

# PEDAGOGÍA SOCIAL

REVISTA INTERUNIVERSITARIA

TERCERA ÉPOCA  
(JULY-DECEMBER 2016)



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#### **PEDAGOGIA SOCIAL. REVISTA INTERUNIVERSITARIA**

Att. Antonio V. Martín García  
Facultad de Educación. Universidad de Salamanca  
Paseo de Canalejas, 169. 37008 Salamanca  
Tel. +34294630. Fax +34294609  
E-mail: pedagogiasocialrevista@gmail.com

Diseño gráfico: Calamar Edición & Diseño

ISSN: 1139-1723.  
Depósito legal: V-4110-1998.  
DOI: 10.7179/PSRI

Periodicidad: Semestral.  
Fecha de inicio publicación: 1986  
Tasa de rechazo 2015: 40%

La dirección de la revista no se responsabiliza de las opiniones vertidas por cada autor en su texto.

#### **PEDAGOGIA SOCIAL. REVISTA INTERUNIVERSITARIA ESTÁ INDEXADA EN:**

##### **BASES DE DATOS NACIONALES:**

ISOC del Centro Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), PSICODOC, DIALNET, REDINED (Red de Bases de Datos de Información Educativa), BEG (GENCAT), DOAJ.

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Recyt (Repositorio Español de Ciencia y Tecnología - Fecyt)

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## EDITORIAL

### THE MEASURE OF THINGS (THAT CAN BE MEASURED)

#### LA MEDIDA DE LAS COSAS (O DE LAS COSAS QUE SE PUEDEN MEDIR)

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One of the critical aspects in a research study is the development and / or use of instruments for data collection. Studies often apply a variety of tools which do not take reliability and validity seriously. Whereas there is a wide range of instruments used to measure variables and psychological and pedagogical dimensions that are considered fundamental for school educational agents, it is essential to broaden the quantity and quality of instruments that assess specific factors of interest for educators and researchers whose professional performance and efforts are set in social environments, while being aware of the difficulties involved.

The progressively imposed required standard for scientific publications also weighs this point, which is appreciated as an extra quality indicator. Thus, several scientific journals find the Cronbach alfa coefficient inadequate for internal consistency in measuring instruments, and expressly request accurate evidence of the suitability of the instruments for data collection, particularly when procedures have not been satisfactorily verified. From the methodological standpoint, the reason is quite obvious: if a specific factor of the study has not been properly gauged, the outcome will be easily questioned, and, as a result, the scientific value of the research weakened. Furthermore, the discredit of the study will also depreciate the publisher.

The question is whether it is possible to transfer to our field the requirement standards inher-

ent to other disciplines, regarding the nature and kind of studies conducted in social education. This long-standing issue relates to the scientificity applicable to social science. We are not heating the debate about the preeminence of some approaches over others in education though; we will not take a stance on that. On the contrary, we assume that the demand of systematization and methodological rigour can be applied to every research. What we stand for is further attention to research procedures already undertaken by other disciplines that share social settings and areas of research with Social Pedagogy. Precisely this kind of methods of data collection, mainly based on implementation of specially designed tests, is what we are referring to in this editorial.

Once that this has been outlined, the ontological question about measurement boundaries arises: Can we measure each and every thing? Which things can be measured? The Kantian distinction between phenomenon and noumenon would exemplify the limits of human knowledge by stating that some things are cognizable (phenomenon) and others are not (noumenon), at least in a specific historic time. For instance, can emotions be measured? Can we find an indicator for level of anger, degrees of patience, satisfaction volume, distance from indifference or weight of affection? Obviously, if we lean on magnitudes (as the physical feature of being measured), the answer is no. The definition given by physical-natural sciences to measure, as the result of measurement, that is

to say, to compare quantity to a unit of measure expressed in numerical notation, is explicit enough about its meaning, and criteria of truth as well. An interesting book portraying this idea is Ian Whitelaw's "A measure of all things: the story of man and measurement", in which every unit of measure (yard, centimeter, month, day, light year, byte, volt, watt, knot, fahrenheit, celsius... up to 300 different units) is presented. Similarly, Ken Alder's "The Measure of All Things: The Seven-Year Odyssey and Hidden Error That Transformed the World" emphasizes the value of the average, but bringing to light some of the contradictions inherent to the overreliance on standardization too. Obviously, these books represent a qualitative perspective, which is clearly not enough for the social educational researcher, usually more interested in realms involving a search for information that is beyond the physically observable and quantifiable data. On the contrary, mentioning Protagoras and his *Homo omnium rerum mensura est* (Man is the measure of all things), we could succumb to an excessive subjectivism that refers to sophist relativism and its denial of absolutes. It stated that things depend on the observer, thus accepting that each human being can establish specific criteria to observe, perceive and measure things. This idea leads to the existence of as many realities or truths as individuals, which is hardly compatible with the logic for scientific research.

