Metaphors for socio-educational intervention: pedagogical implications for practice

Metáforas de la intervención socioeducativa: implicaciones pedagógicas para la práctica

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Abstract:

The concept of socio-educational intervention has been much discussed in the field of education. Nonetheless, and despite its versatility and variety of meanings, it is one of the most commonly used concepts in the fields of school and social education. The aim of this text is twofold: on the one hand it will analyse this term and argue for its usefulness and applicability in our field; on the other hand it will derive from this analysis a whole series of pedagogical principles that can help with the training of teachers and educators and the development of their professional practice. Given the complexity of socio-educational intervention processes, the methodology employed to derive these pedagogical principles will be metaphors. The aim is to collect or create metaphors that enable analysis and reinterpretation of the socio-educational intervention processes that take place within the framework of professional practice. Six metaphors are presented and analysed in the text: 1) the horse and the fountain; 2) socio-educational synapses; 3) the crocodile and the pond; 4) the tightrope walker; 5) the bullet and the moving target; and, finally, 6) signalling beacons. These all allow a novel look at the socio-educational intervention processes used by education professionals. Some of the pedagogical principles developed refer to the sovereignty of the learner in relation to learning, the need to establish links with participants and work together, and the need to establish guidelines to steer the actions of those who work in education and pedagogy, among other principles.

Keywords: educational principles, pedagogy, social education, intervention, educational research, community education.

Resumen:

El concepto de intervención socioeducativa ha sido muy discutido en el campo de la educación. Sin embargo, y a pesar de su versatilidad y homonimia, es uno de los más utilizados tanto en el ámbito de la educación escolar, como en el de la educación social. El objetivo de este texto es doble: por una parte, analizar y argumentar el uso y la aplicación de dicho término en nuestro campo; por otra, derivar de dicho análisis toda una serie de principios

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pedagógicos que ayuden tanto en la formación de pedagogos y educadores, como en el desarrollo de su práctica profesional. Dada la complejidad de los procesos de intervención socioeducativa, la metodología utilizada para inferir aquellos principios pedagógicos va ser la de la metaforización. Se trata de recopilar o elaborar metáforas que posibiliten el análisis y reinterpretación de los procesos de intervención socioeducativa que se desarrollan en el marco de la práctica profesional. En el texto se presentan y analizan seis metáforas: 1) la del caballo y la fuente; 2) la de las sinapsis socioeducativas; 3) la del cocodrilo y la charca; 4) la del funambulista; 5) la del proyectil y el blanco móvil; y, por último, 6) la de las balizas de señalización. Todas ellas posibilitan una mirada novedosa sobre los procesos de intervención socioeducativa que desarrollan los profesionales de la educación. Algunos de los principios pedagógicos elaborados se refieren, entre otros, a la soberanía del aprendiz en relación al aprendizaje; a la necesidad de establecer vínculos con los participantes y de trabajar conjuntamente y, por último, a la manera de establecer referentes que orienten la acción de los profesionales de la educación y la pedagogía.

Descriptores: principios educativos, pedagogía, educación social, intervención, investigación educativa, educación comunitaria.

1. Introduction

One of the main objectives of pedagogical research is to discover or develop principles to help educators perform their professional duties in appropriately and efficiently. As Brezinka notes (2002), the pedagogical knowledge that guides educators must be simultaneously rational, practical, and relevant. The purpose of this text is to construct pedagogical principles for socio-educational intervention that facilitate the training of teachers and educators and the development of their professional practice.

There is agreement between different authors on the foundations on which pedagogy and social education are built. This is known as the *socio-educational relationship*. It is a relationship that involves a teacher or educator and a person, group, or community. These can be of any age but they are always situated in a specific sociocultural and historical context.

Where there is a multitude of opinions, is concerning the specific term that should characterise this relationship. Concepts like *action*, *praxis*, *intervention*, *orientation*, *accompaniment*, *practice*, and *interaction,* among others, have been tested by authors from the field of education in an attempt to find the one that defines, as fully and unambiguously as possible, the actions that the educator performs in the framework of this relationship. The debate about this concept has not lacked stances —often highly polarised— that connected each of these terms to certain visions and focuses in the pedagogy of social education, debates that, in my opinion, have been more ideological than strictly epistemological or scientific.

