

Social Pedagogy Briefing Paper

Introduction: Purpose/intention of paper

There is growing interest across the UK in whether European models of social pedagogy might offer a helpful conceptual framework within which to locate direct work with people. Pilot programmes that seek to introduce and apply social pedagogical principles in practice settings are emerging, including in Scotland. A joint BA run by The University of Aberdeen in conjunction with Camphill Schools was the first qualifying programme in social pedagogy in the UK. Many of these pockets of interest can seem only loosely connected to one another. ‘Scottish Conversations’ based around The University of Edinburgh, was conceived of to bring together practitioners, academics and policy makers with an interest in social pedagogy, to explore the possibilities and implications of introducing social pedagogical ways of working in Scotland. Considerable work has already been undertaken on this by the children’s charity ‘Children in Scotland’, supported by The Scottish Government. Our intention here is to draw upon this and to encapsulate, within one document, key themes from the literature on social pedagogy, and to consider its relevance and possible application in a Scottish context. Specifically, we suggest that social pedagogy offers a means through which distinctively Scottish ideas around social welfare and education might be reframed in a way that resonates with current concerns about the role and direction of social work and social care more broadly. In this sense, we do not restrict our focus to areas of practice such as residential child care with which social pedagogy is most often associated, but consider its features to have relevance across a broad range of provision and professional groupings.

What is social pedagogy?

Social pedagogy is the discipline underpinning direct work with children and families across most of Europe, its roots stretching back, primarily, to 19th Century Germany. While it is most often thought of in relation to residential child care, its principles can be, and in many European countries are, extended to working with individuals and groups across the life-course (Petrie, 2001).

The term pedagogy is derived from the Greek, *pais*, meaning child and *agein*, meaning to lead

or to bring up (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2010). The idea of upbringing is a central one. Pedagogy is most commonly described as ‘education in the broadest sense of the term’ (Jackson and Cameron, 2011). Social pedagogy extends beyond the upbringing of individual children to incorporate wider dimensions of community responsibility and provision (Petrie, 2006). In this sense, social pedagogy is a strengths-based approach, concerned with community capacity building. Diesterweg, a Prussian educator argued that ‘social pedagogy should be expressed in ‘educational action by which one aims to help the poor in society’ (Smith & Whyte, 2008: 19). There is a pronounced social dimension in social pedagogy, a significant strand of which involves social critique (Hamalainen, 2003, Paget et al, 2007). Specifically, it offers a perspective on social issues that seeks to give expression to the voices of disadvantaged groups within society.

While there are common features within social pedagogy across Europe, it assumes different forms and terminologies in different countries. Reflecting these differences, Petrie (2006) suggests that it can be more helpful to think about pedagogies rather than pedagogy. In France, for instance, the broadly equivalent term for a social pedagogue is ‘educateur’, with different types of educateur performing slightly different roles. Each different national manifestation, however, can be thought to share a common aim to promote social welfare through broadly based socio-educational strategies, thus providing a framework for the consideration of the individual in society.

Who are social pedagogues?

Across most of Europe, social pedagogy is a discrete discipline with its own educational qualifications. Social pedagogues generally study to degree and often to Masters level, although some more practical jobs can be undertaken with an upper secondary qualification. Even this lower level qualification, however, requires three to four years of study (Paget et al, 2007). Social pedagogues are, thus, significantly better qualified, academically, than their workforce equivalents in the UK, where vocational qualifications are considered sufficient for what are increasingly called social care jobs.

There are also distinctions to be made in the nature of the training between European and UK models. Social pedagogues study a combination of theoretical, practical/recreational and professional subjects and skills and undertake practice placements. Significant attention is

focussed on the development of reflective capacities that might enable social pedagogues to respond to different and changing practice situations, in contrast to the competency based and instrumental underpinnings of (S)VQ approaches, which identify knowledge and skills as largely fixed and merely requiring to be demonstrated. Social pedagogues often stay in the same job for many years; there seems to be higher levels of worker satisfaction and lower levels of staff turnover than in the UK and hence greater continuity of experience for those they work with.

