

NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE OF SCHOOL SOCIAL PEDAGOGUE'S SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL RISK CHILDREN: ONE CHILD'S STORY "ONE OUT OF FIVE"

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Abstract

Social pedagogue's assistance to social risk children is a relevant, complex and difficult topic. Social pedagogue is one of the key figures in country's schools in terms of ensuring social equality, social integration, socialisation or simply the provision of social pedagogical assistance in the education process. However, currently there is not enough of a deeper understanding about the entire notion of school social pedagogue's assistance to social risk children: how and in which situations it takes place, how it is organised and what is the role of a social pedagogue as well as which specific activities are carried out. Even though social pedagogical assistance itself is regulated in the legislation, there is still a prevailing lack of the actual situational and in-depth analysis that would reveal the entire process of social pedagogical assistance, allow to have a better look at it and through understanding it, enable the improvement of the situation. In this article, assistance provided by school social pedagogue to social risk children is analysed through narrative approach. In this article is represented one social pedagogues (Sigita) narrative about her assistance to social risk child Rytis. Sigita's narrative is analysed on the following logic: description (narratives themselves, based on stories told by respondents during interviews, divided into smaller units), interpretation (personal insights about the narratives provided, personal approach, reflections based on memories) and explanation (objective analysis of a narrative provided in the description (or a part of it), based on scientific literature).

KEY WORDS: assistance, social pedagogue, social risk child, narrative.

Anotacija

Mokyklos socialinio pedagogo pagalba socialinės rizikos vaikams – aktuali, kompleksinė ir sudėtinga tema. Socialinis pedagogas – viena esminių figūrų šalies mokyklose kalbant apie socialinės lygybės užtikrinimą, socialinę integraciją, socializaciją ar tiesiog socialinės pedagoginės pagalbos teikimą ugdymo procese. Kol kas trūksta supratimo apie mokyklos socialinio pedagogo pagalbos socialinės rizikos vaikams visumą: kaip ir kokiose situacijose ji pasireiškia, kaip teikiama, koks mokyklos socialinio pedagogo vaidmuo ir kokia veikla. Nors pati socialinė pedagoginė pagalba reglamentuota teisiniu lygmeniu, trūksta realios situacijos supratimo, išsamesnės analizės, kuri atskleistų patį socialinės pedagoginės pagalbos procesą, leistų į ją pažvelgti giliau ir sudarytų situacijos tobulinimo prielaidas. Šiame straipsnyje mokyklos socialinio pedagogo pagalba socialinės rizikos vaikams analizuojama taikant naratyvinį požiūrį. Pateikiamas vienos socialinės pedagogės (Sigitos) naratyvas apie jos pagalbą socialinės rizikos vaikui Ryčiui. Naratyvo logika: aprašymas (interviu su tyrimo dalyvėmis metu gautų istorijų pagrindu sukonstruoti naratyvai, suskaidyti smulkesnėmis dalimis, iš esmės tai yra ne autorės, o tyrimo dalyvių patirtys), interpretacija (asmeninės įžvalgos apie pateikiamus naratyvus, asmeninis požiūris, prisiminimais paremti apmąstymai), paaiškinimas (mokslinė literatūra pagrįstas objektyvus aprašyme pateikiamo naratyvo (jo dalies) atskleidimas).

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: pagalba, socialinis pedagogas, socialinės rizikos vaikas, naratyvas.

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Introduction

Social pedagogue's assistance to social risk children is a relevant, complex and difficult topic. Social pedagogue is one of the key figures in country's schools in terms of ensuring social equality, social integration, socialisation or simply the provision of social pedagogical assistance in the education process. In the meantime, social risk children are a very significant and relevant problem faced by both the society and us all.