This work starts by analysing intervention as a generic concept used in the fields of school education and social education. It then takes the complexity of socio-educational relationships as a starting point and uses metaphors as a method to try to understand them. It is a matter of creating or collecting metaphors that make it possible to reinterpret processes of socio-educational intervention. In the following section, six metaphors for the socio-educational relationship are presented along with the pedagogical implications deriving from each of them. The work ends by drawing together the main conclusions.

2. The uses and meanings of the concept of «intervention» in pedagogy and social education

The semantic versatility and differing meanings of the term intervention between the two disciplines are perhaps its most characteristic attributes. We could almost say that intervention is a wildcard term. Interventions can be psychological, educational, school, economic, accounting, armed, surgical, social, or military to name just some of the many possibilities.

Intervention started being used as a concept in the 1970s. At first, it was linked to educational psychology —psychological interventions in schools— and to a theory of education —educational intervention— which at that time had a clearly technological orientation. This was decisive in establishing an almost organic link between intervention and technological action. Intervention was consequently associated with technological focuses: with technocratic approaches and educational relationships that were hierarchical, authoritarian, and managerial. As a result of this link, there was a notable polarisation of positions between academics in the field of education regarding this concept.

Socio-educational intervention as a concept was strongly criticised by some authors, especially those who opted for approaches more closely linked to critical perspectives. Lucio-Villegas analyses this concept based on one of the many definitions of the word intervention in the *Diccionario de la Real Academia de la Lengua Española*. Intervention would be taking part in a matter. Based on this definition, he notes with some irony that «the term intervention may not be as terrible and intrinsically evil as we had thought» (2005, p. 200).

Carballeda (2002) says that the term intervention comes from the Latin term *atei-venio* that translates as *come-between* or as «intervene». This dual meaning of the word intervention could, on the one hand, make it a synonym of mediation, interaction, help, or cooperation, or, on the other hand, intrusion, meddling, interference, coercion, scrutiny, control, or repression. Hence, in any process of social intervention, «both sides of the coin can be found» (2002, p. 93). This question accounts for and explains the ideological polarisation of different authors regarding this concept, based on the word's double meaning. It could be claimed that both positions —intervention as technological action or as ideological or critical action— have grounds for accepting or rejecting the concept of intervention given

that they were only looking at one of its faces.

For my part, I believe that, using pragmatic and etymological criteria, the term intervention offers an appropriate and useful concept for defining and characterising the actions of professionals in the framework of the socio-educational relationship. From the pragmatic perspective, this is because, with the passage of time, this concept has come to be in general use among professionals and academics in the social and educational fields. The number of publications in the field of social education that have it in their title are proof of this fact. Despite all of this, authors often insist on the versatility of the term which, from their perspective, strips it of effectiveness or technical precision in the field of pedagogy. Furthermore, from the etymological perspective, intervention seems to be appropriate as a concept because, as Carballeda notes, it includes the contradictions inherent to the actions of teachers and social educators, and because other supposedly more neutral concepts such as action or praxis seem to refer to broader and less specific situations.

In any case, this allows an initial approach relating to how we use the terms and concepts in the socio-educational field. Depending on the epistemological, sociocultural, and ideological context in which they are used, they all convey a series of connotations that make them suitable or unsuitable for more or less appropriately referring to the situations or phenomena mentioned. In the end, what really matters is not so much what we call our actions but how we do them.

To specify with precision what we are talking about, we define socio-educational intervention as a professional activity performed by educators and teachers in the setting of a sociocultural situation or problem with the aim of creating scenarios that help the participating people, groups, or communities to empower themselves, in other words, to give themselves the lessons and resources needed to improve their situation in the world. It is a professional action that, beyond its initial unidirectionality, seeks to build a bidirectional relationship with the participant as a priority.

3. Metaphors for socio-educational intervention

Discussing socio-educational intervention involves referring to actions characterised by a high degree of complexity. Dewey noted that «no educational practice whatsoever could exist that was not highly complex» (2015, p. 12). This complexity is what leads us to use metaphors as a method for analysing and understanding this situation. It should be noted that there are many authors in our field who have used this method of analysis and research in recent decades to consider the complexity of educational phenomena (Sfard, 1998; Chan, 2013; Neuman/Guterman, 2017).

Metaphors are not limited to describing, illustrating, delving into, or interpreting a situation. They create new realities that can significantly modify the referents from which they are created.