Contexts in which social pedagogy might be practised

While social pedagogy is most often thought of in relation to work with children in residential care, its principles might just as readily be applied to a range of different groups: early years, teaching support in schools, family support, drugs work, youth work, youth and criminal justice, learning disability and physical disability services and support for older people. Social pedagogues are generalists; while they are the main staffing group in some services, such as nurseries and school age childcare, they also work in a complementary role alongside other professions such as teachers, social workers, doctors and nurses. At a time when there is a major political drive for different services and professions to work more effectively together, social pedagogues might provide the conceptual ‘glue’ that can bring different professionals together. In a child care context, this aspect of the work may be particularly apposite within The Scottish Government’s Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) (2005) agenda.

Social pedagogy’s relevance in a Scottish context

In offering a Scottish perspective on social work we are mindful of some of the pitfalls of doing so. Making a case for a distinctive identity might lead to a tendency to overstate national differences, to underplay nuance and complexity across borders and perhaps to collude with particular national myths or romantic notions of the kind of values and practices we might like Scottish social welfare to reflect.

Having said this, we do suggest a particular resonance between social pedagogical ideas and Scottish traditions of education and social welfare (Smith and Whyte, 2008). Central to this is a faith in education as a means to individual improvement and social cohesion, which might be

traced back to the Reformation. The particular form that the Scottish Enlightenment took reinforced a collectivist ideal. Paterson notes that Enlightenment thinkers nurtured such qualities, demonstrating a 'well developed sense of human mutual obligation' (2000: 9). Seed (1974) describes some of the practical manifestations of this tradition, exemplified in Scottish approaches to the 'ragged' schools, which emerged in response to the social problems caused by industrialisation and urbanisation. Social pedagogy emerged around the same period in Germany, in response to similar social trends.

Elsewhere, Paterson (2000) argues that a collectivist belief that educational success and failure cannot be understood only in educational terms, but must be related to the social and economic circumstances faced by children. Such socially rooted assumptions underpinned the development, in the 1960s, of the comprehensive school system, community education initiatives, the deliberations of the 1964 Kilbrandon Committee and the eventual emergence of social work as a profession following the 1968, Social Work (Scotland) Act. This Act included a duty placed upon local authorities to 'promote social welfare' (Section 12), which is still in force today.

Some distinctive aspects of a Scottish tradition persist. Specifically, education in Scotland is seen as collective and social rather than primarily cognitive and individual, 'having a key role in tackling a range of social problems and in promoting cohesion in a more diverse society' (Bloomer, 2008: 32). Some of this broad vision for education might be thought to be encapsulated in Curriculum for Excellence, which seeks to develop children and young people as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society. The combination of such qualities might be analogous to the German idea of 'bildung', very roughly translated to include aspects of character formation and lifelong learning.

The Kilbrandon Report, 1964

The Kilbrandon Committee was established in 1961 with a remit 'to consider the provisions of the law of Scotland relating to the treatment of juvenile delinquents and juveniles in need of care or protection or beyond parental control'. Its conclusions might be thought of as essentially social pedagogical, drawing explicitly on an idea of upbringing but also incorporating a sense of community responsibility. Kilbrandon concluded that juvenile offenders and children in need of care and protection, who might be thought of as different

groups, were in fact united in their common need for special measures of education and training, the normal up-bringing processes having, for whatever reason, fallen short' (para 15). As is the case with social pedagogy, education is considered 'in its widest sense'. Kilbrandon proposed a new field organisation, a Department of Social Education staffed by social workers but located within an expanded education department.

In gathering data for their report the Kilbrandon Committee deliberately looked to Europe and particularly Scandinavia for ideas. Asquith et al (2005) suggest that 'There are grounds to believe that what [Kilbrandon] intended was not an 'education' department in the traditional sense but rather a department based on principles much akin to those of social pedagogy. The social education department proposed by Kilbrandon may well have had its roots more in the notion of allowing an individual to realise his/her potential in society, much as with the role of the 'educateur' in France.'

