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Social pedagogy and its relevance for Scottish social welfare

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INSIGHTS

A SERIES OF EVIDENCE SUMMARIES

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Social pedagogy and its relevance for Scottish social welfare

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Iriss

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Key points

- Social pedagogy is an academic and professional discipline, which seeks to effect individual and social change through broadly educational means
- It does not offer a discrete approach or set of tools for practice but is a way of thinking, under which a range of different approaches might be situated
- Across Europe, some form of social pedagogy or social education provides the theoretical and disciplinary basis for direct work with people across the life course
- There is growing interest in social pedagogy in the UK; while initial interest focused on residential child care, its principles are increasingly recognised as being relevant across health, social care and education settings
- Social pedagogy has a particular resonance for Scottish social welfare, where it chimes with Kilbrandon's conception of social education, but also offers a suggestive framework within which to locate current policies
- Evaluations of social pedagogy projects suggest that social pedagogic ideas can boost practitioners' confidence and give them a language through which to better describe what they do

What is social pedagogy?

Social pedagogic ideas have been central to the development of social work across most of Europe (Hämäläinen, 2003; Lorenz, 2008). While most often associated with Germanic and Scandinavian traditions, versions of social pedagogy are also evident in Eastern Europe and in Romanic countries

– Spain, for example, has a well-developed tradition of social education and this extends to Latin America. Historically, social pedagogy has had less purchase in Anglo-American traditions (Hämäläinen, 2003) where individualistic casework models dominate. Recent years, however, have seen an upsurge in interest across the UK.

Social pedagogy is most commonly described as ‘education in its broadest sense’ (Petrie and colleagues, 2009). It includes social and pastoral, as well as didactic elements – it is where care and education meet (Cameron and Moss, 2011). This

might be summed up by one of the foundational thinkers on social pedagogy, Paul Natorp, who identified education as a social process, and social life as an educational process (Stephens, 2016). Social pedagogy explores ‘the linked tasks of preparing individuals for communal and societal life and, at the same time, bringing society as a community to orient its culture and social life towards the

personal developmental and social needs of individuals’ (Lorenz, 2008, p634).

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A misconception regarding social pedagogy in a UK context is that it offers a particular approach to practice that can be set alongside and compared

to other approaches. It is, in fact, less an approach than an ethical and theoretical orientation – a way of thinking rather than a technique (Hämäläinen, 2003; Cameron, 2016). It offers ‘no universal definition, no common theory and no uniform establishment for practice procedures’ (Hämäläinen, 2015, p1028). As such, it is problematic to seek to transpose it from one national context to another.

Different national manifestations, however, share a common aim to promote social welfare through broadly socio-educational strategies. A central concern (in relation to children) is that of upbringing (Mollenhauer, 1983; Smith, 2013). For adults, the German term *Bildung*, extends this concept to consider how individuals form and are formed by society. This is a lifelong challenge and a lifelong opportunity (Biesta, 2002). Social pedagogy locates work with people in everyday life – it is a socio-educational and cultural endeavour rather than a specialised therapeutic/treatment-based one.

History of social pedagogy

The pedagogical aspect of social pedagogy has its roots in the writings of progressive continental educational thinkers and philosophers such as John Amos Comenius, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. The ‘social’ dimension was coined by the German educator Karl Mager, who identified social pedagogy as being centrally concerned with the acquisition of culture by society, rather than just the acquisition of knowledge by individuals (Lorenz, 1999). It had distinct egalitarian and reformist underpinnings,

being expressed as ‘educational action by which one aims to help the poor in society’ (Infed, 2005).

The emergence and growth of social pedagogy

Since the 1990s, there has been growing interest in social pedagogy in the UK. This was picked up in policy circles, prompted by the realisation that the quality of life for children in care across parts of Europe was better than in the UK. The government, in response, funded research to investigate this disparity. Academics at the Thomas Coram Research Unit at University College London’s Institute of Education, were commissioned to undertake comparative studies (Petrie and colleagues, 2006) to explore the theory and practice of social pedagogy. This led to the establishment of an international network of academics across Europe, the Centre for Understanding Social Pedagogy. It also led to pilot projects that explored whether, and how, social pedagogy might be introduced in the UK (Cameron and colleagues, 2011). Alongside this, the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care in England advocated for social pedagogy in residential child care. This led to a project involving

German and Danish social pedagogues seeking to introduce social pedagogy in several residential settings (Bengtsson and colleagues, 2008).

