'Not a Prophet' versus 'Foreign Fads': two scenarios for conceptualising social pedagogy dissemination

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of current Scottish and British efforts to establish social pedagogy in higher education and professional practice, these efforts may be met with enthusiasm or reticence. Because Scotland and the UK have no explicit social pedagogy tradition, social pedagogy needs to be imported from countries with such a tradition, which usually means Continental Europe and the Nordic countries. As a framework for understanding how social pedagogy may be seen, the paper develops two scenarios, 'Not a Prophet' (exemplified through the gradual disappearance of social pedagogy in Germany, where it originated) and 'Foreign Fads' (discussed by drawing on an exemplary debate in the magazine Community Care, showing English/British unease with social pedagogy on account of its German and Nordic connotations). The paper insists on the need to adapt social pedagogy to the local context.

Key words: connectivity; convergence; exportability

Introduction

As social pedagogy is becoming more established in Scotland and the UK more generally, the question of how to use 'foreign' ideas, theories, models, etc. will become increasingly prominent. This is a natural reflection of the fact that social pedagogy has a long history in many European countries, whereas it has only very recently become relevant in the UK. The dissemination of social pedagogy can hardly go both ways, as long as only one end of the learning relationship has any noteworthy social pedagogy tradition. (This is not to say that Scotland or the UK has nothing to offer in terms of knowledge relevant to social pedagogy: they can however not take a lead in conceptualising it as social pedagogy.) The aim of the paper is to offer a framework for discussing the proliferation of social pedagogy towards the British Isles, using two alternative scenarios conveniently dubbed 'Not a Prophet' and 'Foreign Fads' respectively.

That (very often) no one is a prophet in their own town or country, is a wisdom repeatedly stated in the Gospels (John 4:44, Luke 4:24; Mark 6.4; Matthew 13:57); it is however also commonplace knowledge. It does not take any affinity with Christianity to recognise the

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continued relevance of such old wisdom, even if it may often seem that foreign ideas are often met with more resistance than domestic ones. The opposition of US Supreme Court Justice Scalia to the idea of 'imposing' 'foreign moods, fads, or fashions on Americans' (Lawrence v. Texas, Scalia dissenting) can be easily dismissed based on the study of the history of US case law (see Finkelman, 2007). Thus, two potentially competing scenarios or frameworks can be identified permitting one to conceptualise and comprehend the spread of social pedagogy towards the British Isles: 'Not a Prophet' versus 'Foreign Fads'. While the former will emphasise the assumption that foreign ideas are trusted more easily than domestic ones, the latter takes the exactly opposite position. Both represent one particular scenario, outlook or (in terms of bias) a specific fallacy.

This framework will be used against the template of an understanding of social pedagogy that is grounded in an understanding of social pedagogy as distinct from social work. In line with the definitions offered by the worldwide social pedagogy umbrella International Association of Social Educators (AIEJI), social pedagogy is an academic and professional paradigm (separate and distinct from social work) in its own right (AIEJI, 2008), which does not mean that social pedagogy can be defined in terms of a specific set of methods. Indeed one understanding of social pedagogy stresses that this is not the case: social pedagogy is rather a specific perspective offered on many activities which may or may not be performed by social workers (Hämäläinen, 2003, 2012).

But while social pedagogy shares much with social work, the features that distinguish it as different appear largely linked to its roots in Continental Europe (especially the German philosopher Paul Natorp (Hämäläinen, 2003; Stephens, 2013), 'whereas social work is more a heritage from a North American tradition' (Storø, 2012, p. 20). This makes it natural to assume that there are 'limits' to the 'exportability' of social pedagogy (Kornbeck, 2002): limits representing differences between national and regional traditions. In the Scottish context, the claim has been raised that social pedagogy links particularly well with 18th Century Scottish Enlightenment, while Anglo-American social work is an essentially English creation, reflecting English traditions (Smith & Whyte, 2008). This position also opens a Scottish window upon Europe (Smith, 2012).

The situation in Europe today

Social pedagogy may be detected when one or more of the following can be observed in a given national (or regional) context: a profession, a field of practice, specific higher education programmes, a research discipline. Social pedagogy exists in most of Europe: degree and job titles may vary, as may the responsibilities and formal recognition of the occupation/profession, yet the fact remains that, across Europe, staff trained in social pedagogy can be found working with the most diverse problems and age groups (see case studies in Gustavsson, et al., 2003; Eriksson & Winman, 2010; Kornbeck & Rosendal Jensen, 2009, 2011-12).