Creating a metaphor involves generating new perspectives on realities that had, hitherto, been known (Krippendorf,

1997). The process of building metaphors makes us see these realities differently, with other perspectives and focuses that give them greater depth and breadth, and also lead us to uncover new patterns and facets that were previously hidden by the veil of the real. It is in this sense that Sloterdijk says that «metaphors let you speak more clearly» (2014, p. 155). Han (2015), for his part, refers to the creation of metaphors as a practice of truth as, in his view, they weave a web that is rich in relationships by uncovering how things relate and communicate with each other. Finally, Swedberg (2016) emphasises the heuristic power of metaphors in social sciences and their usefulness for theorising: «The metaphor, like analogy —he notes—, is particularly important for discovering, not for verifying» (2016, p. 90).

Starting from this aim of generating pedagogical theory, six metaphors are presented below to try to understand socio-educational intervention processes and the interpersonal relationships that provide their framework. What we aim to do, based on these metaphors, is create pedagogical rules, and so each metaphor is presented with the pedagogical implications that derive from it. These implications take the shape of pedagogical and methodological principles that can help social teachers and educators develop better and more efficiently the socio-educational practices in which they participate.

3.1. The metaphor of the horse and the fountain

This metaphor was developed by Claxton who states that «you can lead a horse to the fountain of knowledge, but you cannot make it drink from it» (1984, p. 214). In the end, the horse must decide for itself whether to quench its thirst for reasons that are entirely its own. The choice is by the participating subject; their own decisions and choices are at the very heart of the pedagogical process (Úcar, 2016). Along these lines it is interesting to note that while this idea was formulated some time ago, education still generally operates without really paying attention to such a vital pedagogical principle, especially in school curriculums.

This metaphor emphasises people's agency in the field of learning. It is true that I can learn without aiming to, like in the case of what is known as informal learning, for example, but however attractive the learning scenarios designed or proposed for me might be, they will not result in learning if I do not specifically choose to enter into them or let myself be persuaded by what they offer.

Teachers and social educators can do many things for and with the people with whom they intervene. They can accompany them, assist them, facilitate their access to learning and resources to help them overcome the situations they experience, but in the end, the participants themselves must decide what they want to or can do with their lives in the context of their own personal circumstances, and this is often independent of anything teachers and educators might say or suggest to them. Educators cannot and should not try to make the horse in the metaphor drink. Social pedagogy and education do not involve educating but instead getting the other to choose and

decide to educate themself. From this metaphor it is clear that an intervention that does not deliberately seek joint responsibility in learning and that does not aim to create a bidirectional relationship with the participant will, in all likelihood, be doomed to fail.

3.2. The metaphor of socio-educational synapses

The key to any socio-educational relationship is connection, the contact that the meeting of two wills entails and that opens the door to learning and subsequent changes. Without a connection between the educator and the participant, it is impossible to speak of a socio-educational relationship. The connection between them is what builds the channel along which learning flows, together with the changes in the lives of the participants that derive from the socio-educational relationship. Without connections or contact it is only possible to speak of a failed socio-educational intervention that is interrupted in its aim of reaching the other, a socio-educational action with no purpose or meaning.

The problem is that neither education nor pedagogy know exactly how to produce this connection, this affective link that enables the start of the socio-educational relationship and its sustained development. Our attempts to reach the other and persuade them to get involved in the relationship and let us help them help themselves, which is ultimately our aim, can in many cases turn out to be useless (Stephens, 2013). There is no question that knowing, commanding, and applying all sorts of techniques —didactic, communicative, persuasive, negotiation, and a very long list of others— can help social educators improve their rapprochement with participants, but in no case does it guarantee that this connection will occur, that the spark will jump, capturing the attention and the interest of the other and leading them to learning and change. This is why the socio-educational relationship has often been conceived in terms of the educator's art or creativity: precisely because of our inability to explain this connection rationally and completely.

This idea of connection leads to another metaphor that makes it possible to visualise creatively how socio-educational relationships are produced or how they work. The neural synapses that comprise and produce cerebral activity, in my view, offer a very suggestive model for interpreting these functions. We can interpret the socio-educational model as a synaptic relationship that occurs between neurones that connect to each other and allow information to flow through them and, in this process, transform them: the social educator and participant as neurones, nerve cells that through their respective connections with the world make connections between each other to exchange information that better enables them to improve their way of being and their situation in the world.

