
Article

Taking social pedagogy forward: Its fit with official UK statements on promoting wellbeing

Pat Petrie

Professor Emeritus, UCL Institute of Social Research, Institute of Education, UCL, UK; p.petrie@ucl.ac.uk

How to Cite: Petrie, P. (2020). Taking social pedagogy forward: Its fit with official UK statements on promoting wellbeing. *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, 9(1): 17.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ijsp.2020.v9.x.017>.

Submission date: 15 May 2020; Acceptance date: 10 September 2020; Publication date: 16 October 2020

Peer review:

This article has been peer-reviewed through the journal's standard double-blind peer review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

Copyright:

© 2020, Pat Petrie. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (CC BY) 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited •
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ijsp.2020.v9.x.017>.

Open access:

International Journal of Social Pedagogy is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

Abstract

This article indicates the range of government interest in wellbeing, briefly describes the emergence of social pedagogy in the UK generally and indicates the part played in it by the UK governments since 2000. This is followed by a short account of the principles of social pedagogy and the profession and education of social pedagogues. There follow descriptions of pedagogy practice, accompanied by examples of government statements (focused on England) that are compatible with these. The article goes on to consider examples where social pedagogy has been introduced into English and Scottish children's services, drawing on Claire Cameron's overview of evaluations of demonstration and pilot projects. These evidence some congruence between the practice reported – and its effects – and the recommendations of government on promoting wellbeing. Finally, the article considers the conditions necessary for the continuing growth of social pedagogy, and social pedagogic approaches in the UK.

Keywords: social pedagogy; wellbeing; UK policy; evaluations

Wellbeing

Wellbeing was defined in the World Health Organisation (WHO, 1978) Alma-Ata Declaration as ‘a state of complete physical and mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’ and a fundamental human right. While this definition is open to discussion, and ‘wellbeing’ is sometimes considered an elusive concept (see for example Morrow and Mayall, 2009, p. 221; Statham and Chase, 2010, p. 2), this is not the concern here. In this article we will consider wellbeing as located within the remit of those national governments, including the UK’s, that signed the WHO declaration. A clarification of the term ‘UK government’ may be useful here. Since the WHO declaration, the UK government has been devolved, albeit incompletely, to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly. There is no separate English parliament and all four nations send representatives to the UK Parliament in Westminster, which is responsible for some policy that is limited to England.

While the aims of the WHO declaration seem perhaps impossibly high, there is evidence that in the UK standards of wellbeing fall far short of the declaration’s aims and that this appears to be of concern to government:

In the Millennium Cohort Study, a quarter of girls aged 14 and nine percent of boys of the same age were shown to have significant psychological distress and wellbeing difficulties. Many adults with disabilities and older people are lonely and cut off from social contact, particularly if they also have health problems. NHS staff have significantly higher rates of sickness than the national average and their wellbeing is closely related to the quality of patient care. Early years workers report exceptional levels of fatigue, insomnia, loss of motivation and anxiety, such that a quarter of staff in one survey were thinking of leaving their jobs. More than half of current social workers intend to leave the profession in the next 15 months due to poor working conditions and resultant stress. (Professor Claire Cameron, introducing a SPPA seminar, *Social Pedagogy: A positive response to wellbeing*, 22 October 2018, UCL Institute of Education)

Government departments certainly express concern about the disparity between the WHO declaration and what is to be found in England – and this article focuses on England. Departments as varied as, for example, the Ministry of Defence, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Education, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Home Office all publish wellbeing guidance and reports. These range across government and public service staff – civil servants, the military, the police and so on – as well as specific groups within the general population, such as children in nurseries, schools and colleges; women prisoners; older people; disabled people; and people in residential care. Concerns about the wellbeing of such groups have been the subject of government, and other, research and publications.

