vahvistaminen,* in Finnish) as one area and the aim of youth work. The Finnish term used for empowerment in the Act, *vahvistaminen* (equivalent to the English term *reinforcement),* is not among the translations of empowerment that are used in other fields (Kuure, 2015, pp. 29-30, 58). The Act defines social empowerment as, "measures targeted at young people and aimed at improving life management skills and preventing exclusion" (Höylä, 2012, p. 12). In the explanation of the Act, the definition has been elaborated as work that focuses on young people who are at risk of exclusion. However, as an aim of the Act, social empowerment is defined as something that concerns all young people (Kuure, 2015, pp. 26-29, 35). As a result, the term has been criticized for being imprecise and for causing confusion in practice (Kuure, 2015, p. 57; Nieminen, 2014).

Social empowerment came into use as a concept that defines the aims and methods of youth work in line with the Youth Act (72/2006). Before the Act, it had rarely been used in youth work or elsewhere. It was kind of a conceptual innovation in an attempt to find an alternative to talking about the prevention of social exclusion, which was seen as stigmatizing. Social empowerment was a concept that was intended to bring about a more positive perspective on youth work without changing its goal: to support the development of young people's life management skills, promote their participation, and empower them to become full members of society and, thus, prevent social exclusion and marginalization. (Kuure, 2015, pp. 8, 13, 26-30, 49; Höylä, 2012, pp. 12-13). In some interpretations, the concept is seen to offer a holistic perspective on the lives of young people, because it defines the aim of youth work very broadly. This interpretation sees social empowerment as something that, at the same time, supports the well-being, agency, and life management skills of young people on the individual level and also prevents social polarization within society. This perspective requires efforts on cultural and structural levels. (Lundbom & Herranen, 2011, pp. 5-7, 10).

On the other hand, another interpretation of social empowerment, based on the explanation of the Youth Act, sees the concept as one that

defines targeted youth work services for young people who are excluded from education or the labor market and, thus, are at risk of being marginalized in society. This interpretation has gained power since it has been backed up by the policies of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, which has set up a youth work service package for social empowerment. This includes targeted services such as outreach youth work, youth workshops, and social reinforcement training called *Nuotta*. As a consequence, these services are often seen as *the* area of youth work that is specified in implementing strategies for social empowerment. These services bring youth work into the sphere of social work, and, thus, make the social empowerment of young people a matter of reparative and rehabilitative work more than participation or education (Kuure, 2015, pp. 8-9, 30, 35-36, 57-59; Puuronen, 2016, pp. 116, 131-132). In the jargon of youth workers, social empowerment is understood as efforts focused on the needs and problems of young people. According to some critics, social empowerment should instead be seen as a basis for all youth work: as social interaction and support for young people's social competencies (Puuronen, 2016, pp. 121, 132, 163-164).

In sum, social empowerment as a term has its roots in the concept of empowerment, but its interpretations have lost all connections with the ideas of power, participation, and citizenship (Kuure, 2015, p. 57). The strong connection of the term to a given set of targeted youth services, makes it quite distant from youth empowerment as this concept is understood in international discourse. However, this is not something that has happened only in Finland with regard to the uses of the concept of empowerment. Empowerment has been widely embraced as a part of educational and youth work policy vocabulary, and in the process, it has gained meanings that refer to the development of individual capacities to live up to contemporary societal needs and to bear responsibility for oneself (Wildemeersch & Olesen, 2012). Many writers find strong political undertones in this shift. It has been argued that the concept of empowerment has been appropriated by governments of the Right that have, "rearticulated it as a rational basis for the framing of social and educational policy" (Troyna, 1994, p. 4).