Kilbrandon's ideas were never wholly adopted, although the 1968, Social Work (Scotland) Act and the early years of social work during the 1970s did incorporate many of them. Statutory social work with children and families, however, has, over the course of the 1980s and since, moved away from its welfare roots and has become, almost exclusively, a child protection service. This shift has been accompanied by the rise of a complex and defensive bureaucracy, contributing substantially to a risk averse and process-driven profession (Lonne, et al 2009). The 21st Century Review of Social Work, *Changing Lives* (Scottish Executive, 2006), depicts many of the problems facing social work. It identifies a profession lacking in confidence and uncertain about its role, one that is process dominated and where negative publicity around 'failures' has led to risk averse and blame cultures. The profession, it claims, had lost touch with some of its core purpose. It calls for transformational change. The adoption of social pedagogical ways of thinking and working might contribute towards bringing this about.

Key ideas in social pedagogy

Petrie et al (2006) identify features of a social pedagogical approach. We expand on some central ones here. These exist within a general rubric of promoting individual and community wellbeing and happiness; the thrust is to use and develop people's resourcefulness. The social pedagogical 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.

An ethical stance: *haltung*

The articulation and expression of an ethical stance is foundational within social pedagogical theory and practice. This, rather than recourse to abstract rules and principles, might be thought of as ‘first practice’ from which all else follows. Knowledge and skills are both informed by and feed into a practitioner’s developing ethical stance. This notion is encapsulated in the social pedagogical concept of ‘*haltung*’, which broadly translated to ethos, mindset or attitude and describes the extent to which one’s actions are congruent with one’s values and fundamental beliefs (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2010). *Haltung* incorporates a practitioner’s orientation to ‘the other’ and might revolve around fundamental philosophical questions concerning how they think about others, what kind of relationships they want to have with others and what might be considered to be a good life or a life lived well. A social pedagogue’s ‘*haltung*’ is intrinsic to their ‘self’. It is that ‘self’ that the social pedagogue utilizes in working with others and which contributes to the development of suitably close and authentic relationships.

Head, hands and heart

Social pedagogues draw explicitly upon dimensions of head, hands and heart in their practice; social pedagogy demands that practitioners utilize a combination of intellectual, practical and emotional qualities. This tripartite way of conceptualizing the task is reflected in the training of social pedagogues. They study a range of academic subjects but their training also involves learning recreational and cultural skills. Unlike social workers or social care workers in the UK, social pedagogues are prepared for direct practice; they have a repertoire of artistic, sporting and cultural skills that they can share with those they work with. The ‘heart’ aspect of the task underpins all of this work. Social pedagogy recognizes the importance and inevitability of close personal/professional relationships between pedagogues and those they work with and the negotiation of appropriate boundaries within these. This requires practitioners who are self-aware and reflective.

Relationship based: the three P’s

Recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in relationally based practice in the social work literature. However, there are perhaps some obstacles to the realization of relationally based

practice. In a UK and wider Anglophone context there has been a tendency to a fairly strict delineation of personal and professional relationships. This fails to take account of the inevitable interweaving of the two. Social pedagogy identifies three ‘selves’: the professional, the personal and the private. It is only the private ‘self’ that is kept apart from those we work with. The professional and personal ‘selves’ combine to support the ‘self in action’ endeavour that is at the heart of direct work with people. We are, as the Scottish philosopher, John MacMurray (1961), suggests, persons in relation. In recent decades, social work appears to have lost sight of this fact. The importance of relationships became subsumed behind increasing recourse to technical and managerial ways of working. Changing Lives, the 21st Century Review of Social Work (Scottish Executive, 2006) reasserted the importance of helping relationships while theoretical shifts, such as the development of desistance perspectives in criminal justice social work (McNeill et al, 2005), reinforce the importance of relational qualities in direct practice.