This article looks at some central aspects of social pedagogy practice and provides examples of government statements that put forward ways of promoting wellbeing resonant with aspects of social pedagogy practice. The statements come from the Department of Health/Health and Social Care, and Public Health England. The article does not set out to be an exhaustive account, nor to claim that such official statements reflect what is to be found generally in practice settings. A more extensive, richer survey of materials could address official understandings that might run contrary to the principles, understandings and practice of social pedagogy – but that is not the intention here. Further, practice does not, of course, paint the whole picture; there are other policy factors at play in fostering wellbeing, with a major part played by social infrastructures that engender either poverty and human inequalities or their opposite. In what follows, the intention is to discover any tokens of compatibility between social pedagogy practice and the thinking of the officials who drafted the documents consulted. The article begins with a short account of social pedagogy and its emergence in the UK, mainly for the benefit of those UK readers who are less familiar with it.

Social pedagogy

Today social pedagogy is widespread in much of continental Europe, as are its practitioners. Until quite recently, it was less known in the English-speaking world, its meaning often lost in translation. For example, the German *Socialpädagogie* may be translated, inappropriately, as ‘teacher’, with similar problems arising for other languages. Below there is (a) a short account of social pedagogy and its emergence in England (for longer accounts see, for example, [Cameron and Petrie, 2009](#); [Petrie, 2013](#)); (b) discussion of how its practice matches the advice advanced in selected government statements on promoting wellbeing; and (c) a summary of evaluations of projects that have sought to introduce social pedagogy.

The ongoing emergence of social pedagogy in the UK

While there were linguistic difficulties, there is a slowly growing acceptance of ‘social pedagogy’ in the UK. Despite some early academic interest in the area little research was conducted in the UK until the Department of Health, and later the Department for Education, funded a research programme conducted at the Thomas Coram Research Unit from 1999 to 2011. Other funders have included KPMG Foundation, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Comic Relief and the Arts Council. The interest that followed these investigations and pilot projects is manifest in different ways: in social pedagogy courses delivered by ThemPra and Jacaranda; some bachelor’s and higher degree courses in Scotland and England; courses for arts agencies delivered by Blue Cabin, Sage Gateshead and Treehouse Associates; and, importantly, implementation projects and evaluations. There have been twice-yearly meetings of the Social Pedagogy Development Network since 2008, now often attended by participants from all four UK nations. The Social Pedagogy Professional Association (SPPA) was founded in 2017, soon followed by the accreditation and delivery of vocational qualifications for practitioners and leaders. These and other local developments continue in some authority departments, non-profit and for-profit agencies and some universities – for the most part in England and Scotland.¹ It is also interesting to note that social pedagogues who qualified in Europe may be recognised in the UK, where some are appointed in appropriate spheres as social pedagogues, social workers and in other positions.

At the political level indications of support for social pedagogy were visible under the Labour governments of 1997 to 2010. This comprised research funding, a pilot study and some promotion in official publications – but did not go so far as to promote social pedagogy as a profession, or as an academic discipline. For example, a government select committee (2009) on children’s residential care visited Denmark and reported that:

102 Two aspects of the workforce were particularly striking to us: firstly the level of qualifications, and secondly the type of training. Almost all residential care staff in Denmark – and indeed the majority of staff who work directly with children in any setting – are qualified as ‘social pedagogues’ through a three-and-a-half-year degree-level course.

Nevertheless, it went on to propose a social pedagogy ‘approach’, rather than profession:

108 . . . We urge the Government to think broadly and creatively about the possible future applications of the social pedagogy approach in the care system rather than looking to import wholesale a separate new profession.

There has been no specific government interest in social pedagogy since 2010.

The theory and practice of social pedagogy

For some British readers, a brief outline of social pedagogy may be helpful. Social pedagogy refers to broadly educational measures that address social purposes. Across different countries, similar theories

¹Mark Smith and Sebastian Monteux (2019) argued that social pedagogy is not alien to Scottish thinking: ‘it chimes with Kilbrandon’s conception of social education, but also offers a suggestive framework within which to locate current policies . . . social pedagogic ideas can boost practitioners’ confidence and give them a language through which to better describe what they do’ (p. 3).

and values inform practice and professional education, while at the level of policy, administration and organisation there is less homogeneity (Kornbeck and Rosendal Jensen, 2009). In continental Europe, social pedagogy can be found in targeted interventions such as elder care, residential child care and fostering, as well as in mainstream services like out-of-school clubs.