4. Empowerment and social pedagogy in Finland

It can be said that a similar kind of obscurity clouds the concept of empowerment, as described above in relation to youth work, in the field of Finnish social pedagogy as well. It is possible to find references to variations of the concept here and there in textbooks (Kurki, 2002, pp. 73, 134-135), in curricula of the training courses for social pedagogical professionals in social and youth work (Semi, 2005, p. 43), and in descriptions of social pedagogical practices (Kaljonen, 2008, p. 56). However, in the theoretical social pedagogical discussion, the concept of empowerment has not been given much significance, and it is not included among social pedagogical concepts in the curriculum of the bachelor and master's degree programs for social pedagogy at the university level. In addition, one of the main Finnish theorists in the field, Leena Kurki, has explicitly taken a somewhat reserved stance towards the concept when writing about the personalist orientation in social pedagogy. She sees empowerment even as a dangerous concept if it is seen, for instance, as a hierarchical intervention in which the powerful give a small share of power to the people (Kurki, 2002, pp. 73, 134-135).

Despite the absence of any thorough theoretical analysis, the concept of empowerment in its variations appears to be quite widely used in social pedagogical training at levels other than the university level, as well as in practice. At many universities of applied sciences in Finland where social pedagogy is a theoretical framework for both social work and youth and community work training, empowerment — or social empowerment *(sosiaalinen vahvistaminen)* — as a method and an objective of efforts has a central, though varying, role (Kuure, 2015, pp. 33-34; Semi, 2005, pp. 42-43). It appears as a general concept that describes the orientation and ethos of social pedagogical work (Ranne, 2005, pp. 17-18): empowerment, or empowering, is used together with terms like dialogic, communal, interactive, and creative in order to describe the social pedagogical way of working (Semi, 2005, p. 43). Regarding the practices that can be placed under a conceptual and methodological umbrella of social pedagogy, empowerment is used in a similar way. In some working methods, like for example the method of empowering photography mentioned earlier, the individual-oriented understanding of empowerment forms the general framework for the practice, which is at the same time described as a social pedagogical practice (see Savolainen, 2008, not paginated).

While empowerment is almost absent as a concept in the theoretical discussion of social pedagogy in Finland, the concept of emancipation is much more present (Hämäläinen & Kurki, 1997, pp. 40-41, 118-125; Hämäläinen, 2015; Kurki, 2002, pp. 35, 45; DalMaso & Kuosmanen, 2008). We have also argued elsewhere (Nivala & Ryynänen, forthcoming) that the concept of emancipation should

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be revitalized in the fields of social pedagogy and youth work as a conceptual "partner" to the term social integration. When understood as two sides of the same coin, these concepts jointly address one of the basic questions of social pedagogy, namely, "the discrepancy between individual autonomy and the requirements that modern society imposes upon a person" (Hämäläinen 2015, 1023) by taking into account both the need for autonomy-oriented subjectification and socialization in an existing order. We have purposefully chosen to use the concept of emancipation instead of empowerment; for us, it has felt more appropriate and applicable to use in the context of social pedagogy (in Finland, at least) than the concept of empowerment, which suffers from its multiple meanings and often unproblematized nature. To provide additional background for this conceptual choice, we will first look at the international literature on the relation between the concepts of empowerment and emancipation to escape the peculiarity of the Finnish language and context-specific conceptual problems. Following this, we will proceed more specifically to the concept of emancipation and its relevance for social pedagogy.

5. Empowerment or emancipation?

The adjective "emancipatory" is often added to the term empowerment when an author wants to underline the transformative import originally attributed to the concept, or to call for some other kind of substance to empowerment than is present in current hegemonic discourses, such as in policy vocabulary. For instance, Archibald and Wilson (2011, p. 23) call for, "salvaging empowerment's emancipatory potential", and Horochowski and Meirelles (2007, p. 486) make sure to specify that they themselves approach empowerment from an "emancipatory perspective" while recognizing other possible perspectives as well (Oliveira Barreto & Paes de Paula, 2014). This raises three sets of questions worth further investigation. First, what is *emancipatory* taken to stand for, and what is it seen to add to empowerment? Second, why is the concept of emancipation not used in the aforementioned instances? Does "emancipatory empowerment" mean something other than mere emancipation? Has emancipation, as a freestanding concept, somehow been sidetracked from (some strands of) educational discussion, and if so, why? Third, how and according to what logic do people choose which concept to use; empowerment or emancipation?