Many questions are raised by such a parallel between synaptic connections and socio-educational relationships: What are the equivalents of dopamine or serotonin in socio-educational relationship? Is it words, gestures, or specific fa-

cial expressions by the professional? Is it the specific topics covered by the educator or the intervention techniques used? Or, instead, does everything depend on the situation and the moment in which the subject with whom the professional interacts finds themself? Or is the connection produced according to the interests and desires that motivate it? And, finally, is it the combination of both circumstances that creates the connection?

These are *pedagogical transmitters* of a sort. They connect an educator and a participant and cause the participant to choose to learn and change: in other words, to get involved in the work on improving themself and their ways of being, living and acting in the world. Trying to identify these transmitters, both in educators' own actions and in the verbal and non-verbal responses of the participants, can help the former to turn the initial intervention into a true relationship that inspires positive changes in the latter.

3.3. The metaphor of the crocodiles and the pond

This is a metaphor that Taylor (2008) uses in relation to community workers and their ways of getting involved with and working in the community. In my opinion, this appears to be fully applicable to teachers and social educators who perform their socio-educational activities in institutional and community settings. We will also extend this metaphor to work with people and groups as, in both cases, there is a socio-cultural and territorial medium that acts as a setting for the development of the socio-educational intervention.

Taylor starts by stating that the professionals, as technicians and experts, are often seen as external agents, outsiders whose ability to inspire change increases according to how capable they are of connecting and getting involved with people in the community. The social transformation of the community would be caused by the educators' ability to help people reflect critically on their reality to lead them to identify the perspectives and resources that can help them initiate change. It is in this process that the metaphor of the crocodiles is used.

I feel that this metaphor is extraordinarily suggestive in relation to what we are as educators, and what we have the ability or potential to do. The crocodile knows how to move about in the water of the pond that is its home. The water is its medium and this means that its abilities and potential are at their maximum when it moves in the water.

The social educator's medium is the socio-cultural sphere of relationships, including relationships with people, groups, and communities, and the socio-educational processes involved. However, stated in this way, this is just a generalisation or abstraction. The specific medium in which a given educator acts is not automatically their medium, unless they try to make it so and work hard on making this the case. Consequently, one of the first tasks of a social educator when starting a socio-educational intervention with people is to find their place as quickly as possible in what will become their medi-

um, at least for as long as the intervention lasts.

Finding their place in the socio-cultural sphere means getting to know others and the community they inhabit. However, the knowledge to which we refer must be an embodied knowledge, experienced in the first person in the relationship and the sociocultural context that surrounds it and in the territory where it develops. The documentation —CV, personal report, egogram, school performance, etc.— relating to the people involved in a specific socio-educational intervention process can be vital for doing the work, but it is of very little practical use if it is not complemented or enhanced by the embodied knowledge to which we refer, knowledge that involves people, groups, bodies, resources, and territory. Taylor notes that it is necessary to add other knowledge to technical knowledge, as this in itself is not sufficient for intervening.

The educator's strength, to generate change in the other, does not exist if it is not felt, integrated, experienced, and, above all, requested by the other, whether this be an individual or a group. The educator exists as such and can unveil *their powers* when they are accepted and recognised by the group and the participants. This is when the educator and participants can combine forces like the crocodile and the water in the pond. This is something that transcends joint responsibility in learning or in the socio-educational relationship. Storø (2013) speaks of a collaborative alliance between the educator and participants, an alliance that must occur both in regards to the interpersonal relationship and the objectives pursued and the activities carried out to achieve them.

Finally, we must insist that it seems unlikely that the collaborative alliance could occur without the participating person, group, or community perceiving some kind of authenticity in the teacher or social educator. Without this sense, the basic trust needed to establish and develop the socio-educational relationship will not be generated, which in turn could make this relationship non-viable.

Honesty and transparency from educators concerning the learning outcomes that can be expected or the real possibilities for change can help avoid situations and feelings of frustration, disappointment, or even having been misled. These situations and feelings can occur as much between educators as between the people who participate in the socio-educational relationship. In this setting, I do not regard honesty as just a moral virtue but, above all, in the sense that Goffman defined it (1974), a communicative and conversational norm that enables more effective interaction.

3.4. The metaphor of the educator as tightrope walker

A tightrope walker is someone who can walk along a tightrope without falling. If the rope is too loose, the challenge of walking along it can become an impossibility; if it is too tight, any bounce, however small, can throw the walker off and into the void. The tightrope walker's specialist knowledge and skill involve knowing how to walk while maintaining balance and even doing acrobatic poses. It

is a theoretical and practical knowledge that, among other skills, includes the ability to sense how tight the rope is, how much it needs to be tightened or loosened to be able to walk on it, and how to use articles that help maintain balance on this unstable base.