Until recently, almost all of the literature on social pedagogy was written in German and, as such, was inaccessible to most English speakers. The growing interest has resulted in a number of publications and resources in English. A good starting point is Pat Petrie and colleagues' (2009) briefing paper. Claire Cameron, who was subsequently appointed the UK's first Professor of Social Pedagogy (at UCL) and Peter Moss (2011), edited a book around the connections between care and education. Paul Stephens (2013), an English academic at the University of Stavanger, was appointed Professor of Social Pedagogy there and has distilled some key foundational ideas to produce an insightful account of social pedagogy. Jan Storo (2013), a Norwegian social pedagogue, has produced a practical textbook, while Keiron Hatton (2013) explores how social pedagogy might impact UK welfare practice. Jacaranda, a recruitment agency for social pedagogues has produced a useful pocket booklet (Kaska, 2015), and a new book by Lowis Charfe and Ali Gardner at the University of Central Lancashire is to be published around the same time as this paper.

Additionally, the training company ThemPra, with Jacaranda, Thomas Coram Research Unit and Treehouse Associates, run regular Social Pedagogy Development Network (SPDN) events and have developed a very useful website¹. An open access journal, The International Journal of Social Pedagogy, has also been established². A more recent initiative is the development of a Massive Open Online Course, now available for free at Coursera³. Another, is the establishment of a Social Pedagogy Professional Association⁴, set up to develop quality assurance mechanisms for qualifications in social pedagogy.

Key ideas in social pedagogy

One of the attractions of social pedagogy is how key ideas have been translated in ways that resonate with practitioners. There is insufficient space here to develop these but readers might look to Petrie and colleagues (2009), Smith (2012) and ThemPra (2015). Key features to highlight include Pestalozzi's belief that education should involve the

1 <http://www.thempra.org.uk/social-pedagogy>

2 <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press/browse-books/international-journal-of-social-pedagogy>

3 <https://www.coursera.org/learn/social-pedagogy-europe>

4 <http://sppa-uk.org>

‘head’, ‘heart’ and ‘hands’, which has been drawn on to emphasise emotional (heart) and practical (hands) dimensions of social work to complement intellectual and administrative (head) aspects.

Social pedagogy validates everyday life-space or lifeworld activities (Grunwald and Thiersch, 2009), especially those that involve negotiation and co-participation (called, in social pedagogy, ‘the common third’). Specifically, social pedagogy can provide a helpful framework through which to bring expressive arts or sports to the fore in working with people.

Importantly, at a time when health and social work is re-evaluating the importance of relational practice (Winter, 2015; Ingram and Smith, 2018), the social pedagogical concept of the 3Ps (professional,

personal, private) offers a way of thinking about the nature of personal/professional relationships. This sees the personal and professional as coming together in a ‘self in action’ task, with only the private aspects of self, kept apart from those we work with. Underpinning this is an individual practitioner’s ethical stance (encapsulated in the German term ‘Haltung’) through which an authentic sense of self permeates professional interactions.

Social pedagogy and social work

Lorenz (2008, p641) regards social pedagogy as an untapped resource for the English-speaking world that might act as ‘a mirror in which the social work tradition can become aware of its own rich but also contested diversity’. As we identify in subsequent discussion on Scottish social work, there is an

obvious affinity between the two disciplines. However, Lorenz argues that the key characteristic distinguishing social pedagogy from social work, is that it is not primarily ‘deficit-oriented’.

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The deficit orientation of social work has been reinforced by neoliberal and managerial influences over the course of the 1990s. Lorenz (2008, p640) identifies managerialism as being the ‘diametrical opposite to humanist pedagogy’ subverting key socio-pedagogical and indeed social work concepts of self-help, civil society initiative and empowerment (Lorenz, 2005). Neoliberalism stripped the social from social work, replacing it with what Lorenz identifies as a ‘plethora of (individualised) counselling, caring, coaching and managing activities’ (2008, p640).

Practice developments

Across the UK, growing numbers of agencies have embraced social pedagogy. In Scotland, Camphill⁵, renamed their BA in Curative Education offered by the University of Aberdeen as a BA in Social Pedagogy and have rolled out social pedagogic ideas across several of their communities. Kibble Care and Education Centre in Paisley have similarly adopted social pedagogy as central to their practice and to staff training. Social pedagogy’s reach has extended beyond mainstream residential care settings to include

learning disability (Roesch-Marsh and colleagues, 2015) and foster care (Fostering Network, 2019).