We will begin with the third question. It is not uncommon in the academic field that familiar concepts gain new tones or even new meanings, especially when adopted into policy vocabulary, or when new concepts appear in hegemonic discourses to replace old ones. What is important to remember is that these shifts do not happen in a vacuum, but they often relate to more permeating transformations in a society and a socio-economic context as a whole. One often cited example of such a vocabulary shift in the field of education is a discursive move from continuous/permanent "education" to lifelong "learning," which has been argued to be accompanied by an ideological reframing of the whole field of adult education towards a stress on marketable skills and individual responsibility for acquiring and maintaining these skills in securing an individual's employability (Milana, 2012; Biesta, 2006). As such, the discursive shift has been attributed to a wider societal transition from welfarism to neoliberalism (Wildemeersch & Olesen, 2012) and, therefore, it has been interpreted to carry strong ideological and purposive orientations (Milana, 2012).

It has been argued that some kind of vocabulary shift, accompanied by an ideological reframing, has happened with the concepts of emancipation and empowerment as well, resulting in the decline of the former and the rise of the latter regarding the goals of educational endeavors: "Emancipation is past and empowerment is present" (Wildemeersch & Olesen, 2012, p. 98). The point of departure in an article by Stephen Gross (2010) on the rise and fall of the concept of emancipation indicates this:

> Emancipation has lost its charisma. In the 1960s, the term had been one of the saviour-concepts in the educational debate on social inequality and the political function of pedagogy in Western countries. Nowadays, as the discussion is still ongoing, the word is rarely in use. Overloaded with political enmeshments and a plurality of meanings, emancipation seems to be nothing more than a nearly forgotten relict of an ancient time (Gross, 2010, p. 9).

However, this is not the whole truth. In the area of education, especially in its critical traditions, it seems that there are always new generations that find something worth preserving in the concept of emancipation. Lately, one growing tendency seems to be to put two influential theorists of emancipatory education, namely Paulo Freire and Jacques Rancière, in dialogue in order to reconsider the aims and means of emancipatory education (Biesta, 2010, 2012; Galloway, 2012; Lewis, 2012; Vlieghe, 2016). This is only one example of recent theoretical discussions in which the concept of emancipation is very much alive.

The discursive shift from emancipation to empowerment — if there indeed is one — is, therefore, much more difficult to grasp than the above example from the field of adult education. In the accounts that deal with either one of the two concepts or explicitly analyze their relation, it is possible to identify three different positions or perspectives. First, it is possible to attach more or less the same meanings to both concepts, even though they are not used, in a strict sense, as synonyms. One example is labelling Freire's critical and transformative educational orientation either as emancipation/emancipatory (Biesta, 2010; Galloway, 2012) or as empowerment (Jönsson, 2010; Soler *et al.*, 2014, p. 52), and defining the approach the two concepts refer to in more or less in the same way. There is one interesting conceptual detail worth exploring in Freire. In some interpretations, it has been stated that it was Paulo Freire who introduced the concept empowerment into the educational discussion in the first place (Jönsson, 2010, p. 394; Archibald & Wilson, 2011, p. 24). However, it is known that Freire himself expressed explicit reservations towards the use of the concept and its interpretations in the US (Freire & Shor, 2008, p. 134; Archibald & Wilson, 2011, pp. 22-24) and, accordingly, he did not use it himself, especially not in his earlier and best known works, such as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, although many writers do such reference (Jönsson, 2010, p. 394). Also, in the Brazilian edition of Freire and Shor's book *Medo e ousadia. Cotidiano do professor* published in 1987, the word empowerment is used in English throughout the text in Portuguese instead of the Portuguese word *empoderamento*. We return to Freire's theory of emancipatory education later, but at this point it is possible to conclude that while the basic idea of empowerment (in its so called emancipatory sense) comes at least partly from Freire (Archibald & Wilson, 2011, p. 22), the concept itself does not, and this is possibly one of the reasons that has caused confusion about the concept of empowerment as well (Archibald & Wilson, 2011; Horochowski & Meirelles, 2007; Oliveira Barreto & Paes de Paula, 2014).