A lifespace approach

Close and effective personal/professional relationships emerge in the course of everyday encounters, through being with another person in naturalistic situations. Over the course of whatever shift arrangements may pertain, social pedagogues take ‘as the theatre for their work, the actual living situation as shared with and experienced by the child’ (or other client/service user) (Ainsworth, 1981: 234). This is what is called a lifespace approach. The idea of lifespace has become a central one in thinking on residential child care. One of the key texts on a lifespace approach, deriving from the North American Child and Youth care tradition is called ‘The Other 23 Hours’ (Trieschman et al, 1969). This title encapsulates the idea that what happens in the other 23 hours, those hours when worker and client are not involved in treatment or therapy is just as important as the more formal ‘professional’ interventions. The life-space is a mini society in its own right, in which people learn to interact, build relationships and feel included. The social pedagogue’s task is to arrange the opportunities provided within a lifespace context to promote social inclusion, growth and learning. Within such a model, working with a client on issues of anger management, for instance, might more effectively happen around the kind of disputes about whose turn it is to do the dishes that through any planned programme.

Activity based: ‘the common third’

Most social pedagogical practice does not take place in the one-to-one meeting or counselling

session but through shared activity. Social pedagogues come together with those they work with around shared activities. This practice reality is encapsulated in the concept of 'the common third'. The pedagogue and the client share and have a joint claim on an activity in all of its different stages, from idea to execution. This makes for greater equality and authenticity in relationships where professional hierarchies become dissipated through joint involvement in an activity within which expert and novice roles might be reversed or at least rendered less pronounced. Creativity is a central element of social pedagogical work. 'Music, drama, dance and the visual arts open (student pedagogues') eyes to wider dimensions of existence and richer possibilities for (those) they will work with (Petrie & Chambers, 2009: 3).

The importance of context: 'it depends'

Social pedagogy does not rely on abstract or universal principles to guide practice. Rhetoric in a UK context around 'best practice' would have little meaning in a social pedagogic tradition, where it is recognized that every situation and the actors within it are inevitably different and therefore not amenable to any notion of a single 'best practice'. What is 'best' will be determined in the particular circumstances that pertain in any situation. The importance of context rather than a reliance on abstractions is recognized in Scottish philosophical traditions (Smith and Whyte, 2008). Kilbrandon's idea of needs rather than deeds might be thought to evince a contextual morality through decreeing that children's behaviours can only be understood and responded to in the social context within which they arose. This emphasis on social context and on the everyday experience might be considered analogous to the idea of a 'lifeworld orientation', which is a central feature of German social pedagogy (Grunwald and Thiersch, 2009).

Rights based

Rights perspectives are central to social pedagogy. In Anglophone countries, rights have assumed a narrow contractual and legalistic focus with a predominant emphasis on protection. In such contexts, rights talk can be reduced to little more than a concern for due process. It is perhaps not surprising that much of the focus on rights in recent decades has coincided with increasingly individualizing and punitive social policies. The kind of rights deemed to be important in social pedagogical traditions are broad social and cultural rights. Such a focus was evident in the thinking apparent in the Kilbrandon Report and the children's hearings system (Jackson, 2004). Such rights are rarely stand-alone or absolute but are negotiated and become realizable within respectful relationships.

Implications and impediments to adopting social pedagogy

We suggest in this paper that social pedagogy might offer a different way of thinking about and working with people, one that finds resonance with Scottish traditions of social welfare and education. The realization of this outcome, however, is not as simple as merely deciding to adopt social pedagogy as a practice model. A range of specific historical and cultural factors mediate how social pedagogical ideas might translate in different national contexts.

It might be claimed that agencies or individuals in Scotland already practice in ways that could be considered social pedagogical. They may do, up to a point. Social pedagogy, however, is more a way of thinking than a set of practices. It is also what Petrie identifies as an organic system, consisting of 'policy and practice, theory and research, and the training and education of the workforce, with each component feeding into, and drawing on, the others (2006: 2). For social pedagogy to begin to take root in Scotland would require that these various elements of the approach be encouraged to develop systemically. Both *Changing Lives* and *GIRFEC* speak of the need for transformational change. *GIRFEC* describes this as the inter-play between culture, systems and practice. Social pedagogy may provide the practice paradigm to facilitate such change.