In 2014, the rate of children being raised in social risk families was slightly more than 56 for one thousand Lithuanian children (Social Map of Lithuania, 2016a), accounting to almost 6 per cent of all children in Lithuania. According to the official data provided in Statistics Lithuania (2017), even though comparing with 2015, in 2016, the number of social risk families has dropped by 100 and children raised in them by 1.1 thousand, other statistical data shows that social situation in Lithuania is still alarming. 18.9 per cent more children have been taken from their parent's care in 2016 as compared to 2015, while the great part of these children are transferred to institutional facilities of infant and child care; in 2016, the number of people seeking for a place to stay in crisis centres and temporary shelters for mothers and children was one tenth higher than in 2015; in 2016, 1.2 thousand of people suffering from addiction-related diseases were committed to psychological and social rehabilitation centres (making it 5.8 per cent more cases than in 2014). Statistical data has revealed that in Lithuania, there are quite a few social issues, making children their hostages as they are raised in environments exposing them to social risk.

It is worth mentioning the likes of foreign experiences as The Children's Society in the Great Britain, the research of which has revealed (2011) that every five minutes, a child runs away from home or a foster care facility, making the annual number as high as 100 thousand. According to the Children's Society (2011), if a child runs away from his / her place of residence, it is one of the key indicators that something in his / her life is wrong. According to The Children's Society (2011), most frequently, reasons of such behaviour include sexual, psychological and physical abuse, neglect, etc. The runaway children usually face the challenge of survival, which result in their socially destructive behaviour: stealing, communicating with strangers, etc. It means that these children enter the area of social risk and specialist assistance in this case becomes both important and necessary.

Even these facts introduced here, while limited, reveal that quite a significant number of children are exposed to social risk from the moment they are born, continuing to experience abuse and neglect in their families and various other problems since a very early age. Since the ancient times, communities would take care

of such children in one way or the other. Due to these reasons the science of social pedagogy has eventually emerged.

1. Theoretical overview

The science of social pedagogy has eventually emerged, with its roots reaching as far as the ancient philosophers Aristotle and Plato. According to Caride & Ortega (2015), Smith (2012), Hämäläinen (2003) Juan Luis Vives, Iohannes Amos Comenius, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Friedrich Fröbel are also associated with the idea of social pedagogy. However, social pedagogy as a term is related to Karl Mayer and the middle of the 19th century (Caride & Ortega, 2015; Smith, 2012; Hämäläinen, 2003).

Currently there are various explanations of social pedagogy available around the world. Researchers have noticed that certain aspects like country's education system, political, historic, cultural, economic and social contexts may affect it. There is no coincidence that scholars from various countries (Kiriadou, 2009; Knotová, 2014; Kornbeck, Jensen, 2011; Hämäläinen, 2012; Stephens, 2013; Lukešová, Martinčová, 2015; Slovenko, Thompson, 2016 etc.) continuously discuss different aspects of social pedagogy.

Juozas Vaitkevičius is considered to be the pioneer of social pedagogy in Lithuania; he has scientifically grounded its concept at the end of the 20th century. However, the most significant contribution to this branch of science was made by the likes of Stasys Šalkauskis, Jonas Vabalas-Gudaitis, Jonas Laužikas. A great contribution to the theoretical development of social pedagogy and various aspects of social pedagogy have been analysed by the scholars like Leliūgienė (1997, 2002, 2003, 2012), Kviesskienė (2001, 2003, 2005), Juodaitytė (2006, 2009).

Concluding all opinions it is worth mentioning an insight of Hämäläinen (2003, p. 76):

Social pedagogy concentrates on questions of the integration of the individual in society, both in theory and in practice. It aims to alleviate social exclusion. It deals with the processes of human growth that tie people to the systems, institutions and communities that are important to their well-being and life management. The basic idea of social pedagogy is to promote people's social functioning, inclusion, participation, social identity and social competence as members of society. Its particular terms of reference apply to the problems people have in integration and life management in different phases of the lifespan. This orientation can be defined in terms of developing a pedagogical approach to address social problems and social needs, which are connected to the processes of the integration of the individual in society.