Cousee and colleagues (2010), however, caution against adopting only the ‘pedagogic’ elements of the approach without also locating these within the ‘social’ critique aspects. Hatton (2013) similarly, warns against selecting particular features of social pedagogy as a quick fix for problems in UK social work. He sees advantages in the paradigm’s ability to challenge social work to (re)adopt a more comprehensive, social approach. Indeed, social work academics are beginning to pick up on social pedagogical ideas to inform and critique social work practice (Ruch and colleagues, 2016).

Social pedagogy knowledge base

A further aspect of social pedagogy concerns its way(s) of understanding and knowing the world. The social pedagogic literature speaks of a conception of the ‘rich’ child, in contrast to the ‘child in need’ of dominant UK child welfare discourses. Similarly, we can consider what might constitute a ‘rich’ adulthood or sense of personhood, focusing on strengths and potentials, rather than deficits.

⁵ Camphill is a provider of care services for people with learning disabilities and other support needs. <http://www.camphillscotland.org.uk>

As noted, much social work has moved in an individualising and pathologising direction (Lorenz, 2008), diminishing the role of the social in understanding the human condition and turning instead to biology and specifically to neuroscience. Biological sciences according to Wastell and White

(2017) are currently culturally ascendant. Canter, similarly, argues that 'The idea that the brain causes behaviour is easier to get across than the subtler and more complex explanation embedded in learning, interpersonal transactions and culture' (2012, p112). Social pedagogy foregrounds the role of culture.

Its knowledge base is moral/practical more than scientific or technical. In this sense, it fits with academic thinking, which suggests that technical forms of knowledge are inappropriate to 'people professions' (Bondi and colleagues, 2011).

Social pedagogy recognises individuals or groups as 'experts in their own lives', shifting the role of the

worker from 'expert' to 'skilled facilitator'. The social pedagogue does things with service users, not for them, and never to them (Stephens, 2013). They provide a democratic context for the relationship, which might nowadays be called co-production.

Change, from an orientation of co-production, is

not linear and its methods are not interventionist or direct. This challenges quasi-scientific endeavours under the guise of 'evidence' that aim to identify outcomes to be reached within unrealistic timeframes, which do not accommodate the complexity or messiness of practice.

Social pedagogy calls instead for a moral practical knowledge base that

does not rely on universal principles. Rather, it is recognised that every situation and the actors in it are inevitably different, and therefore, not reducible to any notion of a manualised 'best practice' or to behavioural codes. What is 'best' will be determined in the particular circumstances that pertain and this

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requires the situated judgment of a worker, who is able to exercise what Sullivan and Rosin (2008, pxvi) identify as practical reasoning. This is neither a matter of simply applying abstract principles, nor is it about the development of a skill but of a certain kind of person – one ‘disposed towards questioning and criticising for the sake of more informed and responsible engagement’. This, in turn, requires reflection and reflexivity from practitioners.

Evaluations of social pedagogy projects

There have been numerous evaluations of social pedagogy projects in the UK. Major ones include Berridge and colleagues (2011); Cameron and colleagues (2011); McDermit and colleagues (2016); and Kirkwood and colleagues (2019), who identify some of the difficulties in evaluating social pedagogic initiatives. One of these is that, if looking primarily to outcomes, evaluation methods do not capture the nuances of the difference social pedagogy makes on practice.

Cameron’s (2016, p220) overview of a range of evaluations presents ‘a coherent picture of developing staff confidence and competence, a (re-)engagement with relational practice, and ‘care’ of looked after children reframed as learning, a broadly-based education where young people are challenged to communicate, reflect, engage, create and live alongside others. The effect of this was, in many cases, to make everyday life more enjoyable, with less conflict.’ Crucially, there was a noted improvement in practitioner confidence. The evaluation of the Camphill programme with adult communities (Roesch-Marsh and colleagues, 2015) found that social pedagogy training had a ‘transformative’ effect on participants, who had increased their confidence, reflected more purposefully on their practice and become more aware of the power dimensions of their relationships with colleagues and service users. The independent evaluation of the Dundee Early Intervention Team (DEIT) social pedagogy project, similarly, highlighted that social pedagogy training led to improvements in staff skills and confidence, the fostering of positive and genuine relationships, and greater collaboration with families (Ecorys UK and colleagues, 2017).

Social pedagogy and a Scottish tradition

Professional social work in Scotland can be traced back to the Kilbrandon Report of 1964. This actually proposed the development of social education rather than the social work departments that emerged following the 1968, Social Work (Scotland) Act. Kilbrandon's Committee was aware of European and, in particular Scandinavian, thinking and in many respects, eschewed individualising Anglo-American models of practice. Asquith and colleagues (2005, p23) argue that Kilbrandon's conception of social education was 'based on principles much akin to those of social pedagogy'.