It is clear that these limitations extend to social sciences as a whole (emotions, feelings, perceptions about ourselves or others, aspects involved in social interacting), and not exclusively to Social Pedagogy. Therefore, our stand claims that Social Pedagogy needs an important collective effort to identify, build, validate and especially use scales for measuring everything, or at least each thing that we can. This is a decisive factor for the survival of social educational research. In an article published in the last issue of this journal, professors March, Orte and Ballester supported this position while stating the need of rigorous assessment, not only as a tool of knowledge in the implementation of social educational initiatives, but also as an essential element for reaffirmation of professional identities of pedagogues and social educators. In line with the editorial written by professor J. Ortega in the last issue (nº27), we should avoid rhetorical studies, away from the reality to investigate, and unreliable tools for data collection. We subscribe to these ideas highlighting the importance of validated measuring instruments in research, previously adapted to the context in which they will be embedded. In this way, well founded discussions will be established comparing results obtained in similar studies.

While exploring any field of study, we will find a wide range of dimensions, factors and indicators identified as variables of analysis which have their own measuring tools. For further explanation, we will refer to ageing and some of its indicators of assessment.

One of the concepts in gerontology that has been most used and analyzed over the last years is "quality of life", which joins different kinds of dimensions, such as emotional well-being, physical well-being, material wealth, interpersonal relationships, social inclusion, personal development or self-determination and rights -for the objective assessment of quality of life we will mention the GENCAT scale (Verdugo et al.)-. From a subjective perspective, quality of life in later life is associated with "life satisfaction" (Life Satisfaction Index (LSI-A) by Neugarten, Havinghurst and Tobin assesses life satisfaction on the basis of indicators like enthusiasm, resolve and fortitude, congruence between desired and achieved objectives, positive self-concept or state of mind), "psychological well-being" or "subjective well-being" (measured with several scales, for example Carol Ryff's Well-being Scale, whose factors are: autonomy, control of the environment, self-acceptance, positive relationships, personal growth and purpose in life) and "self-esteem" (traditionally measured with Rosemberg's Self-Esteem Scale, which estimates self-worth and self-respect. Together with these self-reporting indicators, quality of life in old age has been associated with health too. Some of these scales are EQ-5D (whose dimensions are mobility, self-care, usual activities, pain, discomfort, anxiety and depression), the Nottingham Health Profile and COOP-WONCA questionnaire (which uses 6 charts to consider physical fitness, daily and social activities, change in health and overall health). In line with this, we could also mention Karnofsky's Performance Status Scale for objective assessment of functional status.

Another group of measures of great interest to social educational studies relates to social interaction, particularly the estimation of social support and loneliness of older people. Social support can be assessed by instruments such as the Duke-UNC Questionnaire of Functional Social Support, the MSPSS Scale (Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support) -composed by 12 items which compiled information through the areas of family, friends and other references-, the Social Relationship Scale, used to detect socio-familiar risk in older people (assessing family and economic situation, housing, social relations and social support network), the Zarit Caregiver Burden Inventory -which studies the degree of overload focusing on the next dimensions: dependant

time, overload in personal, social and emotional life-, the GIJON Scale for the assessment of social risk, etc. In relation with loneliness, J. Jenny de Jong Gierveld and T. Van Tilburg developed the Scale for overall, emotional and social loneliness. Other scales for this concept are the Scale for Evaluation of Social and Emotional Loneliness in Adults (SESLA-S) -which values the subjective experience of social loneliness, family loneliness and partnership loneliness-; Social Loneliness Scale ESTE II, etc.