Despite the variety of opinions, social pedagogy is perceived as the foundation for society's social development, while the key goal to be achieved by a social pedagogue is its practical implementation. A social pedagogue (school social worker in the USA) is almost everywhere perceived as the main helper to child and facilitator in his/ her environment in the processes of social development. According to Böhnisch and Schröer (2011), children and teenagers are the most vulnerable age groups in our society. Therefore, the line between a child and a social risk child is sometimes a very fine one indeed. Etzion and Romi (2015) claim that the concept of a social risk child defines a part of children population which is in a physical, psychological or spiritual peril. When speaking about problems related to children at risk Lovitt (2010, p. 317) claims:

Thousands of children are living in stressful and dysfunctional situations. Scores of them reside in conditions replete with drugs or alcohol. Many children live in circumstances of abject poverty. Indeed, hundreds of them are homeless and live in automobiles, parks, or on streets. Other children are in situations in which violence of one type or another is common. Some of these children are living with two parents, but many are with a single parent. Great numbers of children are placed with relatives (often grandparents). Yet others reside in foster homes, group homes.

A social risk child is a child who, because of personal, family or social circumstances, possesses traits associated with social risk, e.g. being prone to delinquency, former or continuing exposure to abuse, homelessness or living in streets, living in very poor material conditions, committing offences at school, etc (Kvedaravičiūtė, 2007; Kvieskienė, 2003, Dobelniece, Millere, Salmane-Kulikovska, 2015). Barauskaitė-Lukšienė (2002) has noted that the activities of a social pedagogue should contribute to social conditions that would compensate the manifestations of negative socialisation, encourage the positive process of person's socialisation, and provide diagnostic, correctional and consulting assistance to children and families at a risk group. However, social pedagogical assistance to social risk children is a relatively new phenomenon of social pedagogy; therefore, it is quite difficult to find studies dealing with assistance provided by a school social pedagogue to social risk children, while the ones that can be found usually focus on the quantitative aspects rather than the in-depth investigation of this phenomenon. There are studies that introduce the assessment of the efficiency of the provision of social pedagogical assistance: Indrašienė & Merfeldaitė (2013), Merfeldaitė (2007), Kvieskienė et al. (2006), Indrašienė & Suboč (2009b), and Indrašienė & Suboč (2009a). However, studies that would introduce a specific description and/ or analyse assistance provided by school social pedagogues are scarce. A more extensive research on this topic has been conducted

by Baraldsnes and Vaškienė (2013). The said research analyses challenges faced by social pedagogues when providing social pedagogical assistance. Therefore, currently there is not enough of a deeper understanding about the entire notion of school social pedagogue's assistance to social risk children: how and in which situations it takes place, how it is organised and what is the role of a social pedagogue as well as which specific activities are carried out. Even though social pedagogical assistance itself is regulated in the legislation, there is still a prevailing lack of the actual situational and in-depth analysis that would reveal the entire process of social pedagogical assistance, allow to have a better look at it and through understanding it, enable the improvement of the situation.

It should also be noted that the term of social pedagogical assistance does not exist in a foreign language; it frequently features the term of social support instead. However foreign studies dealing with social support (Kozan, Di Fabio, Blustein, Kenny, 2014; Schuitema, Peetsma, Van der Veen, 2016; Liu, Mei, Tian, Huebner, 2016; Wood, Smith, Varjas, Meyers, 2017; Tian, Zhao, Huebner, 2015), it is also noteworthy that the said studies are usually quantitative ones, without providing a deeper understanding and clearer view into the process of providing social support to children at risk. Qualitative research would be beneficial in order to understand the role of a school social pedagogue providing social assistance; it would reveal how this process is organised, implemented, aiming to facilitate the process of improving this area and allowing the maximum efficiency working with social risk children.