Smith and Whyte (2008) develop this linkage from Kilbrandon to European ideas of social pedagogy. They reiterate collective responsibility for the upbringing of children – the children's hearings system is an obvious illustration of such a philosophy. The growth of community social work in the 1970s and 80s (see Turbett, 2018) is another. The Smith and Whyte (2008) article led to further conversations with key stakeholders interested in social pedagogy and the publication of a briefing paper, developed

in a subsequent article (Smith, 2012), setting out the relevance of social pedagogy in a Scottish context.

A broader contemporary backdrop to welfare debates in Scotland is that under the Scottish National Party (SNP) administration, social welfare has been employed within a wider 'nation-building' project (Mooney and Scott, 2016; Smith and Cree, 2018; Whyte, 2018). Smith and Cree (2018) argue that Scotland can find itself positioned geographically and ideologically between individualising and pathologizing Anglo-American models of practice and more European social democratic ones – as a result, it can talk one game (the progressive European nation) while 'walking' another (Mooney and Scott, 2016).

Whyte (2018) notes that a socio-educational paradigm is consistent with and indeed pre-dates major international treaties such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and its associated guidance, which point to social welfare policies and practices based around a broad conception of legal, social and cultural rights and socio-educational means through which these might be realised (Jackson, 2004). In Anglophone countries, by contrast, rights have assumed a narrow contractual

and legalistic focus with a predominant emphasis on protection (Petrie and colleagues, 2009).

Implications for practice

Whyte suggests that a revitalised conception of social education (to use Kilbrandon's term) may offer a distinctive and culturally congruent paradigm for Scottish social work. In fact, many of the principles of social education or social pedagogy are already evident in policy, if not always in practice. Whyte (2018) identifies the emphasis placed, from Kilbrandon to current day policy, on working in partnership with individuals, family networks and communities in a non-coercive, socio-educational and co-productive manner, as the basis of effective social work practice.

Such principles underpin *Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)* (Scottish Government, 2008), which set out to improve the early identification and effective, proportionate response to the needs of children. They, similarly, underlie the 'whole systems' approach to youth crime. Recent legislation (Children's Hearings Act, 2011; Children and Young Person's Act, 2014) reiterate corporate and collective responsibility for education, housing,

leisure and recreation, as well as cultural and other community services to support the upbringing of children, and in assisting challenging young people towards social integration. In other areas, the 'rights-based' approach central to the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 and increasing moves towards relational and recovery-focused practice are underpinned by policy initiatives such as the *Mental health strategy for Scotland 2012-2015* (Scottish Government, 2012) and *Rights, relationships and recovery* (Scottish Executive, 2006). All reflect social pedagogic principles. More broadly, in a policy context that calls for ever-more interprofessional collaboration, social pedagogy might offer the 'conceptual glue' (Smith, 2012) for different professional groupings to come together around strengths-based practice.

However, practice often lags behind the spirit and the terms of policy. It is constrained by cultures that (over) emphasise notions of risk and protection. While there are occasions when social workers and care workers have to be cognisant of risk – and when they have to act in a protective capacity – the balance is currently skewed towards quasi-scientific forms of risk assessment and management.

Social pedagogy offers a different approach to risk – one of risk competence (Eichsteller and Holthoff, nd) which helps re-frame dominant ideas about risk, as something to be avoided, rather than it being seen as necessary for growth.

In terms of protection, social pedagogy does not shy away from the need for such interventions, nor does it locate practice in some woolly world of relationships. Rather, it recognises that relationships can be forged through conflict and that practice requires the presence of adults who will not avoid conflict due to fear, but who will work confidently and creatively with it to reach a place of genuine engagement and negotiation rather than artificial sensitivity. It is this that makes it possible in the longer term for workers to encourage and nurture change rather than demanding compliance (Kleipoedszus, 2011).

Adoption of social pedagogy beyond its current, albeit growing, presence in a series of pockets of practice would, however, require a shift in mindset. Specifically, it would need a re-framing of social work away from its current technical rationality, which looks to largely unsubstantiated claims of ‘evidence-based practice’ within increasingly

managerial cultures, towards a value rationality. This would seek through education and critical reflection, to explore the dynamic interaction between the individual and society as a way of better preparing individuals for communal and societal life. To achieve this would require a loosening of the regulation that currently frames practice. If we really want a confident, competent workforce, there is a need to recognise the complexities and uncertainties of practice and to trust and support workers when things go wrong. Social pedagogy offers an alternative vision of what it is to be a professional, rooted in a framework of dialogue and ongoing reflection on personal and professional values.

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