There are obstacles that will get in the way of the adoption of social pedagogy: social pedagogical thinking challenges assumptions and practices that are deeply embedded in a Scottish context. Perhaps the most obvious challenge it poses is to the dominance of risk perspectives in contemporary practice. According to Janusz Korczak, a famous Polish pedagogue, a child ought to have the right to die. While this claim may appear somewhat extreme, what Korczak is arguing is that a predominant focus on preventing children from dying or from harm, simultaneously denies them the opportunity to live fully in the present and to enjoy the right to life. Similar arguments might be made across the lifecourse. Social pedagogy requires that we relinquish our current predominant concern for ideas of risk and protection and focus instead on growth and opportunity. The test of whether we can do this will be when things go wrong. At a similar level, the proliferation of external regulation that surrounds social care in the UK is dissonant with social pedagogical models that give precedence to ideas of professional judgment and trust.

Social pedagogy also requires different guiding principles for how professionals engage with

those they work with. 'Expert', supervisory or counselling type relationships give way to socio-educational approaches, undertaken in lifespace and, often, in group contexts. Workers and those they work with become co-constructors of meaning or 'fellow-travellers' in journeys of growth.

There are, then, structural and discursive barriers to the adoption of social pedagogy that run deep. One of the structural barriers is political; social pedagogy is more likely to find a home in social democratic political cultures rather than neoliberal ones. In that respect, there are obvious resonances within Scottish political and civil society and the broadly social democratic approaches to welfare that have historically prevailed across Europe.

On the other hand, social pedagogy offers a number of possible benefits over the social welfare system as it has developed in Scotland over the past three decades. While it is unwise to draw direct comparisons in cultural contexts that are very different, outcomes for children in other educational and care systems are better than those for children in the UK, across just about every outcome measure. While this might be thought to be attractive politically, it should not be a clinching argument. The whole notion of outcomes is a product of a very different political and professional culture than that within which most social pedagogical systems exist. Social pedagogy would regard the process as much as the outcomes of professional involvement to be equally important. It just so happens that if the nature and process of involvement is right then outcomes are likely to be better. It is difficult to disentangle the two.

Social pedagogy might also offer an opportunity to reclaim some of the hopes and aspirations that were around during the early years of social work. Social pedagogy incorporates a structural as well as an individual focus, which offers a counterpoint to dominant individualizing and pathologising approaches to practice. Moreover, work with individuals and groups is conceived of as fundamentally relational rather than the administrative and controlling practice it has, largely, become in the past three decades. Both of these aspects are likely to appeal to the motivations of most of those who enter social work and related professions.

And, as Scotland enters a particular point in its history, social pedagogy might offer a distinctively Scottish approach to social welfare that both resonates with many of the nation's own traditions while also bringing us closer to a European mainstream.

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Links

Children Webmag www.childrenwebmag.com/t/social-pedagogy

Goodenoughcaring social pedagogy page

www.goodenoughcaring.com/Training_Consultancy.aspx

Petrie, P et al (2009) Pedagogy – a holistic, personal approach to work with children and young
people, across services

http://eprints.ioe.ac.uk/58/1/may_18_09_Ped_BRIEFING_PAPER_JB_PP_.pdf

Socialpedagogyuk, www.socialpedagogyuk.com/

Addendum

We are conscious that our understanding of social pedagogy in a Scottish context is still developing. The concept is attracting considerable interest across a range of agencies and disciplines. We are keen to engage with individuals and agencies who want to be part of this developing conversation. Should you wish to do so please contact mark.smith@ed.ac.uk

Scottish Conversations were initiated by:

Mark Smith Senior Lecturer in Social Work, University of Edinburgh

Kate Skinner, Independent Social Work Consultant

Prof Bill Whyte, Director of the Criminal Justice Social Work Centre, University of Edinburgh

Wendy Paterson, Former Chair South East Scotland Learning Network