2. Methodology

In this article, assistance provided by school social pedagogue to social risk children is analysed through narrative approach. Narrative as a research method has appeared at the beginning of the 20th century and has been mostly applied in sociology. Later, however, it has been adopted by other branches of science. Currently foreign research studies in the field of education apply it extensively as well. Narrative in the research of education studies was grounded and developed by Connelly & Clandinin (1990). According to Clandinin (2006), a narrative-based approach enables understanding how a social and a personal experience gradually intertwines as people's lives advances, because their individual experience is determined by greater social, cultural and institutional narratives that have been and still are inhabited by people. The final text in narrative does not ever mean that the final answer will be provided it only raise questions what / how / why happen and what the result was (Clandinin et al., 2016; Bernard, 2013). Experts of the narrative employ collaboration and ethics in order to enable the audience to rethink,

retell, take a better look into one's experience, reconsider how they operate and are related to others (Clandinin et al., 2016).

Data has been collected from school social pedagogues during the empirical research phase, employing the method of unstructured in-depth interview. During the interview, the said social pedagogues told their stories of providing assistance to social risk children. Moreover, this phase also included collecting documents related to the activities of social pedagogues, their journals and stories submitted in writing. Additional data was collected during correspondence with social pedagogues, asking to clarify some data and recall some details necessary for the research that have not been mentioned during the main interview. Additional semi-structured interviews with some of the research participants have also taken place aiming to clarify some information and discuss interpretations. Data collected was transcribed and used to construct narratives further used for the analysis of research results.

In this article is represented one social pedagogues (Sigita) narrative about her assistance to social risk child Rytis. Sigita's narrative, in accordance with Yi (2014), Markula, Denison (2005), Clandinin, Connelly (2000), is analysed on the following logic: description, interpretation and explanation.

3. Results

At work, social pedagogues hear a lot of stories about children that shake or shock them. Some of us do not understand, what are the conditions in which some of the children are living. And the children not always understand that it is possible to live in some other way. They think that others live the same way as they do. Therefore, the advanced contemporary society should try to ensure that these children whose living conditions and needs are not satisfactory, would receive adequate assistance. It is meaningful to focus on the long-term perspective, but not on temporary measures.

The story told by Sigita about Rytis is quite short. However, despite of the fact that the life story of Rytis is quite complicated and difficult, the assistance provided by Sigita when solving his problems, according to her own words, was simple and effective.

Living environment of Rytis

The environment in which we grow up and in which we live is very important. It shapes both us and our character. It might help or, on the contrary, prevent us from relaxing, getting some rest and feeling safe. When retelling the story of Rytis, Sigita provides a lot of details about his living conditions, because as it becomes evident later, the situation at home and living conditions are the main reasons of problems faced by Rytis:

I had a family with five children. And all five children had different fathers. All were born one year after the other. Once, when drunk, their mother has told me that she can't tell how she got pregnant and who was the father; she cannot tell who the fathers of her children are. When I started working here, the eldest was in the eighth grade, and the youngest one was several months old. They lived in a social housing owned by the municipality. While the mother was drinking, it was a total slum: with the rotation of men, with someone coming to party, as Russians say it was some sort of "prochodnoj dvor" (a walk-through yard). Later, when child protective services started making visits, she made some repairs. But every time the mother started drinking again, everything was getting worse.

The story of Sigita reveals that the living environment of Rytis has not been suitable for a child in any sense of the word, neither physically nor psychologically. Children have not seen a positive example of their mother and as Sigita herself recalls, their home was in disrepair. Therefore, it is possible that children have not had been able to study and rest. The main reason for this was alcohol addiction suffered by the mother of Rytis:

Children's mother had a serious drinking problem. It used to come in waves: she would drink, and then stop. These pauses between drinking and not drinking used to last for 3–4 months. But when she did, those would be serious cases. It would last for half a year. And then there would be four months of normal behaviour. But there used to be the same period: when she drinks, child protective services take the children to foster care. Then she pulls herself together and stops drinking. Then she gets her children back. And the children are thus always in between foster care and home. They would actually be taken from home approximately twice a year. And it is very traumatising for children. We used to get the sense instantly that they had been taken from the family. But we at least demanded for children to be able to go to the same educational institution, not changing at least that environment, because it was stressful enough to be away from home. We knew that family, we knew all those children and we knew all the aspects related to their feeding. And they all five attended school here.