Second, there are authors of empowerment and/or emancipation that see the two concepts as not only different but also fundamentally incompatible due to their different ideological underpinnings. Inglis (1997) follows this line of reasoning by placing the difference between the two concepts in how they see the present (societal) structures of power: "Empowerment involves people developing capacities to act successfully within the existing system and structures of power, while emancipation concerns critically analyzing, resisting and challenging structures of power" (Inglis, 1997, 4). However, Inglis argues that the current incompatibility between the two concepts is not some historically unchanging fact but one that has developed over time as a result of the appropriation of the concept of empowerment by organizational management and industrial training, beginning in the 1990s. In some other cases, the distancing of empowerment from emancipation has been attributed to the rising influence of neoliberalism and its ethos, which stress the necessity to continuously develop individual capacities to live up to contemporary societal needs and to bear responsibility for oneself (Wildemeersch & Olesen, 2012). In one way or another, the supposition seems to be that empowerment has been, "co-opted in neoliberal discourse" (Archibald & Wilson, 2011, p. 22), that it has been steered to (over-)concentrate on the development of individual capabilities, and that it fails to (sufficiently) take into account the nature and workings of power. In other words, "The evolutionary lineage of empowerment as a concept has divaricated and been subtly waylaid, obfuscating its initial emancipatory import" (ibid., p. 23; Mayo, 2003, p. 40). On the other hand, from the perspective of the divergence of the two concepts, emancipation, with its plea for structural transformation for greater societal equality and justice, can be seen as an outdated ideal that nourishes unrealistic utopias (Gross, 2010).

Sarah Galloway (2011, p. 3) also refers to a fundamental difference in the current uses of the concepts of empowerment and emancipation in her suggestion that the idea of emancipation can be mapped in the domain of subjectification, or becoming a subject, and the development of individual and collective agency, whereas the idea of empowerment is more about (adaptive) socialization. By making this distinction, she refers to Gert Biesta's (2009, pp. 39-40) definition of the three functions of education; qualification, subjectification, and socialization. Socialization is understood in this context as consisting of, "the many ways in which, through education, we become members of and part of particular social, cultural and political 'orders'" (Biesta, 2009, p. 40). In contrast, subjectification is defined as the opposite, in other words, as a process of gaining independence from such orders (as a process of emancipation). One could argue that the way Biesta defines socialization leans more towards the traditional — and the bit outdated — understanding of socialization as a process of adaptation rather than towards the modern idea of socialization as a two-way process. However, as a conceptual construction, this dualism offers an interesting view of the relation

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between the two concepts from the perspective of their incompatibility.

The third perspective to the relationship between the concepts of empowerment and emancipation is to part from a notion that the term empowerment, in particular, is used in multiple, even contradictory, ways, and it is this that makes the relationship between the two concepts ambiguous instead of some fundamental similarity or difference between them. This notion is in line with our analysis of the different uses of the concept of empowerment in Finland as well. As mentioned before, in the attempts to classify these different meanings, many texts part from the notion that two main approaches can be identified, or two ends of a continuum. One of them is often labelled as emancipatory, critical or structural approach to empowerment (as we wrote in the section on empowerment in the Finnish discussion). This approach is rooted in the theories of Freire and in the new social movements of the sixties and the seventies, such as the feminist and black power movements. (Horochowski & Meirelles, 2007, p. 487; Inglis, 1997, not paginated; Soler *et al.*, 2014, p. 52.) From this perspective, empowerment is understood as a process in which individuals gain control over their lives, participate democratically within different collectives, and gain abilities to critically read and understand the context within which they live. However, there is no consensus on whether or not to include in the concept of empowerment a broader objective of trying to affect the power structures of society to better address issues of inequality and oppression. There are studies where especially this is seen to make empowerment emancipatory (Horochowski & Meirelles, 2007, p. 486; Archibald & Wilson, 2011, p. 24), and others where this question is mentioned but not so explicitly addressed as an objective of social pedagogical work (Soler *et al.*, 2014).

