

Commentary for the keynote lecture by Dr Ligia (Licho) López López, The University of Melbourne: What do runaway 'slaves' have to do with social pedagogy in Finland? Building antiracist socialities in and beyond education

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Last week, a Finnish rap artist Yeboyah pointed out that one of our national music award nominees, a well-known rap artist Pyhimys, or the Saint, has cultivated some openly racist lyrics in his old songs that were, until last week, freely available for instance in Spotify.

bell hooks writes in her book *Teaching Community. Pedagogy of hope* published in 2003 that "While more individuals in contemporary culture talk about race and racism, the power of that talk has been diminished by racist backlash that trivializes it, more often than not representing it as mere hysteria." (hooks 2003, 27).

Unfortunately, in Finland last week, as countless times before, this observation was once again proved to be true.

While Yeboyah got praised for her braveness for once again raising questions that truly need to be publicly discussed, she also had, one again, to face a storm of both dismissive and openly racist comments. As a result, she wrote in her public Instagram account for instance the following: "I wouldn't want to talk all the time about racism, but I just cannot overlook it. My health, my music career, my well-being and my personal relationships suffer because of this, and I'm crushed under all the hatred I have had to meet because of this discussion. (...) I'm tired and anguished because white people do not support this discussion. I hope this changes now, and will not just be another two-week phenomenon." (@yeboyah, translation SR.)

I personally hope that the fact that we are gathered here today and tomorrow, to reflect and, most importantly, to learn together about anti-racism, shows that we, the community of Finnish social pedagogues and the other likeminded, are, on our part, hearing what, for instance, Yeboyah has to say to us, taking it seriously and acting on it, along with many other co-conspirators that there are around. I'm quite sure we outnumber the hatred – but we also need to be louder than the hatred.

It would actually be rather tempting to argue that in the field of Social Pedagogy we already are anti-racist by definition. Social Pedagogy as a science and as a field of practical work is distinguished from many other neighbouring fields by its openly normative orientation and an explicit value-based approach. The distinguishing feature of Social Pedagogy, especially its critical orientation, is a strong commitment to equality and social justice.

But this commitment in itself isn't enough – of course it isn't. Anti-racism is not just a commitment to equality but first and foremost about taking an active stance *against* racism.

It is about using one's privilege to step in the way of racism, and actively work against systems of oppression. And *this* is the challenge Social Pedagogy, with its history dedicated to social transformation, needs to take seriously now – more seriously it has done so far.

Co-conspirators. This is what we would need to be, not just allies. Co-conspiracy is about what we do in action, not just in language. This is in line with the quote from Paulo Freire that is often repeated in the texts of social pedagogy. Freire has stated that to affirm that people should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce (Freire 2005).

Finnish educators Warda Ahmed and Mona Eid define in their recent text about anti-racist pedagogy that it is “active action, analysing the situation, intervening the situation and retrieving the situation. It starts by recognising own prejudices and ways of acting, and works best when one is capable of reflecting the relationship between power and personal characteristics.” (Ahmed & Eid 2018, 93). In the field of Social Pedagogy, the aforementioned situations come across both in the settings of educational and social work, and in both, they need to be taken equally seriously, from institutionalised work settings to more informal ones.

The questions raised in the presentation of Dr. López, take us especially in the public sphere and in the fields of public pedagogy and informal learning. When understood as an analytical concept, public pedagogy directs the interest towards learning and socialization processes that occur in the public sphere, for instance through media and popular culture – through examples that Dr. López shared with us.

But it is also possible to understand public pedagogy in a normative and a more political way, as for instance educational scientist Gert Biesta (2012) does. And this is perhaps something that we could call specifically public *social* pedagogy. Then the interest is still directed towards the analysis of pedagogical processes but also in creating space and possibilities for them by transforming the public sphere with different kinds of pedagogical interventions. Accordingly, it could be said that anti-racist social pedagogy is not only about taking active stance against racism as a part of its pedagogical approach but also about actively aiming at transforming public sphere towards a form of human togetherness characterised by true plurality.

This is especially important now, when behind the all-pervasive corona pandemic there lurks the ecological catastrophe, that we also shouldn't forget. A diverse range of voices are needed to solve global problems and to achieve social justice. This means that racial justice and climate justice are themes that are deeply intertwined. Therefore, in concentrating on the theme of anti-racism, we should also bear in mind the theme of last year's social pedagogy conference, that is, eco-social responsibility.

References

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@yeboyah. An Instagram account.