The social professions are middle management that operate in everyday life; they are located in a space shared with politicians, technicians, community leaders and opinion leaders, people, groups, organisations, bodies, and institutions. Social professions mediate between the personal, material, and functional socio-cultural resources of the setting and the people who inhabit it. They also mediate between the people responsible for the institutions, agencies, and organisations that employ them and the people and communities with which they work. Working as a teacher or social educator means performing a pedagogical role with a strongly marked political and ideological dimension. It could be said that the social educator, as a professional mediator, operates at the very heart of the social conflict.

This process of mediation can put social educators in situations that are very hard to manage from the professional role they perform, especially when the people or communities in which they intervene are in positions of vulnerability or conflict. For example, what should a community social educator do faced with the eviction of a family from the neighbourhood where they are working or a neighbourhood dispute where violence threatens the safety of members of the community? Taking a position in conflicts like these might lead to what Jacquard (1974) described, referring to the teacher as *the field of betrayals*; a space where their actions can be regarded by their employers as neglecting their professional responsibility or by the participants with feelings of abandonment or mistrust. Both cases can cast doubt on factors such as their job stability or professional ethics and credibility, not to mention the potential personal emotional conflicts it can entail.

The extreme positions are clear and do not usually present problems for any of the parties in the conflict, situations, for example, where the law or human rights are infringed. However, the problem does not arise in these cases but instead in ones where the former and the latter might come into conflict. The social educator's ability to connect with the main figures in the situations of conflict, to mediate and keep tensions in balance, to act as a catalyst in situations, tempering the positions of the people or organisations, to propose, make visible, and channel ideas, and, ultimately, to know how to stay at the centre of the conflict, maintaining dialogue with all of the parties involved, can be compared to the skill of the tightrope walker who crosses a chasm balancing on a rope.

It is true that, unlike the tightrope walker, the educator does not risk their life, but they do risk their emotional stability and the balance of their life, as well as the ethical principles that support them. The main tool in social pedagogy is the educator (Eriksson and Markström, 2003). The social educator is a subject who puts themself at stake in the socio-educational relationship; who uses

their emotions and feelings as currency to exchange with the emotions of the participants, who feels, suffers, and enjoys with the people with whom they intervene and who can be deeply affected by the situations they are involved in as a result of their work.

These elements make up the tightrope on which the pedagogy and social education professional must maintain balance. Learning to do this requires time and dedication, and this learning is only possible in day to day practice, by putting a great deal of care and attention into it and, above all, reflecting in-depth and critically on the situations experienced and interventions delivered.

3.5. The metaphor of the bullet and the moving target

Bauman (2010) uses a very suggestive metaphor to describe learning situations in liquid societies. He speaks of a moving target and how the trajectory of a bullet must be constantly adjusted if it is to hit it. We should note —apart from how inappropriate a military metaphor is for a pedagogical encounter— that this metaphor can be applied better to an asymmetrical pedagogical relationship than to a symmetrical one where both parties, the educator and the participant, are voluntarily and deliberately involved. Clarifying this metaphor means emphasising that both are, or could simultaneously be, the target or the bullet, or to put it another way, both could be looking for each other at the same time. The socio-educational relationship is a bidirectional one involving an interchange that works in both directions: from the educator to the participant and vice versa. This is why the classic terms used in education such as *target group* are no longer appropriate for defining socio-educational interventions where both educator and participant are agents who participate in the relationship actively and, in many cases, at the same level.

Not every attempt to create change comes from educators in the same terms. Coercing or obliging others to change is not the same as, for example, providing them with the resources to help them change themselves. The distinction between intervention *on* and intervention *with* is relevant here. The former does not involve the opinions, desires, or expectations of the latter and only follows the will of the educator, the expert *who knows*. The power of technique and the technician has not, in my view, been examined sufficiently in our field.

The latter, in contrast, is constructed jointly by the educator and participants, combining or sharing, at levels that can vary, the knowledge and skills that each of them possesses. It is this second perspective, based on a relational horizontal approach and linked to socio-constructivist perspectives (Storø, 2013), that seems better and more appropriate to us, given that, unlike the former, it does not involve asymmetric relationships and respects and makes the most of the contributions and resources of every single participant.