The description of the second approach, or the other end of the continuum, depends a lot on the writer's metatheoretical position. In critically oriented analyses, the second approach is typically labelled neoliberal or neoconservative, and its definition is in line with the aforementioned critique of an approach that has been stripped from the analysis of power and aims at adapting to existing (power) structures rather than transforming them (Archibald & Wilson, 2011; Horochowski & Meirelles, 2007; Wildemeersch & Olesen, 2012). Other analyses are less explicit in their critique and stress, for instance, the individual's capacity to care for him-or herself as a key tenet of this approach (Soler *et al.*, 2014, p. 53). In our description of the Finnish discussion, we used the label individual-oriented understanding of empowerment.

All three perspectives to the relationship between empowerment and emancipation have something to offer to our analysis. First, they remind us that the two concepts are often used interchangeably. Second, they signal to us that the current hegemonic interpretations of the concepts have developed in more or less opposite directions, which means that the concepts should be used cautiously if they are treated as synonymous. Third, the multiple meanings attached especially to the concept of empowerment in different discourses would require more attentiveness and reflection when the concept is used, and this is something that is often missing. In the following section, we will expand our analysis by taking a closer look at the concept of emancipation.

6. Emancipation

The origins of the concept of emancipation can be traced back to ancient Roman terminology, more specifically to Roman law where emancipation was taken to signify an act of freeing a son from the legal authority of the father (Biesta, 2010, p. 41). However, as Gross (2010, p. 10) points out, in those early days, emancipation signified integration into the current order rather than freeing oneself from it as only those who could ensure the permanence of paternal property were guaranteed emancipation. In addition, the process was closely intertwined with the unequal structures of society and the renewal of existing inequalities rather than an attempt to change them (ibid., pp. 10-11). Only later did emancipation come to mean a process of relinquishing one's authority over someone in order for the object of emancipation to become independent and free, as it is known today (Biesta, 2010, p. 41; Biesta, 2012).

During the Enlightenment in the 18th century, the notion of emancipation, understood as a process of becoming independent or autonomous (and as such, synonymous to the process of enlightenment itself), became explicitly intertwined with the field of education. For the best-known theorist of the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), the prerequisite of autonomy was the use of one's reason, and for the capacity of reasoning to emerge, education was necessary. This idea of education has been rather prominent in modern educational thinking, and it has profoundly influenced modern educational practice. (Biesta, 2010, p. 42.) However, it was only after the Second World War, when the idea that there could be no individual emancipation without wider societal transformation, that the notion of emancipation came to be included as one of the key tenets of the concept of education (Biesta, 2012).

The more recent history of emancipation as an educational concept is intertwined with the field of social pedagogy in many ways. The idea that education entails an orientation towards autonomy and freedom instead of just inserting the individual into the existing order played an important role in Germany in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Biesta, 2010, p. 43), and social pedagogy, along with other so-called reformist educational movements, can be seen as one representative of this line of educational thinking. More specifically, social pedagogy developed as a pedagogical attempt to deal with a discrepancy between individual autonomy and the requirements of a society in a specific historical situation characterized by completely new types of problems brought about by rapid industrialization and urbanization (Hämäläinen, 2015, pp. 1023-1024). This relation between social integration and emancipation continues to be one of the key questions of social pedagogy (Hämäläinen, 2015, p. 1035).