Sigita was telling about serious problems caused to the entire family by alcohol-related issues of Rytis mother. According to the social pedagogue, it used to happen quite often that children were taken from the family and moved to the foster care. However, Sigita remembers that even though children were moved to foster care, the school would always look for ways to let them stay in the same school. Lovitt (2010) states that there are cases, when school environment is safer

than the one in which a child is raised. The same situation is usually applicable and speaking about the social risk children. Therefore, the attempt to keep children in the same educational institution in some sense is ensuring that a child would have one stable place.

However, scientific analysis has revealed that according to scholars, the most suitable environment for children to be raised is family. On the other hand, if it is not completely suitable for a child, before taking a child from a family, the first thing to ensure is that all measures have been taken for such environment to be created. As it is evident from the story of Rytis, the environment in which he was raised, is far from the environment that would ensure the fulfilment of his needs. However, one of the reasons mentioned most often both in the scientific literature and my thesis, because of which children are placed at social risk, is their living environment. When evaluating the story of Rytis told by Sigita, it is evident that considering the living environment of Rytis, it is completely normal and understandable that he faced some problems. Sigita remembers:

There used to be all sorts of things: running away and lying. There used to be cases, when [they] spent time in foster care, and wanted to see their real mother, but it was impossible due to the legislation applicable in such cases. So, then they lied that they had to get back earlier to foster care. And you used to walk around the territory and see them. All the people are locals after all. And you caught them sneaking to their mother. And you had to report things like that. I used to communicate with all of them: they would all come to me to drink tea or do their homework. Basically, throughout the day, when they stayed at their mother's, they wouldn't go home when their mother was drinking. I saw them all going to the 12th grade in front of my eyes.

Then Sigita remembers her first direct contact with Rytis, how their communication started and her contribution solving his problems:

My first contact with Rytis as an eight grader was as follows: I started working here in September, and the very next week, the vice-principal brought him to me completely drunk. He was completely drunk in the history lesson. So, these are the people here. So, we started talking, I gave him strong tea to sober him up. Of course, he hadn't drunk much: maybe a bottle of cider. But for an eighth grader, that was enough. So, I sobered him up, we went for a walk and I tried to find out its reason in a humanistic way. He told me that his friends told him to celebrate the beginning of the school year. So, they have been celebrating for a week.

Stephens (2013) states that in his/her work, a social pedagogue must attempt to start a conversation with others, because this form of communication creates a good atmosphere, and conditions to collaborate in order to point out the existing problems and work together to solve them. According to Stephens (2013), relationship between a social pedagogue and a child under his / her care, must be based on a horizontal approach (equals), rather than the vertical approach (bottom-up). It is highly important, when working with a social risk child, because such children are more sensitive to the environment, and they are more hostile to both the environment and people. Therefore, such a friendly approach does not scare a child. This type of conversation can be seen in the story told by Sigita. In this situation, Sigita could have chosen more drastic actions (bring the child to the principle, etc.); however, instead of doing it, from the very first moments of making acquaintance, she showed Rytis that she is ready to listen and help him.

Problems of Rytis, their solution and outcome

Sigita recalled that the main problem of Rytis was his absence from school, as there had not been any more manifestations of problematic behaviour, nor other pronounced issues characteristic to social risk children.

Continuing the story about the problem of Rytis and its solution, Sigita remembers:

Later it became evident that his main problem is failure to attend classes. The thing with his attendance... it became evident to me later: if he skips school, it means that he's at home looking after younger brothers and sisters. His failure to attend classes was directly related to his mother's drinking. It meant that there is no one to look after the little ones, so he stayed. And I could see it evidently: if one of them is missing, so you can take teacher's log and see that the others are missing as well. So, it means that there's something going on at home. So later everything shaped itself into some sort of triangle.