These European qualifications and occupations/professions may be grouped under the heading 'social pedagogy' and juxtaposed with other, equally recognisable qualifications and occupations/professions under the heading 'social work' (see the table in Kornbeck & Lumsden, 2009, p. 124). This social work/social pedagogy dichotomy is a defining feature

of social pedagogy, in a comparative perspective, because social pedagogy addresses many of the same challenges as social work: but it seeks solutions in the realm of education (see Hämäläinen, 2003, 2012; Stephens, 2013; Storø, 2012) rather than in therapy, counselling or social assistance law, as does social work. Conceptually, social work and social pedagogy may be seen as jointly forming 'the social professions' (Otto & Lorenz (1998): the dichotomy reflects the fact that they are complementary yet essentially different.

The situation in the UK today

English-language social pedagogy literature is still very limited, with edited collections of essays in English (see above) representing a source of illustrative material. Until now there was a total lack of textbooks, though some anthologies could be used as textbooks (e.g., Cameron & Moss, 2011). Then in 2013, the publication of the first true, monographic textbook occurred in February (Stephens, 2013) and March (Storø, 2013). Still, English and Scottish textbooks in residential care need not have a social pedagogy base (see Connelly & Milligan, 2012).

It had become clear that social pedagogy had something different to offer (Coussée, et al., 2010; Lorenz, 2008): a development which was and is of particular novelty in the UK. Maybe as a corrective to a perceived 'inherent tendency of the social work paradigm to disengage from political processes on account of its fascination with value-neutral scientific paradigms' (Lorenz, 2008, p. 641), or simply because social pedagogy 'is not primarily "deficit-oriented". It regards all children, and indeed all human beings, as, on the one hand, in need of educational guidance for the full development of their potential, more explicitly obviously in youth and in crisis situations, and, on the other hand, as capable of always developing themselves further, provided the requisite resources are available' (Lorenz, 2008, p. 636). This may be seen as a difference in epistemological positions (Hämäläinen, 2003, 2012), yet these differences obviously translate into differences in regard to the solutions chosen: 'a social worker might use her institutional vantage point to acquire a wheelchair for a disabled person, while simultaneously engaging in pedagogic dialogue with the service user regarding the most suitable model' (Stephens, 2013, p. 5).

Maybe the absence of a 'vantage point' – indeed even the absence of an ambition to gain one – is the key defining feature of social pedagogy? A look at the definitions offered by the two global professional associations, including because that for social work relegates social pedagogy to a subordinate role (IFSW, 2001), while the one for social pedagogy underscores the independence of social pedagogy (AIEJI, 2008). But then again – to repeat Stephens's argument – both social pedagogy and social work have crystallised into different emanations within concrete national contexts.

Until now, the UK has been 'unusual in locating residential child care professionally within social work' (Smith, 2009, p. 151), thereby following the rest of the Anglophone world in not having any social pedagogy tradition. Very recently, however, government-funded projects have shown that social pedagogy could make a difference by offering more targeted staff training to workers in residential care and the 'early years' workforce (see e.g., Bengtsson, et al., 2008; Boddy, et al., 2005). Significantly, the prescription for social

work education has no link with social pedagogy (see QAA, 2000). This is to be deplored as social work history reveals that European immigrants to North America did previously provide some social pedagogy-rooted inspiration to social work there (see Asquith, et al., 2005, p. 23, sec. 5.26).

Nevertheless, things are moving in the UK where social pedagogy, 'as a discipline and a practice, is drawing attention in British political circles' (Stephens, 2009, p. 343). While it is true that British debates have until now kept a strong workforce management focus in relation to residential care and 'early years' (Hämäläinen, 2012, p. 9), there is much to share with social work: '(…) social care is a special field of social pedagogy but is not isolated from aspirations to promote social inclusion and active citizenship.' It may 'provide a particular view of education in the modern society – "social pedagogical eyes" – applying to all kinds of education throughout the educational system,' being like 'a general rather than a special theory of education' (ibid., p. 13). This suggests rather promising win-win scenarios: so what are the risks facing social pedagogy?

"Not a Prophet"? German Social Pedagogy and the Heuristic Value of European Comparisons

In Germany – the intellectual home of social pedagogy – the social work/social pedagogy split referred to above was essential for the first three-quarters of the 20th Century (for a detailed analysis in German, see Müller, 2001) and only really lost ground in the 1980s and 1990s. Already the 1960s, however, saw predictions of a gradual merger of social work and social pedagogy, and this view finally prevailed when a national social work 'framework curriculum' made no reference to social pedagogy (KMK, 2001).

The theory known as the 'convergence theorem' came to be increasingly embraced by large (but not all) parts the academic community, partly as a reflection of changes in practice structures and partly as a reflection of a very specific professionalisation agenda. The proponents of 'convergence' were so successful that their view of the traditional social work/social pedagogy dichotomy as obsolete eventually was blue-printed by the national curriculum (KMK, 2001). (That developments launched at EU level made this document obsolete soon after is less important.) Social pedagogy continued to exist in some university-based programmes and even in some programmes based at so-called 'universities of applied sciences' (*Fachhochschulen*) (similar to the former British polytechnics), as indeed the label continued to be used in journal and book publications by one part of the academic community (but not by the other). Social pedagogy had even come to be associated with specific German traditions which would handicap the professions' 'international connectivity' (for a discussion in German, see Kornbeck, 2009). For some, it was connected with the wish to achieve higher professional status ('professionalisation').

German authors seem generally unaware of the continued existence of a social work/social pedagogy dichotomy in most of Europe: they seem to assume that 'convergence' like in Germany is inevitable. They may even be under the impression that, because social pedagogy has not traditionally been found in the Anglo-Saxon countries, it needs to be avoided. But social pedagogy is not dead. Rather, according to one Scottish author, the

arrangements in UK residential child care were 'unusual' by European standards (Smith, 2009, S. 151). When German authors speak of 'international connectivity' (*Anschlußfähigkeit*) (see e.g., Puhl & Erath, 2005, p. 804), what they really mean seems to be a terminological and conceptual 'connectivity' with Anglo-Saxon literature. It is this author's conviction that many German developments can be explained as a result of (West) Germany's Transatlantic connections after 1945 (Kornbeck, 2012). This is fine as far as it goes, and learning theory, evidence-based knowledge and good practice from the Anglosphere is of course laudable in itself. Yet denying social pedagogy a place of prominence, and one that lets its German roots stand out as German, becomes meaningless at the moment when some Anglophone countries are adopting and adapting social pedagogy. The 'connectivity' problem then becomes a non-problem, so that 'one does not need to speak of "social work" to be successful internationally' (Niemeyer, 2003, p. 16). But while it may be useful to refer to work with 'disabled children and adults, prisoners and their families, children in secure settings, and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people' as social pedagogy, according to one author (an Englishman in Norway), 'in themselves, the words used to describe the child care workforce in the UK ought to be less important than what child care professionals do' (Stephens, 2009, pp. 349-350).

'Foreign Fads': still some resistance in some quarters of the UK

While it is clear that there must be 'limits to exportability' (Kornbeck, 2002; echoed by Asquith, et al., 2005, pp. 23-24, sec. 5.26, 5.29), it must also be recognised that careful eclecticism is possible. There is no need to portray the social work/social pedagogy dichotomy as the product of a 'Teutonic taxonomy' (Brauns & Kramer, 1986, p. 5), and indeed, the German provenance of social pedagogy should not – in itself – pose a problem. Yet this is precisely what has happened in some cases, as exemplified by a controversy in the magazine Community Care (Fitzpatrick, 2010).

Despite 'indications that England is now ready to contemplate the introduction of social pedagogy as an academic discipline, and the introduction of the profession of social pedagogue' (Petrie & Cameron, 2009, p. 145), there are also signs of retrenchment. When a Draft Guidance document on work with 'looked-after children' was put into public consultation by NICE & SCIE (2010), an otherwise short and very timid paragraph on social pedagogy attracted an aggressive comment from a GP and author. Dr Fitzpatrick not only called for better pay and recognition of social workers (a laudable agenda indeed), but also took the opportunity to ventilate views which can be described at best as prejudiced. Fitzpatrick thought it had taken social pedagogy 'several decades to recover from its association with the Nazi regime. Then it was used to facilitate the extension of state authority into intimate spheres of family and personal life (…)' (Fitzpatrick, 2010), thus elegantly building a bridge from Nazism to the welfare state.

Note that social pedagogy was no less compromised under Nazism than social work, which also existed at that time: it is characteristic of totalitarian regimes that all walks of life must 'get on board'. The idea that social pedagogy 'took decades' to clean its name in countries like Germany would probably come as a big surprise to many German or Nordic

social pedagogues. Fitzpatrick dismissed the 'social pedagogue – new, glossy, Scandinavian, spouting platitudes' as unnecessary and needed solely to solve problems created by New Labour, and he concluded that '[...] there is no need to go in search of gimmicks to Denmark or Germany or even Pennsylvania [...] Politicians could help by ceasing to produce more policy guidance like this, by ceasing their bad-mouthing of social workers and by putting the pedagogues on their bicycles' (Fitzpatrick, 2010).

The uninformed nature of this contribution becomes particularly obvious if one examines the incriminated Draft Guidance. Far from being prescriptive, let alone unashamedly in love with Scandinavia or Germany, the text did not go an inch beyond providing guidance. Its authors had 'heard about research in England' and a 'pilot programme that is introducing social pedagogic values in residential care homes here'. It noted that this seemed to be in line with Government's Care Matters paper (H.M. Government, DCSF, 2008) (NICE & SCIE, 2010, p. 15, sec. 3.14) but was kept resolutely factual. It should also be noted this was half a page out of a total 139 pages: that such a text should prompt so virulent a reaction, is remarkable, yet seems to be symptomatic of attitudes held at least in some quarters of English and British society. Other quarters, however, did not agree, as can be seen from the reactions published in the journal shortly after. Brody (2010) found comparisons with Nazi Germany offensive and not a representation of current practice in Germany; recommended a UNICEF report on children's lives in various European countries; and found Fitzpatrick to be 'clearly ignorant of the strong youth work tradition in the UK which shares the values of social pedagogy and the work of educationalists such as A.S. Neil whose work predates the rise of fascism in Germany'. Petrie (2010) made a similar contribution.

Without prejudicing the value of the different arguments put forward, it is significant that such a debate could take place at all. Readers may argue that drawing on such an example in this paper is biased and impressionistic, yet the material is sufficient to illustrate one type of bias: 'Foreign Fads'. It is also worth noting that an external evaluation of the first social pedagogy education programme doubted if improvements achieved could clearly be attributed to social pedagogy 'in isolation': instead, a 'higher status, graduate, residential workforce hypothetically could be developed in England unassociated with social pedagogy' (Berridge, et al., 2011, p. 260). A pragmatic solution may be to say that 'If she looks like a social pedagogue, she probably is a social pedagogue' (Stephens, 2009, p. 350), yet this will probably not do in a public policy climate where accountability and evidence are essential: social pedagogy will be expected to define itself in clear terms, to make a strong case and show that it can deliver. While the UK may be attracted to social pedagogy practice in selected fields, its theory seems 'less open to evaluation by Anglophones' (Petrie & Cameron, 2009, p. 162). Yet this might mean missing the very point of social pedagogy itself, as it 'is *not just a method to be imported*, but also a rich source of inspiration for critical reflection on the role that pedagogical institutions play in our society' (Cousée, et al. 2008, p. 11) (*emphasis added*).

Conclusions

European comparisons can be useful for many reasons, including when they enable one to understand one's own country's traditions and structures better (Lorenz, 2008, p. 641). In

addition to the workforce planning perspective apparently favoured by British policy makers, it offers an opportunity to learn by questioning the conventional wisdom. Whether this opportunity can be seized, depends however upon how prepared the UK is to embrace social pedagogy theory, given a certain 'English distrust for theory as opposed to a more pragmatic "theory-light" approach' (Petrie & Cameron, 2009, p. 163).

This paper set out to examine two scenarios – 'Not a Prophet' versus 'Foreign Fads' – which may serve to conceptualise social pedagogy dissemination. They are not clear-cut scenarios bound to reproduce themselves in each and every case but rather ideal-typical representations of important fallacies which need to be identified and addressed. A pragmatic conclusion would be a warning against attempts at 'lock, stock and barrel copying from abroad,' which is 'rarely a wise choice' (Stephens, 2013, p. 126). It may be 'more precise to speak of adoption and adaptation' (ibid.). Even in Scotland – where (as discussed above) there may be more affinity with domestic traditions than in England: 'one that finds resonance with Scottish traditions of social welfare and education' (Smith, 2012, p. 52) – social pedagogy dissemination must be handled with caution: it needs to respect the Scottish context (ibid.).

Nevertheless, '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' (Smith, 2012, p. 53). If the announced referendum on Scottish independence were to result in a Scottish exit from the UK, and if a UK exit from the EU ('Brexit' in current press jargon) were to result from the announced referendum, then Scottish EU membership would also have to be addressed. Social pedagogy could then be one of the issues over which Scots might wish to define their relationship with 'Europe'.

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