However, not until the 1960s did the notion of emancipation emerge explicitly in the social pedagogical discussion. This was due to the strengthening of the critical orientation of the concept that was brought about by critical approaches to the social sciences, for instance, by the Frankfurt School, especially Jürgen Habermas, as well as by critical educational theorists, such as Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich. One of the first explicit connections between social pedagogy and the Frankfurt School was Klaus Mollenhauer's (1928-1998) book on emancipation and education published in 1969 (*Erziehung und Emanzipation: Polemische Skizzen - Education and Emancipation: Polemical Sketches*). (Thiersch in Schugurensky, 2014; Biesta, 2012; Gross, 2010.) The adoption of the concept of emancipation into the social pedagogical lexicon happened concurrently with other critical approaches: "Emancipation became the imperative for all sectors of social science with critical pretensions" (Gross, 2010, p. 11). This particular understanding of emancipation derived from the Habermasian notion of emancipatory interest in critical science that gave critical science the double task of both understanding and seeking to transform oppressive structures (Gross, 2010, p. 12). Therefore, the notion of emancipation came to be fundamentally intertwined with the issue of power. The logic that guides emancipatory educational endeavors parts most often from the idea that in order for emancipation to happen, there is a necessity to expose how power operates in society and in different types of relations (Biesta, 2010, pp. 43-44.)

There was a strong emancipatory tide in the German social pedagogical discussion in the 1960s and 70s represented, for example, by Klaus Mollenhauer and Helga Marburger (Hämäläinen & Kurki 1997, 118-125). The theory of emancipatory education that has probably had the strongest influence in the field of (critical) social pedagogy, however, is Freire's theoretical construction known as liberating education (Freire, 2005/2008). This approach is an attempt to build a counterforce to the "banking education" that socializes people into oppressive society in processes of hierarchical knowledge transmission. The aim of emancipatory, or liberating, education is to support the liberation of the reflexive capacity to act in the world with the aid of dialogical problematization of the existing societal structures and power relations. For Freire, individual emancipation is an oxymoron; emancipation is always a collective act. Moreover, he was a devout advocate of the notion that emancipation requires wider societal transformation (Freire, 2005/2008; Galloway, 2012). "Education for liberation and emancipation is a collective educational activity which has as its goal social and political transformation" (Inglis, 1997, p. 14).

It is worth remembering that Freire understood as oppression every dehumanizing act that prevents people from acting out their vocation as humans, that is, which limits their potential and possibilities to reflect and act in the world (praxis). Therefore, Freire's notion of oppression is not confined to the explicitly oppressive military regimes in Latin America in the 1960s, the context in which Freire formulated his theory, but can be found in the present-day global North as well, although in more covert ways.

What makes Freire especially interesting where the concepts of emancipation and empowerment are concerned is that he remains one of the key references when emancipatory education is discussed, and, as mentioned above, he is also often referred to as the theorist who introduced the concept empowerment into educational discourse - even though it would be more correct to speak of the idea of (emancipatory) empowerment. On the other hand, Freire's theory of emancipatory education is one often cited example of the theories that have suffered from a process of distortion and "domestication" (McLaren, 2009, p. 31) as it is often reduced to a dialogical method, without taking into account its original roots and aims. In other words, Freire's thinking has been and is used in such ways that strip it of its sharp social criticism and "revolutionary potential," as Peter McLaren calls it. This is what happens in some instances when Freire's educational orientation is referred to with the concept of empowerment, albeit not always. It should also be pointed out that the conceptual diffusion of empowerment, which

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has been addressed to some extent, concerns emancipation as well.

In sum, since the 1960s, the concept of emancipation has been strongly associated with the critical traditions of education (Biesta, 2012). In the field of social pedagogy, the differences in the use of the concepts empowerment and emancipation can also best be grasped by remembering that there are different schools of thought that see the role and function of social pedagogy in society rather differently. In addition, one should not forget the country-specific understandings that are often seen as one defining feature of social pedagogy globally. (Hämäläinen, 2015.) Therefore, the most pertinent approach is not to try to find some universal truth about how the concepts of emancipation and empowerment are or should be used in the field of social pedagogy but rather to learn to recognize differences in their theoretical underpinnings and in the ways they are used.