The term *social pedagogy* can be applied retrospectively to work by thinkers and reformers before the field was so defined in 1841 (Petrie, 2002). As Hämäläinen (2003) put it: 'From the very beginning, the social pedagogical perspective was based on attempts to find educational solutions to social problems' (p. 71). Hämäläinen (2012) also noted that social pedagogy has developed in two ways: toward the prevention and alleviation of social exclusion and, more generally, the promotion of welfare, community life and the social development of the individual and the wider population.

In 'social pedagogy', the word pedagogy refers to education and learning for people of all ages:

In terms of learning, all . . . periods are propitious for developing and updating competences, and learning processes can be considered, maybe even more than in other life periods, as necessary to optimize life management in old age. (Kern, 2012, p. 99)

This is the understanding of the Department of Health as well (see Box 1). However, the use of the words 'learning' and indeed 'education' needs discussion.

Box 1. Learning and wellbeing.

Engagement in learning can affect people's wellbeing throughout their life course. (DHSC, 2014, p. 3)

Social pedagogy has been called the place where 'care and education meet' (see for example Cameron and Moss, 2011), although this is perhaps more apt for services with an explicit care remit, like foster care or adult or children's residential care, than for more broadly focused community work. Services based in social pedagogy set out to promote *education in a broad sense* across the life course, rather than learning related to a formal curriculum, although social pedagogues may work in schools alongside (or in) the classroom. For social pedagogy, the learning referred to means processes that occur when the social pedagogue is working 'alongside' people as a supportive, egalitarian presence, whether in *informal* daily activities related to work, family and leisure, or in *non-formal learning* contexts, which offer activities that are less everyday and have been specially planned (Werquin, 2010); illustrations of both are to be found in the section on practice below. For social pedagogy, whether non-formal or informal, learning is not only concerned with skills and knowledge, welcome and essential as these may be. It is also involved in those personal changes, large or small, that involve realisations that impart a new sense of agency, of becoming and transformation, as in 'I trust this person', 'I enjoy gardening', 'I can do this', 'I can make a contribution'. This concern with learning does not imply that social pedagogy is a purely individualistic approach. For social pedagogy, the person is seen as social in their immediate relationships *and* as a member of the larger society: 'We are interested in the social. We feel that the recovery or reconstruction of the social may be the answer to many of the situations and issues that our societies now live' (Úcar, 2012, p. 167). Association, community and society have all been keywords in its development. In this it accords with the government statement in Box 2. Paul Natorp (1899), a prominent German philosopher, wrote:

It is only because of the human community that man can become human. The single individual is only an abstraction, just as the physician's atom. Concerning everything that constitutes man as human: man does not first exist as an individual who then can relate to others: without a community man could not be man. (Cited and translated in Rothuizen, 2008)

Box 2. The value of a supportive community.

A healthy community is a good place to grow up and grow old in. It is one which supports healthy behaviours and supports reductions in health inequalities [and it . . .] supports social interaction. (MHCLG, 2014)