Schugurensky (2014) claims that social pedagogy sees the environment from its bottom and out of the point of problems existing in that society; therefore, it has an exceptional right to bridge this gap between the utopian vision and reality. It means that social pedagogues see more than the others: teachers, other members of the school community and the society in general. The same situation is reflected in the Sigita's story: on the one hand, it seems that the problem is that Rytis is skipping classes, but it is an outcome of graver problems within the family. Therefore, social pedagogues, according to Schugurensky (2014), have more influence and power to enable changes than they think they do.

During a conversation with me, Sigita told me that each child is very different and unique, so the methods she applies during her work must be individually selected for each child after evaluating him/ her. Things that are suitable for one child, might not be right for the other. With some children, it is enough to speak about their behaviour, list its consequences and this will be enough to change it. With others, it requires long and consistent work applying specific methods. However, when speaking about the problem of the attendance of Rytis, Sigita remembers that solution for the problem was suggested by the problem itself:

Finally, I managed to convince him that he at least must be in classes. They [children] were easy to manage: they were afraid of being taken from their family. And they knew perfectly fine that it takes one letter from school and child protective services start home visits and watching them. And for them this sense of watching was horrible: they felt as if about to be going to foster care. It was some sort of rein. It was easy to get him back behind the school desk because I said him: “If you skip classes, I show it to child protective services as a fact that your mother fails to ensure your attendance. And you will get back to foster care.” And foster care is a place where they will do whatever you want for them not to end up here.

The story makes it evident that when solving the problem of Rytis attendance, Sigita has applied some sort of blackmailing technique. We have all heard the saying that “the end justifies the means”. Sigita also agrees with it. During the conversation, she claimed that social risk children are more prone to be clinging to their home and family, irrespective of the fact that they do not usually receive any support in there, nor they are provided with basic conditions for survival. Therefore, it might be unavoidable to manipulate their family situation for educational purposes or to solve some of their problems. She provides one piece of memory as an example:

The worst thing is, once I had to participate when they were removed from their family, a process of taking a little girl and moving her to foster care: the mother is lying with some naked man completely drunk, a baby not older than a few months cries and crawls around, and the rest hold the hand of their drunk mother tight, while screaming “Mom, we want to stay with you”. No matter what sort of person their mother is, they need her.

Schugurensky (2014) provides an example: everyday, a doctor in an emergency room sees victims of various accidents; he / she also sees flaws and imper-

fections of the traffic rules; therefore, on the one hand, the doctor must treat the motorcyclist injured during a road accident, on the other hand, the doctor knows that it is necessary to change the rules of the traffic in order to protect motorcyclists in the future. In the context of the story of Rytis, this example shows that it is not enough to work with social risk children, because usually the support must be extended to the entire environment in which the child is raised. Therefore, focusing on only one problem, while ignoring the others, can offer only a momentary solution for a problem (treatment of a motorcyclist), knowing that the problem will re-occur again (because the imperfections of the traffic system have not been solved nor they are going to be).

Sigita continues sharing her memories about Rytis and his problems as well as her role in the family:

Rytis was the caretaker: while mom was on the binge, he took care of the rest of his brothers and sisters. There used to be cases, when he stole something at the market, so they would have what to eat while their mother was partying. Just to hide the fact that mother was drinking again. They used to cover her all the time, so the school wouldn't find out. There used to be situations, when I had to visit them at home, but he wouldn't let me in, so I wouldn't see how the things are.

Sigita claims that social risk children usually must take over some of the family functions that actually belong to the parents. Therefore, as it is possible to see from the story told by a social pedagogue, once the alcohol-related problems of Rytis mother became more acute, he had to take over taking care of his family. This was precisely the reason while he failed to attend classes. Sigita has taken this fact into consideration, and continued putting a lot of effort into trying to help the mother of Rytis:

There used to be a very nice rapport between the mother of Rytis and me. She would be very communicative with me. And I used to notice when she starts drinking again, and when she visits me after some party. But she would come. Whenever I invited her, she would always come. In whichever state, she would come. I used to invite her on a regular basis, every ten days, so I would see the situation, how the things stand and what is going on. She had to present me papers, because her children got free lunch at school and there used to be a requirement to submit papers about the income. So, from time to time she had to report to me about her income, because once she started drinking, she would get fired. So we agreed that she would come to me every ten days and tell me what is the situation, what is going at home, maybe she needs some assistance or support, because I used to organise a lot of events to collect clothes, food and I gave away a lot of those things to this particular family, because all of

these events would take place in that school. The school itself used to collect various things: clothes, food, stationery. But I used to give everything away to students of this particular school; quietly, so no one would know who got what, but it would all stay among the students of this school. And this family used to get a lion's share, because they really needed that support. And the mother of Rytis used to come often and ask: "Maybe you have some food, because I no longer have neither job, nor money?" And I would also look for some place for her to work: either at some market or some store. I would get into touch with the eldership administration and ask whether they have some job. Because there are always all sorts of jobs in an eldership, or they have some information: maybe they need some cleaner or someone else. But it all would work until she would not start drinking. Once she started, she would get fired immediately and then everything would start from the beginning. And so, I would help her, until each of her children finished school.

However, as it is evident from the story of Sigita, her efforts to help the mother of Rytis have not always been fruitful: even though the mother tried to change herself or with the assistance of Sigita, the addiction to alcohol was stronger in most cases. Úcar (2015) notices that social pedagogical practice and assistance are impossible without participation, efforts and involvement of the party subjected to the said assistance. No changes are possible, if a person does not want to change. Úcar (2015) claims that no social or sociocultural changes do start, if personal changes do not start first. The same applies in the case of Rytis mother. As it is evident, even though Sigita put a lot of effort so the life of Rytis mother would change for good, but the mother herself has not put enough effort in it.

However, Sigita remembers Rytis and his story as a somewhat positive case. During the conversation, she had admitted that not all stories have a happy ending and the efforts of a social pedagogue in those cases remain futile. However, Sigita claims that Rytis is a different case: she felt a connection with this child, she was successful in communicating with him, he welcomed her help. For this reason, she claims that connection with such children remains after they leave school as well:

But we get in touch with Rytis up until today: he made it work; he is now married, has a son. All the special ones I have had to work with, they get in touch with me to this day.

According to Stephens (2013), it is worth remembering that a social pedagogue must work to enable children to control their lives, solve their problems and live a full life: it is not just a matter of ensuring their survival. In a society, it is assumed that if a child is raised in a social risk family and belongs to the group of social risk, then

he or she will never be able to get rid of this “label”. In this case, according to Sigita, Rytis managed to get his life into his own hands and start his own family. It shows that despite the fact that we are greatly influenced by the environment in which we are raised, a lot of things depend on us and our own efforts to build our lives.

It can be said that all in all, the tactics employed by Sigita to solve a problem that has become evident at school (skipping classes), is quite strict. According to Sigita herself, it is not blackmailing. By simply speaking to Rytis, she listed the reasons and consequences: if you do not attend school, you will have to go to foster care. Various interpretations are possible assessing the choice of approach made by Sigita, but it is evident that in this situation, it has been effective. However, it is also important that Sigita has also decided to help solve the problem of Rytis (insecure home environment), as much as her position as a social pedagogue allowed it. Sigita hosted social skills training for the mother of Rytis, she also undertaken to control her: set meetings on a regular basis and analysed the situation at home.

According to Sigita, all of the children from this family had various social issues. However, she notices, that only a constructive dialogue, which, if needed, included external specialists, and consistent work with Sigita, always allowed the problems to be noticed in time and solved before spiralling out of control.

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