In this perspective, educators and participants are at the same level and free from relational hierarchies, al-

though they have clearly differentiated roles. The former contributes to their technical training, and their professional experience to tackling socio-educational situations and problems. The latter, bring their knowledge and experience —first hand and in the first person— of the situations in which they live their lives, whether these realities are physical, psychological, or cultural and belong to the order of the imaginary, the symbolic, or the real (physical and virtual). In my view, the process of socio-educational intervention in socio-educational situations or problems, or in other words shared participation between social professionals and participants, essentially entails comparing and agreeing on the lines of action and behaviour that in an appropriate and satisfactory manner respond to these realities or problems.

Sociological research into education has shown that educators project certain expectations onto the participating subject about how they will behave. In response, these create not just specific behaviour in that subject but also and at the same time other specific expectations concerning the development and results of the socio-educational relationship. Much of the success of this relationship depends on how both blocks of expectations are managed and negotiated: those of the educator and those of the participants. The mutual alignment of the expectations is a fundamental prior requirement for the success and sustainability of the socio-educational relationship. If educators wish to obtain good results that are simultaneously satisfactory and effective, they must necessarily focus their intervention on negotiation and management of expectations as this is one of the few ways of guaranteeing the participants' motivation and involvement in social educational practices.

3.6. The metaphor of signalling beacons

It has been said that social pedagogy is neither a method nor a group of methods. However, I believe that one of the distinctive features of social pedagogy compared to other types of pedagogy is its method or, to be more specific, its methodological principles.

If the claim that social pedagogy does not have its own method means that there is no standardised or normalised way of doing things, then effectively, it does not have a method. What we should ask is whether, in the social sciences, and in the framework of human —and specifically pedagogical— relations, it makes any sense to use the concept of method in the same way that it is used in the experimental physical-natural sciences. I believe it does not. The deliberately open way in which Morin (1993) defines it seems more appropriate to me. This author states that the method is what teaches people to learn and that this method can only be created during one's search for learning. Therefore, it is not possible to speak of standard, closed, or pre-set approaches. «There can be no prescriptions,» wrote Alinsky, «for particular situations because the same situation rarely recurs, any more than history repeats itself» (2012, p. 157).

What guides the actions of social educators in the framework of social pedagogy, and what guides and justifies their decisions are, in my view, their methodological principles. These principles are a sort of *signalling beacon* that helps social educators find their way in the uncertain and complex desert of human relations, the shifting sands on which social pedagogy is built and developed.

We call them signalling beacons because they warn and guide the educator about the corrections, changes, and modifications they must introduce in their actions to react to the constant changes of the people with whom they intervene and of the specific setting in which they are situated. Signalling beacons are the methodological principles that make it possible for educators to triangulate their position in a given socio-educational intervention with a person, group, or community in a specific moment.

Socio-educational intervention is not something that can be taught; it can only be learnt. And this process of learning must occur through practice, in everyday life and in the encounter between two individuals: the professional and the participant. This does not cast doubt on either the importance of training in theory for the educator or of advance planning of the actions to be performed. Both, in my view, are requirements for the success of the socio-pedagogical encounter. The former makes possible:

1) Better prior diagnosis of the situation.

2) More productive interpretation and use of the data obtained during the intervention.

3) The availability of strategic and technical reference points for action, among other aspects.

Advance planning of the socio-educational intervention makes it possible to anticipate possibilities, prepare a range of responses, and have resources available when faced with new or unexpected situations. Theory and planning provide security in the action but will most likely be insufficient if they are not backed up by the professional's own intuition. This intuition is fine-tuned over time by experience and reflection on the educator's own actions if they observe them consciously, reflect on them, and integrate these observations and reflections. This intuition, which can be guided by empathy, has been described as an essential competence for social professionals (Eriksson and Markström, 2003).

These are all resources that the professional brings into play in socio-educational interventions. However, they are resources that can only be activated based on what Shotter has called *knowledge of the third type*; a knowledge that is not propositional (knowing what) or procedural (knowing how) but instead is knowledge from within. Only if the professionals are immersed in the socio-educational situation can they know exactly what courses of action are available and select the one that their intuition, experience, knowledge, and technique as their own signalling beacons suggest to them as being most appropriate to produce situations in which the subjects with whom they interact can learn and improve themselves and their situation in

the world. This is why Moss and Cameron (2011) state that, faced with the complexity, randomness, and unpredictability of human beings, we have to trust in the judgements made by the social educators involved in practice, given that it is they who can make situated judgements based on knowledge, experience, dialogue, and reflection.