For social pedagogy, ‘becoming’ human takes place via relationships with other human beings in social groups and institutions where, whether formally or informally, social identity is learnt. This comes about through a variety of experiences and is affected by the prevalent image of the human *and* the various images associated with sub-groups, for example, those relating to gender, ethnicity, age, social class and impairment. The process constitutes two-way traffic between the individual and the larger society and its institutions. Fielding (2007) has written that in a radical school, ‘both education and society develop the conditions of each other’s mutual growth’ (p. 541). Social pedagogy recognises such a relationship across formal and non-formal educational provision, whether radical or otherwise, and includes those that promote growth and wellbeing and those that promote oppression and ‘illbeing’. Such relationships are matters for social pedagogic analysis: (a) for the critique of provision and an understanding of the image of the human person that underlies policy measures and intentions, and (b) to consider how, in a democracy, the beliefs and value systems of a population may ‘produce’ the educational (in a broad sense) policies that prevail: ‘[social pedagogy] 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’ (Coussée, Bradt, Roose and Bouverne-De Bie, 2010, p. 808). In brief, social pedagogy is a theoretical field that can illuminate and inform practice and policy intentions.

The social pedagogue

In continental Europe and beyond, social pedagogues are the most visible aspect of social pedagogy. They are all graduates whose breadth of education, theoretical and practical, qualifies them for a wide range of child and adult educational and welfare services, working with groups and with individual people as well as in community outreach (see Kornbeck and Rosendal Jensen, 2009, 2011). They have usually undertaken vocational first degrees lasting three to four years, or a master’s degree, in either case supplemented by continuing professional education. Lower-level courses can lead to employment but not to full qualification as a social pedagogue. Degree courses cover theoretical fields such as psychology and sociology, drawing for example on learning, attachment and systems theories, group dynamics and social constructionism. There are also specifically social pedagogic theories, such as *Alltagsorientierung* and *Lebensweltorientierung* (described briefly below). Practice placements are part of the degree, as are specialist options and courses in the arts, outdoor activities or sport, which relate to the social pedagogue’s personal development as well as having potential for sharing with service users.

Social pedagogy in practice and congruent government statements

We turn now to a description of the principles and practice of social pedagogy, as promoted in the education of social pedagogues. These are supported by research and are described in many publications. Such understandings apply across settings: children’s residential care, including foster care (Petrie, Boddy, Cameron, Simon and Wigfall, 2006; Petrie, 2007); family support services (Statham and Chase, 2010); and work with adults throughout the life span (Kornbeck and Rosendal Jensen, 2011, 2012). They include several elements: a focus on the whole person and their overall development; a strength-based approach; the importance of listening to the service user’s point of view; a spirit of collaboration, recognising the contribution of service users, other professionals, members of the community and community institutions and agencies; and an emphasis on reflective practice, as an individual and as part of a team. These provided the criteria for selecting some examples of relevant recommendations from two government departments; all are more fully described below, where they are accompanied by text boxes containing congruent official statements on practice that promotes wellbeing. These have been chosen as examples of fit; social pedagogy is not mentioned explicitly, nor is it meant to be inferred. The claim is not that they are typical

of existing practice: they are advice as to ‘good practice’ rather than a suggestion that government sees its provision through a social pedagogy lens. They cover the period after 2010, when a Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition took over from a Labour government which had expressed support for a social pedagogy ‘approach’, if not for its profession (see the section ‘The ongoing emergence of social pedagogy in the UK’ above). The documents consulted were issued by the Department of Health/Health and Social Care and by Public Health England (a government agency).

A focus on the whole person and a strength-based approach

The statements in Boxes 3 and 4 stress the value of seeing the person as a whole – physical, emotional and mental. In the nineteenth century, when social pedagogy was first defined (Mager, 1841, cited in Winkler, 1988, p. 41), those attempting to improve the lives of poor people via educational measures were much influenced by the principles of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi:

the concept of person is central to any theoretical or practical approach to social pedagogy. Since its inception (Pestalozzi), what has most distinguished and differentiated social pedagogy from other pedagogies has been its tendency to understand the person as a whole. In social pedagogy body, mind, emotions, and spirit are integrated in each person’s relationship with the rest of the living world. (Úcar, 2012, p. 132)

Box 3. The whole person.