Furthermore, other measures are also essential for the knowledge of this matter and they refer to the level of capacity for the development of instrumental activities of daily living. This dimension, related to the concept "geriatric functionality" or "functional status", is an important variable to bear in mind in the implementation of specific socio-educational programs for this age range. There are many instruments for measuring this kind of variables and the best-known are the Katz Index of Independence in Activities of Daily Living (which measures the functional state of a person according to the performance of daily activities and considers self-care and mobility), the Barthel scale (which assesses 10 daily activities), the OARS Multidimensional Functional Assessment Questionnaire (OARS-MFAQ) (which consist of 7 items referred to basic activities and personal care and 7 more referred to instrumental activities and environment), the Philadelphia Geriatric Center Morale Scale or the Lawton Instrumental Activities of Daily Living Scale to assess independent living skills (using the phone, going shopping, cooking, house-keeping, washing, using public transport and responsibility for medication and money), the Functional Scale of the Spanish Red Cross and the Older Multidimensional Resources and Services (OARS). Apart from these functional scales, mental and psychological assessment scales are also useful, being some of them the Mini-Mental State Examination by Lobo in Spain (adapted from Folstein's), Pfeiffer's test (Short Portable Mental Status Questionnaire [SPMSQ]), the Clock Drawing test for dementia of the Alzheimer, etc.

Referring to attitudes toward ageing, we could mention the scale developed by Tuckman and Lorge (consisting in 137 sentences organized in 13 evaluation categories including personality features and physical and cognitive characteristics), the scale by Kogan and Shelton (consisting in sentences which compare adults and older people), the facts on Aging Quizzes by Palmore, and the questionnaire of negative stereotypes by Montorio and Izaz, the Scale of Psychosocial changes following retirement by Rosenkoetter and Garris (consisting in 30 items), etc.

Lastly, we should also mention other aspects related to learning and memory, educational and community participation, leisure, level of physical activity, etc. In the case of formal learning, there are several instruments such as Kolb Learning Cycle (which describes different ways to learn, preferences in learning; a variation of this scale is the one by Honey-Alonso -CHAEA- about learning styles that can be also applied to adults and older people); it is interesting to point out SDLRS Scale by Luci Guglielmino (which measures love of learning, creativity, initiatives on learning, self-knowledge, acceptance of responsibilities or self-concept); or the Continuing Learning Inventory by Oddy, OCLI, a scale composed by 24 items which assesses level of autonomy and self-management, usually used for adults). Educational participation has been measured with scales as Social Participation Scale by Boshier, which estimates various dimensions (cognitive interests, stimulation, human relationships). For leisure and free time we could mention the Leisure Activities for Older People Inventory (INACOAM) and also the studies conducted in the Institute for Leisure Studies at Deusto University (M. Cuenca, A. Goytia, etc.). In relation with physical activity we will mention the Works performed by Guirao-Goris, Cabrero-García and others (Gaceta Sanitaria, volumen 23, (4), 2009, pp. 334.e1-334.17) which displays 36 instruments to measure the level of physical activity in older people. Among them, we highlight the Minnesota Leisure Time Physical Activity Questionnaire, which has been applied in Spain.

This list could never end. We have mentioned many scales and instruments applied to a specific context, which is older people and ageing problems, but it could be applied to other issues in pedagogy and social education.

The complete quotation by Protagoras says: "Man is the measure of all things: of things which are, that they are, and of things which are not, that they are not". This sentence means that things show the value that the man (in the universal sense) collectively wants to give. Thus, the editorial line of *Pedagogía Social Revista Interuniversitaria* firmly works to promote efforts in this direction, helping through the exquisite choice of articles with great methodological rigour, monitoring of the creation and validation of new scales, instruments and other evaluation resources which are useful for social educational researchers and professionals, as well as being a dissemination medium and space for reflection. Because of this, the editorial board of this magazine will propose in an upcoming issue the problem about scales and measuring instruments in Social Pedagogy. Specialized researchers will participate, and the mono-

graphic is also opened to the collaboration of other authors.

Possibly these scales and tools are not enough to let us achieve the comprehension of the thing-in-itself of reality, as Kant said; however the development of these instruments is necessary and helpful for many researchers and particularly for graduate students. Some of these instruments may and must be used for screening in order to prop-

erly choose samples or participants in a study, and they can help to build consensus about validity of initiatives. All for the sake of scientific research.

**Antonio Víctor Martín García**

Editor in Chief. *Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria*