Youth Inclusion and Social Pedagogy: a UK Perspective

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Abstract: The European tradition of social pedagogy has, over the last 10 years, been gaining prominence in discourses around welfare in the UK. Initially this was the result of research into the efficacy of social pedagogy in residential services in Europe as compared with the relatively poor outcomes achieved for young people in similar services in the UK. More recently attention has focused on the way youth services could be reoriented if they were to adopt a social pedagogic approach. This paper considers these later developments and looks at how youth work in the UK could be re-energised by the insertion of a social pedagogic framework into the activities of youth workers. It argues for a perspective which moves beyond an individual focus on the young person to one which utilises an approach which recognises structural as well as individual perspectives. The paper suggests that to achieve this we need to draw on notions of the 'Common Third' and underlying commitments to inclusion and creativity.

Key words : youth, inclusion, social pedagogy, creativity, structural perspectives

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Social Pedagogy has been attracting increasing interest in the UK. Hamalainen (2003) suggests that 'the basic idea of social pedagogy is to promote people's social functioning, inclusion, participation, social identity and social competence as members of society' (p.76). This paper seeks to identify how these processes occur in a particular form of welfare practice – youth work. Consequently it will draw on recent debates around social pedagogy in the UK starting with the discussions around the efficacy of social pedagogy in children's residential services.

The Thomas Coram Research Unit was commissioned by the Departments of Health and Children, School and Families (now the Department of Education) to look at the efficacy of social pedagogy as a form of intervention in children's residential services (Cameron, Jasper,

Kleipoedszus,Petrie, Wigfall 2010). This follows a gradual, but increasing, understanding of the importance of listening to different approaches to the provision of social work and in particular learning from our European neighbours (Lorenz 1994; Hatton 2001, 2008; Lyons, Manion and Carlson 2006).

Reporting on the initial stages of the Thomas Coram Research Unit (TCRU) report, Petrie (2001) argued that:

> …the pedagogue, exercising an emancipatory pedagogy and respecting children as social agents, could ensure that children and young people were themselves brought more fully into the discussion.

Earlier Highman has suggested that social pedagogy had a role in working with young people through the provision of personal advisor services. She suggested that this could overcome some of the deficiencies of current UK social work and that it could help to reclaim a broader concept of social work from the narrow managerial one which was becoming established at the time she was writing. She argued that 'the challenge for British social work is to establish broader European definitions of roles and scope of practice' (Highman, 2001: 28).

Central to the concept of social pedagogy, that the author believes needs to be introduced into the UK to improve current welfare practice, is the idea of creativity. Creativity is envisaged as an active process in which the social pedagogue/social worker works with the person using their service in a way which seeks to maximise their potential, increase their ability to make decisions and improve their life chances. At least in the Danish context it is based on theoretical concepts around the 'Common Third'. This is described by Aabro as a descriptive project or ambition within the pedagogical tradition of relations in social work in which there is a 'deliberate focus on the object as something outside the subject. The object being a 'common thing' which both parts in the relation' can connect with' (see Hatton 2006: 2008). Aabro describes the work of Husen who sees the key element of social pedagogy as being:

> To be sharing something, to have something in common, implies in principle to be equal, to be two (or more) individuals on equal terms, with equal rights and dignity (subject – subject relation). In a community you don't use or exploit the other (subject- object relation). (Husen, 1996: 231, translated by Aabro, 2004 cited in Hatton, 2008:114).

At the core of this relationship are notions of equality and respect and the eradication of unequal power relations. In addition this approach is central to ideas about social pedagogy being developed in the UK as demonstrated in the work being produced by the Social Pedagogy Network (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011 – see also www.socialpedagogyuk.com). This is an approach which is consistent with a wide range of activities which have been taking place across the social sectors in Europe. In the spring 2009 edition of *Homeless* in Europe, the magazine of the European federation of national organisations working with the homeless (FEANTSA), there are a number of descriptions of the way in which arts and creativity can help with the empowerment of severely marginalised individuals and groups. The editorial of the journal claims that the examples quoted, 'share the common achievement of having improved peoples self-esteem, self-awareness and motivation, while challenging mainstream perceptions of homelessness'. (FEANTSA, 2009: 3).

The magazine describes a number of initiatives across Europe. Matt Peacock, the chief executive of Streetwise Opera UK, welcomes the recognition of the importance of creative activity in tackling homelessness as witnessed by the support provided by the report of the office of deputy Prime Minister in 2005). As Peacock notes:

> the confidence and self-esteem, increased communication and motivation that results from the arts have been shown to be the building blocks to help individuals who forward quicker and better. (FEANTSA, 2009: 4).

The creative and inclusive approach to social pedagogy which is outlined above can have beneficial effects in terms of improving self belief and self confidence of people in a range of different situations. This paper is concerned to look at how social pedagogy can in particular improve outcomes for those working within the youth service. At the time of writing the UK has seen an explosion of violence and disengagement in a significant number of communities across the UK. Without excusing the actions of people involved in these 'riot' situations, early indications also suggest that they can at least partly be explained by young peoples' sense of dislocation and alienation from mainstream society. A key feature of social pedagogy is the recreation of relationships, an attempt to increase social integration and a commitment to ensuring that the people pedagogues work with engage and/or re-engage with the communities in which they live.

Eischesteller and Rapey (2007) suggested that social pedagogy could play a significant role in reclaiming the core values of youth work in the UK. Earlier, Higham (2002) had suggested

that the Connexxions service, a government funded advice counselling and training service for young people, provided clear opportunities to explore the potential of social pedagogy on young peoples lives. The refocusing of the youth service since that period onto more targeted interventions with the more difficult to reach young person population, while narrowing the scope of the potential impact of social pedagogy, did suggest that there was a possibility of allowing the youth service to reframe its interventions so that social pedagogy could be utilised as a strategy for working with young people.

Indeed Langager (2009) writing about the Danish experience of working with 'at risk' young people describes the work of the Academy for Untamed Creativity (AFUK), 'a creative socio-educational environment …(which)…represents a contemporary social –pedagogical approach to the vulnerable adolescents' (Langager, 2009:91). As Langager says:

> The basic idea is to empower the participants trying to strengthen their self-esteem, their acting, their …competence and individual development of constructive new life strategies by working with creative projects - theatre, music, poetry, design, cooking (as an art) etcetera' (p.92).

One participant said, 'What I most of all have learned in this school, is to turn a problem to something you can work with' (p.94)

Such outcomes have encouraged the providers of youth work in the UK to examine its usefulness in their youth services. A recent report of the Regional Youth Work Unit North East and the University of Sunderland examined a six month review of the implications of social pedagogy for youth work. The unit interviewed professionals, young people and collated information from local authorities carrying out social pedagogy pilot programmes. It was influenced by the Children's Workforce Strategy, 2005 the Children's Plan and the 2020 Children and Young Peoples Workforce Strategy. They quote from an article by Oxtoby (2009) which suggested that social pedagogy reflected:

> The close and empathetic nature of the social pedagogues relationship with the young people they work with... the social pedagogues can help them to make great strides in terms of developing great life skills (Oxtoby 2009, quoted in RWYUNE/UOS, 2010:6)

Respondents to the survey were asked why they did or did not think social pedagogy would benefit children or young people in England. Examples of their responses included.

- (it) gives direction and support to those young people who, currently, feel dislocated and disconnected from society.

- (it has) the ability to effectively communicate with young people and empowers them to make their own informed decision. The workforce must also recognise that structural aspects impact on young peoples lived experience of the world and these need to be addressed to ensure sustained change. The workforce must develop skills such as conversation, group work and the recognition of the importance of communication between agencies. It is also imperative to ensure staff are trained at confident in the areas they practice.

- Social pedagogy underpins good quality youth work and social work practice, so it is already happening here – we just haven't called it social pedagogy. The key benefit for children and young people is to be regarded as competent individuals who are treated with respect and supported/enabled to learn and develop as they grow into adults.

- (it has) much more person centred work or consistent outcomes learning, and deeper understand of the child and his/her development. However it could lead to dependency on the worker if clarity around boundaries is not good enough.

- It depends on which model is introduced. You cannot make integration work by creating one type of worker or one form of knowledge. Integration is dynamic and needs many voices and different knowledge bases

(RYWUNE/UoS,2010:33)

As we can see some of these comments directly connect with the construct of social pedagogy we have been describing. The respondents note how social pedagogy helps people who are dislocated and disconnected gain direction and support, improves communication, helps people make informed decisions and become competent individuals, is person centred and contributes to the integration of service delivery.

The report is notable also for its focus on the views of young people themselves. They point out that young people suggested to them that social pedagogy courses could be beneficial to services in the UK. They suggested that social pedagogy was beneficial in building positive

informal relationships, that it enabled professionals to see people in a holistic manner and that it could contribute positively to the basic training of all professionals involved with young people (pp47-48).

The report also looked at the opinion of youth work professionals on social pedagogy. One said, 'for me the principles of social pedagogy are quite similar to the principles of youth work... I think it could really help actually in making our work force more creative and responsive to young people and their own needs and aspirations.' (p.52). Another commented that, 'in terms of young people being influential on what happens to them, not just having things done to them, it will be a really positive thing... (in a social pedagogy framework) young people are far more influential in services. And that can only improve services for them because they are the only ones that know what services they need, want and will use' (p.54). However a number of the respondents warned about the difficulties of integrating social pedagogy into a different cultural, social and political context. They recognised the possible contribution of social pedagogy but maintained a belief that existing youth work services could meet many of the challenges thrown up by social pedagogy. They quote one area manager of integrated services as saying:

> good youth workers have always put the young person at the centre of their work... they have the young people helping in terms of planning. They give them choices. They try not to bring their own prejudices into their work... good youth work is based on social pedagogy' (p.56).

The report notes that 46% of professionals who completed their questionnaire believed that social pedagogy would benefit the children and young people's workforce (p.58). They concluded that social pedagogy could:

- Encourage professionals not to compartmentalise certain aspects of children or young peoples lives.

- Provide a more person centred approach.

- Encourage professionals to focus on the views of the children or young person.

- Bring the work force closer together.

- Encourage professionals to take all aspects of a child's life into account (p.59)

They warned however that amongst the drawbacks to introducing social pedagogy into the UK may be that it is seen as too idealistic; not sufficiently well understood or effective in a UK context; not necessarily suitable for all professionals working with children and young people; a lack of understanding of the theory and practice of social pedagogy and an inconsistency in its education and training; problems of funding and the possible dilution of individual specialism's; and the possible resistance of the workforce if proper account wasn't taken of the cultural differences between the UK and European countries more familiar with the pedagogic tradition. They call for an increased awareness of social pedagogy across the children and young people's workforce, the development of further pilot projects, the review of existing pedagogic training in the UK to ensure consistency across the sector and adequate funding for the development of pedagogy as a profession.

One of the key issues in identifying ways in which social pedagogy can be integrated within youth work is by looking at issues of risk. In Care Matters one of the more noticeable responses came from young people asked their views about the way services meet or fail to meet their needs. They consistently make comment about wishing to be heard more and in particular articulated strong views around issues of risk. The Commission for Social Care Inspection report from 2006 which looked at the views of young people leaving the care system suggested that, 'to reach their potential and individual must be allowed – and supported – to take risks, have new experiences and make mistakes' (Hatton 2008:16).

How then can we align youth work with an approach which can integrate social pedagogy in a positive and beneficial way for young people? A Quartet report from 2009 positively highlighted the ways in which services in Denmark adopted what they regarded as a radically different approach to caring for children and young people which was, 'based on nurturing relationships, individuality and creativity' (Gulati and King, 2009:17)

Social pedagogy has been seen as a form of social education and much of the discussion of social pedagogy is formulated through the work of IEIJ,FESET (association Européenne des Centres de Formation au Travail Socio-Educatif and the various fora for social educators which make up FESET). The Nordic Forum for Social Educators argue that:

> Social education is the theory about how psychological, social and material conditions and various value orientations encourage or prevent the general development and growth, life quality and welfare of the individual of the group. (Nordic forum for Social Educators, 2003:8)

The NFFS suggest that central to social education processes are issues of integration and that the general aim is to ensure the integration of excluded and marginalised people. Their focus is on working in ways which ensure the people they engage with benefit from rather then become dependent on the services they use. This they suggest is achieved through them connecting 'critical analysis with constructive actions' (p.10). At the core of social education work is the notion of becoming reflective practitioners

> social educators in the Nordic countries work within many various fields, differing from one country to the other. The Norwegian childcare workers, barnevernpedagoger, perform tasks and functions that are to some extent similar to a social worker in Denmark and Sweden. In Sweden there a few social educators compared to social workers. In contrast to their Danish colleagues, Swedish social workers perform direct social educational treatment work... in Denmark as well as in the Faroe Islands and Greenland, the education is a common social education programme that is also aimed at taking care of children and young people in day-care, schools and leisure time facilities' (NFSS,2003:11)

This conceptualisation of social education suggests a way of realigning UK youth work to incorporate perspectives which move beyond risk maintenance or risk management. This paper will conclude with a brief look at two potential ways of achieving this. The first is the idea of positive youth development which has emerged over the last two decades. Flannagen, Syvertsen and Wray-Lake (n.d.) suggest that positive youth development is, in a similar way to the strengths perspective in social work, an attempt to focus on young people's assets and not their deficits. They suggest that this approach can be extended by recognising young people as agents of change and that political activism should be seen as an important element in such positive youth development. To achieve this they argue that we would need to legitimise marginalised identities, (a similar point made by Bill Jordan in his work on poverty and social exclusion, Jordan, 1996). They argue that we should support young people in contesting race and class inequalities in a wide range of welfare services including public spaces (this would mean developing a much more resistant discourse to the paradigms which problematise young people such as ASBO's and dispersal orders). They also argue that young people are currently and will continue to be involved in environmental and global justice activism. Finally they argue that young people can be encouraged to critically analyse the societies around them. They suggest that, 'with the proper knowledge and skills, youth can

move beyond individual acts of service and link their sense of social responsibility to constructive political action' (p.251)

An example is provided by a youth worker at the Blaeksprutten (Octopussy) youth project in Copenhagen (Hatton, 2001,b – the project is part of SSP model widely used in Denmark – see Langager, 2009). This is a project which focused on the experience of a poor, marginalized community with a high proportion of black and minority young people living within its boundaries. The project, aimed to break down the barriers between the police, social welfare agencies and local young people. The project leader said of the project's approach, that they seek to provide the young people using the project with an increased sense of self-worth.

One of the project workers at Blaeksprutten describes how:

> When we give these kids more confidence and a strong identity they go out on the streets and in social society and can be like normal people, they do not have to be afraid and do not have to pretend to be tough guys, because they know from the inside that they are good enough. After giving these kids self-confidence they can do more things for other kids and adults in social society. We are showing the social society that the kids around here are OK (Hatton,2001,b).

One of the project leaders at Blaekspratten describes the difficulties people often face when they try to explain the nature of their difficulties to people in agencies, including social care agencies:

> A woman is living with a man in a family together, he is violent towards her. Whenever it happens she goes to some social assistants who really pity her. They say ' I feel really sorry for you'. She says that is not what she needs. She needs someone to cry out and say 'do something about it. Rise up and do something yourself '. The system does not really handle the problem, we do not really involve ourselves, we just listen.

A similar approach is suggested by Perkins, Borden and Villarruel (n.d.) when they talk about community youth development, a further attempt to develop the positive youth development model. They suggest that community youth development, 'shifts the emphasis from a dual

focus of youth being problem free and fully prepared, to a triadic focus for youth being problem free, fully prepared and engaged partners. More importantly, this focus recognises that there is a interdependent relationship between positive and healthy youth outcomes and positive and healthy communities' (p.43). They suggest that at the core of community youth development is a focus on the young persons capacity to both understand and act upon the environment, a recognition that this involves the active support of people across the community, and that central to this is the engagement of youth in 'constructive and challenging activities that build their competence and foster supported relationships with peers and with adults' (p.48). Finally they suggest that to achieve these goals requires developments in youth participation and partnerships with their community.

The author is not suggesting that these approaches have been absent from developments in youth work in the UK. What is being suggested is that over the last ten years we have seen developments within youth work which have been akin to those in other sectors of the welfare state – including the development of neo-liberal policies which atomise and individualise welfare while problemmatising the recipients of welfare (Ferguson, 2008). In the context of young people this means a focus on young people as problematic rather than them as people with capacity. We have seen the growth of organisations such as youth parliaments and through Care Matters and Youth Matters, recognition of the importance of listening to and engaging with young people. This has occurred increasingly against a backdrop in which young people have been, and continue to be seen as a threat, rather than a resource within our societies. As we have seen social pedagogy can help us reframe debates so that we focus on the creativity of young people, their capacity to act (and in a positive rather than negative way) and the importance of including, engaging with and promoting young people as active citizens. Recent foci within UK youth work on targeted interventions with the most vulnerable young people while important can result in us reinforcing negative images of young people rather than the positive outcomes which social pedagogy, positive youth development and community youth development can help attain.

Aluffi-Pentini and Lorenz (1996) pointed to the importance of social professionals, including youth workers and social pedagogues, challenging structural as well as individual oppression when addressing racism when they describe the challenge faced by Italian youth and social workers who felt that, ' racism was a challenge to educators in all parts of the country, that all pedagogical interventions had to be embedded in a clear political analysis, that cultural differences reflected power differentials' (p.vi).

This means engaging with young people and ensuring their participation in all levels of decision-making. The United Nation's Children's Fund (2001: 9 -11) suggested that participation had a number of important values for young people. These included;

- Participation as a human right and thus something beneficial in its own rights.

- Participation as being critical to self development

- As a way of building effectiveness and sustainability, particularly where they are fully involved, or even the authors of a project

- It demonstrates that young people can make a real contribution to society

- It fosters learning, builds life skills and enables self –protection. They refer in particular to the way young people 'will be better equipped to deal with abusive , threatening or unfair situations because they will be in a better position to seek advice, exit a harmful situation when necessary or cope creatively when there is no exit' (p.10)

They quote the Dominican Youth Group who argue that, 'participation implies decision making and is viewed as a strategy for human development as it is closely linked to the promotion of leadership (with transforming capacities) at the social level, that empowers adolescents, adolescent groups, communities, provinces, and the country to get involved in the processes towards individual and collective development'. (p.12)

This view of work with young people as potentially empowering at a structural as well as an individual level takes us to a new understanding of social pedagogy as an activity which needs to engage with social change as well as individual development. This suggests that the agenda in our work with young people needs to be participatory, inclusive and oriented towards social action rather than focusing on young people as a problem which needs to be solved or fixed. A bridge between these two approaches can be seen in the links between community development and social pedagogy which the author has explored elsewhere (Hatton, 2011).

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