Learning outcomes are unpredictable given that they are relational properties, fruit of the pedagogical encounter of two unique individuals —educator and participant— in the framework of everyday life (Úcar, 2013). This does not, as we noted above, mean that prior planning or pre-established educational objectives are unnecessary. Learning is an untamed activity that only obeys the conditions, appetites, and rules —conscious or unconscious— of the learning subject in the specific situation in which they learn.

The social educator must discover, investigate, and rework their own signalling beacons, based on what they have learnt in their own life, in theory, practice, and experience. These are all lessons that the professional contributes to socio-educational interventions.

Formalised methodological principles inferred from one's own practice are key elements in the social educator's training, particularly ones they can activate in their socio-educational interventions. As Storø notes (2013), the ability to adapt methods to the context one is working in, is an important function of teachers and social educators.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this work was to develop a series of pedagogical principles to guide teachers and educators in their professional practice. To this end, we started by identifying the range of terms used by authors to describe their professional practice. Based on pragmatic and etymological arguments, we opted for the generic concept of *socio-educational intervention*, despite its range of meanings and uses. This type of intervention is defined as a professional activity performed by educators and teachers in the setting of a sociocultural situation or problem with the aim of generating scenarios to help the people, groups, or communities that participate to empower themselves. In other words, to acquire the learning and resources necessary to improve their lives and their situation in the world.

Using the process of constructing metaphors as a method of analysis and research has allowed us to analyse six metaphors for socio-educational intervention. From each of them, a series of pedagogical principles have been derived that can be used in the training of social educators and in the professional development of their practice.

From the metaphor of the horse and the fountain, it has been inferred that the participants are sovereign in regards to what they want, are able, and wish to do and learn. The social educator who intervenes must accompany, teach, guide, direct, and convince the participant, but it is the participant who will decide and choose what, how, and when to learn. Socio-educational intervention is part of what could be called a *pedagogy of choice*.

The metaphor of socio-educational synapses focuses on the connections and links between people —the educator and the participant— and their respective lived worlds of meaning, and on the need for the educator to try to connect both worlds. Without this connection, the educator loses the chance to achieve their main function and aim: to convince the participant to set off along the path towards improving themself and their way of being in the world.

From the metaphor of the crocodile and the pond, we have inferred the importance of the educator, not just knowing or having information, but also being involved in the lived and sociocultural reality of the participants. This involvement, as well as the fact of being seen as authentic and honest, can help with being accepted by the participants and, consequently, facilitate turning the intervention into a true socio-educational relationship.

From the educator as tightrope walker, we have derived the complexity of the intervention that occurs in the setting of people's everyday life and, often, within social conflict. The social educator, as their own and principal instrument for intervention, puts themself and their emotional health at risk in the processes of sociocultural mediation in which they participate. This requires a high level of training and capacity for learning in regards to the balanced management of one's own emotions. It also requires a good ability to read and analyse the complexity of the sociocultural situation and the forces in conflict so they can be channelled or catalysed to make them lead to opportunities for learning and improvement for the participants.

The metaphor of the bullet and the moving target addresses the need for the educator and participant to work together throughout the socio-educational intervention process, constantly modifying and redefining the objectives, characteristics, and results of this intervention. Managing and adapting the expectations of the participants is a key principle in the development of the socio-educational relationship. This adaptation is what can guarantee both the involvement of the participants and the sustainability of the socio-educational relationship itself.

The last metaphor —signalling beacons— emphasises the methodological principles that help the social educator to guide themself and make decisions in the setting of a given socio-educational intervention. These principles are mobile, changing, situated, and emerging. The ability of educators and teachers to learn from their own practice and develop, modify, and incorporate new pedagogical principles is what can make them become good professionals over time, in other words, capable of accompanying and helping the people with whom they intervene to learn what will help them improve their way of being and acting in their particular life contexts.

Notes

1 See, for example: Sáez, 1993.

2 With the concept of *socioculture* I refer to the social relationships created in the encounter of cultural, personal, group, and community identities in phys·

ical or virtual frameworks that make a specific cultural or multicultural context possible. See Úcar, 2016.

[3] See Úcar, 2015.

[4] Op. Cit. Ibáñez, T. (2001).

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