7. Conclusions

The discussion of the different understandings and uses of the concepts of empowerment and emancipation, as well as on their relationship, is at the very core when the purpose and direction of social pedagogical practice is deliberated. Both concepts relate to the issue that is possibly the most central one in the field of social pedagogy, namely, the relationship between individual, community, and society. Critically oriented social pedagogical theorists and practitioners approach this relation by stressing the structural, societal, dimension as well as the necessary interplay between the three levels. In line with this approach, the function of social pedagogy is seen to intertwine with the issue of power structures in society. Moreover, within the critical orientation, enhancing the abilities of individuals and communities to live dignified lives has fundamentally to do with a critical reflection of the current societal order, recognizing structural barriers to equality and justice, and advocating changes not only on individuals and communities but also in societal level. Education is, in this light, seen as a fundamentally political act, and the concept of emancipation is often used to describe both the objectives and the methods of social pedagogical work. This is in line with Inglis' (1997, p. 4) definition of emancipation as a process of, "critically analyzing, resisting and challenging structures of power". One example of a contemporary representative of critical social pedagogy is Hans Thiersch who states, "we [social pedagogues] have two main tasks: the social and pedagogical task of developing forms, methods and arrangements in community affairs, and the political task of creating public awareness and advocating systemic reforms, and the two should go together" (Thiersch in Schugurensky, 2014, p. 12). Other interpretations that explicitly or implicitly distance themselves from the critical tradition put the structural role of social pedagogy in brackets, and have a central focus on individuals and communities (Úcar, 2016, p. 134). In this context, we come close to Inglis' (1997, p. 4) definition of empowerment as involving, "people developing capacities to act successfully within the existing system and structures of power".

The differences in social pedagogical traditions may, at least partly, explain the difference in the use of the concepts of empowerment and emancipation in the field of social pedagogy, although it is not possible nor relevant to make clear distinctions. However, in the analysis of the concepts of emancipation and empowerment in relation to social pedagogy, it is useful to take into account the different paradigms or traditions of social pedagogy instead of trying to approach social pedagogy as a consensual whole, which it is not. It seems to be easier to use the concept of emancipation when the assumed (meta) theoretical framework leans towards the critical tradition of social pedagogy. In other instances, the term empowerment or emancipatory empowerment appears to be preferred instead of the concept of emancipation. According to our interpretation, in these instances the term emancipation may feel too "political" with its critical underpinnings.

For us as Finnish social pedagogues with a critical social pedagogical mindset, the concept of emancipation is not only more familiar but also bears with it a direct relation to those traditions of social pedagogy on which we have learned to build our theoretical framework. As one of the leading figures in Finnish social pedagogy, Juha Hämäläinen (2015, p. 1029) reminds us, "from the outset, social pedagogical thought has had a characteristic of social criticism, although there have also been tendencies to integrate people into society through pedagogic repairs". As for the concept of empowerment, it is for us a newer conceptual acquaintance, and although we recognize familiar roots in its history, the current uses of the concept feel somewhat distant to us when viewed from the critical social pedagogical perspective. This partly accounts for the puzzling Finnish discussion and confusion concerning different translations. However, the Spanish social pedagogical discussion around empowerment (Soler *et al.*, 2014) could bring a long-awaited theoretical base to ground the concept in the Finnish social pedagogical discussion as well.

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Note

[1] An interesting detail is that the same tendency to use the English word empowerment in the lack of an appropriate translation has been detected, for instance, in Brazil as well, until the Portuguese concept empoderamento became established around year 2000 (Horochowski & Meirelles, 2007, pp. 487-488). One example of this is Paulo Freire's and Ira Shor's dialogue book that was first published in Portuguese in 1987. In a footnote to the introductory chapter, it is specified that due to the richness of the word empowerment, the original word in English will be used throughout the text (Freire & Shor, 2008 [1987], p. 11).

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