10.38 Consideration of the needs to be met should take a holistic approach that covers aspects such as the person’s wishes and aspirations in their daily and community life, rather than a narrow view purely designed to meet personal care needs. (DHSC, 2014)

The aim of a whole prison approach is to [. . .] build the physical, mental, social and spiritual health of people in prison (and, where appropriate, the staff). (PHE, 2018, p. 10)

Box 4. Taking account of a person’s strengths.

Consider the person’s own strengths and capabilities, and what support might be available from their wider support network or within the community to help. (Care Act 2014, Statutory Guidance; DHSC, 2014, 6.63)

Practitioners see themselves in a personal as well as professional relationship with the person(s) they work with. Just as the social pedagogue is concerned with the whole person, they bring themselves as a whole to their work; they recognise themselves as people with personal as well as professional experience, fellow human beings with feelings, hopes, fears and humour. This view of wholeness is sometimes referred to as the ‘three Ps’, the professional, the personal and the private (ThemPra, 2018). As professionals they are aware of their responsibilities towards others, bringing relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to their tasks. At the same time, they see themselves as persons: fellow human beings with colleagues and children, not afraid to express feelings, talk about their lives or share humour and fun, as appropriate: they also judge which matters are private and should remain so, deciding what is appropriate for sharing according to the particular context. In addition, they bring all three aspects – professional, personal and private – to their reflective practice. The *private* contribution is an awareness of how private experience may colour professional reactions and, possibly adversely, affect pedagogical relationships.

The holistic, strength-based approach is associated with wellbeing in various government documents (Box 4). It is an approach that recognises the strengths of others – in fact, one in which the practitioner bases their practice on an image of the strong human being. This view informed the work of Loris Malaguzzi (1993), the first head of early childhood provision in Reggio Emilia, Italy. He wrote ‘our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and, most of all, connected to adults and

other children' (cited in [Moss and Petrie, 2002](#), p. 10). The social pedagogue sees people as having the potential to learn, and as being capable of transformation, social agency and ongoing self-realisation.

The following report was written by a child's social worker, as part of an evaluation of introducing social pedagogy into a residential care home. It illustrates the benefits they believed the child was receiving from a social pedagogic approach.

[The child said] 'Today I played football in the garden, then drew pictures on the path, and then we went to the beach and I rolled up my trousers and paddled in the sea and got soaked and we collected things, look at my shells and my fish, and then we came back and played some more football the garden and then we had dinner and then we went to the play park and I tried to do the monkey bars!' This child had recently started living in a residential children's home, had barely left their home in the past year, referred to themselves as disabled and believed they could not run. This child was 14 years old. ([McDermid et al., 2016](#))

Social pedagogy's strength-based approach (Box 5) finds resonance in the Department of Health's Care 2014 Care Act. Strength-based practice underlies joint decision making and involves the co-construction of meaning, where different 'realities' and perspectives are taken into account. Social pedagogues' education promotes their trusting people to make and participate in decisions about things that matter to them, large and small. This entails recognising the part played by each person's particular life experiences as well as those of the 'professionals'. A Flemish social pedagogy student, taking part in an early study, remarked: 'As adults we are always afraid to give authority to children, but it's not authority, it's responsibility' (Petrie et al., [2006](#), p. 35). And a child in Essex County Council residential care said 'Before they started to mention all this "pedagogy" [*sic*] thing, they didn't do as much involving us. Normally, the adults make the decisions but, instead, [now] they let us help the adults to make the decisions' ([Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2012](#), p. 23). A further example comes from a Greek refugee project that adopted social pedagogy practice:

The determination of best interests (Article, 3 UNCRC) is a living process that involves the boys in making decisions (article, 12 UNCRC) about the 'everyday'. The boy's needs inform the work of the child protection team, rather than their legal status, minimum standards or risk. ([Hadi, 2018](#))

Box 5. Supportive relationships.

A strength-based relationship is based on the fundamental premise that the social work relationship is one of collaboration, and that people are resourceful and capable of solving their own problems if enabled and supported to do so. ([DHSC, 2014](#), p. 6)

Relationships between staff and students, and between students, are critical in promoting student wellbeing and in helping to engender a sense of belonging to and liking of school or college. ([PHE, 2014](#), p. 9)

Supportive relationships

Many government publications speak of the association between relationship and wellbeing (Boxes 5 and 6). Social pedagogues aim to establish trustworthy relationships in whatever settings they work and in which human beings learn about themselves and their world. This may entail some risk. As a person moves from the comfort of the status quo towards new activities and new ways of encountering others, of seeing the world and of being oneself in the world they require the support of trusted relationships. Because they believe that risk should be assessed and managed, not evaded, social pedagogues support the other person in encountering risk; they also are on a learning journey: 'We make the road by walking ... together' ([Horton and Freire, 1990](#)). On the journey, for the social pedagogue listening is as important as speaking. As a Danish pedagogue in a residential home said, 'We can only move things together and we can only do so when they [the children] believe in us, they dare listen to us and only then is what we say useful for them' (quoted in Petrie et al., [2006](#), p. 81).

Forming the relationship often takes place in everyday activities (an aspect of both informal learning and the *Alltagsorientierung*) whether it is eating together, watching television, mending a bike or washing up. It also occurs in less everyday events such as outings, drama, art and music that have been planned in advance – in other words, examples of non-formal activities. All can be sites for developing skills and knowledge. Importantly, for both the pedagogue and the other person, joint participation provides a common external focus, rather than a more intense one-to-one gaze. It belongs to both and is known as the ‘common third’ (Petrie and Chambers, 2010); these are activities owned jointly, which can lead to discovery and learning: about the other person, about oneself and about the relationship between us.

Practice also draws on the theory that the actions and communications of others arise from particular ‘life-worlds’ (*Lebensweltorientierung*), meaning that a person’s history, their significant relationships and the political and cultural contexts of their lives underlie their perspectives. These form the basis for their actions, for how they understand both the world and their own place in it. Significantly, pedagogic dialogue with another person is non-hierarchic. As Paulo Freire commented, ‘At the point of encounter there are neither ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only men [*sic*] who are attempting, together, to learn more than they know now’ (Freire, 1972, p. 63).

Association and collaboration

Valuing human social equality informs the formation of today’s social pedagogues. Accordingly, associative life, team work and co-operation are highly valued: social pedagogues see themselves and those they work with as inhabiting the ‘same life space’, be that a senior citizen’s lunch club, a staff meeting, a residential setting or a family support meeting. They do not inhabit a separate hierarchical domain. They appreciate the strengths that a group can offer: the richness of different life experience, the perspectives that arise from these and the opportunities for mutual support. The Care Act (see Box 6) speaks of people being ‘co-producers’ of services and support. A relevant social pedagogy example comes from Rob Hunter, the chair of Leicester Ageing Together, which has worked in partnership with the East Midlands Workers Education Association (WEA), Treehouse Associates and the Centre for Understanding Social Pedagogy (CUSP) at the UCL Institute of Education. The partnership actively promoted social pedagogy with older people, not as passive recipients but each as persons having ‘a past, a present and a future who, with support, have much to offer to family, each other and the community’ (Hunter, personal communication, 13 August 2018). Hunter refers to the activities of the partnership’s Pop Up Café, which are clearly congruent with social pedagogy and with the government statements in terms of the co-production of services and of associative life:

The WEA’s Pop Up Café, located in a very disadvantaged area, initially attracted small numbers of older people experiencing social and emotional loneliness. There they were well listened to, encouraged to talk about their lives and how they wanted these to be better [see Box 6]. Gradually they co-produced what happened in the café, shared their skills and enthusiasms, giving and receiving support. Some led sessions and even travelled to groups in other parts of the city to do so. As numbers grew, some took on more organising responsibility. The café is now self-organising and increasingly participants are looking outward, not only to meet the needs of themselves and their peers but also of other groups in the community. (Hunter, personal communication, 2018)

The café is an example of what Payne (2005) defined as ‘reflexive’ practice (p. 165), where participants are understood to affect each other and the processes in which they are jointly involved, whether as members of the community – young or old – or of public and voluntary agencies (Box 6). The social pedagogue understands this; they are part of the group they work and learn with, breathing the same air and, importantly, contributing to the group dynamic, not merely as onlookers or supervisors. At the same time, they aim to bring professional and personal skills and understandings, plus self-knowledge, to their work and their reflections on it. The same attitude is carried through to their collaboration with other agencies.

Box 6. Social participation and agency.

Local authorities should actively promote participation in providing interventions that are co-produced with individuals, families, friends, carers and the community. (PHE, 2018, 2.20)

Arrangements should be in place to promote a culture [that] take[s] into account the views of looked-after children, their parents and carers, to inform, influence and shape service provision. [Care Act 2014.]

It is essential that women in prison are involved in the design, development and delivery of health and wellbeing improvements and programmes within the prison at every opportunity. (PHE, 2018)

User involvement should take a co-production approach and diversity of representation should be achieved. (PHE, 2018)

Involving students in decisions that impact on them can benefit their emotional health and wellbeing by helping them to feel part of the school and wider community and to have some control over their lives. . . . Collectively, students benefit through having opportunities to influence decisions, to express their views and to develop strong social networks. (PHE, 2015, p. 14)

Taking part in social activities, having good relationships and strong social networks are all shown to be good for people's levels of wellbeing. Good social relationships and happiness appear to demonstrate two-way causality. (DHSC, 2014)

Preventing needs will often be most effective when action is undertaken at a local level, with different organisations working together to understand how the actions of each may impact on the other. (PHE, 2018)

Evaluations of social pedagogy interventions in England and Scotland

Practices salient for wellbeing and proposed by various government departments and agencies (Boxes 1–6) are based on research. We have seen that there is a good fit between these proposals and the working practice and ethical stance of social pedagogues, which, accordingly, should also promote wellbeing. It is relevant here to consider recent independent evaluations of social pedagogy pilots and demonstration projects in British agencies providing for looked after children. For the most part these projects were based on learning opportunities for staff, often in professionally mixed groups; in some additional staff support was provided, and in some qualified social pedagogues were employed. Cameron (2016) overviewed ten such evaluations and found that the following positive outcomes were reported by staff and others concerned, all in line both with the account of social pedagogy provided above and with wellbeing policy statements:

- With children in care, there was less conflict in everyday life, less running away, more engagement in school, more fun and more natural, spontaneous, expression of emotional warmth – perhaps this could be expressed, briefly, as greater wellbeing.
- The people who worked with them began to refer to theory more and to use a theoretical language held in common with other staff. Perhaps not surprisingly, there was improvement in organisational dynamics and teamwork; participants were learning to reflect critically together. This was accompanied by greater thoughtfulness in their practice.
- Staff introduced more practical and creative activities into children's everyday lives; they developed new ways of managing risk, turning away from sometimes stifling risk-averse practice – all in line with supporting children's informal and non-formal learning, a central precept in social pedagogy.
- They became more confident about how to engage with, and be more authentic in, interactions with the young people, and were able to talk more openly with their colleagues – signs of a purposeful move towards positive relationships.
- Care staff mentioned their own growing confidence, especially communicating with staff in other agencies or senior colleagues – a basis for improved professional relationships and greater openings for collaboration.

Nevertheless, [Cameron \(2016\)](#) suggested that local work cultures may be less open to accepting social pedagogy practices in the first instance:

The evaluation of social pedagogic input across one local authority led to the ‘unanimous agreement that introducing social pedagogy would have a positive impact on organisational culture . . . it would produce better results, value for money, less stress, more proactive and useful partnership work . . . with other agencies’ ([Moore, Jakara, Bowie and Marriott, 2013](#), p. 11). But practitioners in this study considered that embedding cultural change in the organisation would require a ‘fundamental change to actual practice’. (p. 217)

For these practitioners, social pedagogy appears to be a positive way to improve services and hence produce ‘better results’. These would presumably include the wellbeing of the people the services worked with. There is, however, a circularity in their conclusion: bringing about a change in existing culture, and hence practice, seems itself to require a ‘fundamental change to actual practice’. The underlying assumption seems to be that social pedagogy could supply this – but how could its introduction be achieved?

While social pedagogy has a long history in continental Europe, in the UK it is growing and has the potential to grow much further. One means of achieving an increasing awareness and practice of social pedagogy would be to involve employers in supporting social pedagogy learning opportunities, including professional development. Bachelor’s degrees, master’s and vocational qualifications are all now available for practitioners. There are also those in other professions, such as social work, education and community arts, who would wish to retain their own professional identity while benefiting from the insights and practices of social pedagogy. Evaluations so far undertaken suggest that such learning may be most effective in appropriately mixed occupational/professional groups, for example where social workers participate alongside foster carers ([McDermid et al., 2016](#)).

Building on the congruence between social pedagogy and selected government statements

To date, the emergence of social pedagogy in England and elsewhere in the UK owes much to single organisations – certain local authorities, universities, training agencies, voluntary sector and non-profit private services, not to mention the work of the Social Pedagogy Development Network and SPPA, its professional association. The examples brought together above may be sufficient evidence that social pedagogy is less alien to British thought than its ‘unfamiliar’ name might suggest. It would not threaten professions such as teaching and social work but provide further ways to promote wellbeing. For social care, which has recently been acknowledged as at crisis point (see for example [Kings Fund, 2019](#)), its introduction could be a fruitful way forward.

The influence of government in British social pedagogy’s early emergence is undeniable (see the section ‘The ongoing emergence of social pedagogy in the UK’ above); resuming an explicit endorsement for social pedagogy, its practice and qualifications, would be a further step in its development in England. As we have seen, there is congruence between social pedagogy and the policy statements selected. Both recognise the value of learning for people of whatever age; both are concerned with individuals and groups; they are aware of the significance of associative life and community; both value practice centred on the whole person, setting out to see strengths rather than weaknesses and the necessity of recognising the other’s point of view; both are positive about collaboration with colleagues in their own and other agencies, *and* with members of the wider community; both highlight the benefit of the co-production of services. The quotations provided suggest, at least, that social pedagogy’s main principles are not alien to thinking in the Department of Health and Social Care, and in Public Health England. The statements are tokens of compatibility between social pedagogy and the thinking of the officials who drafted the documents cited. Nevertheless, the documents quoted do not mention – still less endorse – social pedagogy. They are in keeping with the cautious recommendations that appeared under the Labour governments of 1997 to 2010, for an approach rather than a profession. The government departments cited know what they would like local authorities and other agencies to achieve: the wellbeing of the population through holistic, strength-based, relational and collaborative practice and learning opportunities. Supporting social

pedagogy as an appropriate profession – rather than an ‘approach’ for care and community work – would be an important way to progress these ambitions.

Author biography

Pat Petrie is Emeritus Professor at the UCL Institute of Education, in the Centre for Understanding Social Pedagogy (CUSP). Her early professional experience, before she turned to research, was as a teacher. Her experience included work in residential settings with young offenders and children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. She has researched social pedagogy in continental Europe and supported its development in the UK. Her studies include policy and practice regarding looked-after children, family support, the extended school, day nurseries, childminders, play and school-age childcare.

Declarations and conflict of interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work.

References

- Cameron, C. (2016). Social pedagogy in the UK today: Findings from evaluations of training and development initiatives. *Pedagogía Social: Revista Interuniversitaria*, 27, 199–223.
- Cameron, C., & Moss, P. (Eds.) (2011). *Social pedagogy and working with children and young people: Where care and education meet*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Cameron, C., & Petrie, P. (2009). Social pedagogy and its prospects in England’s children’s services. *European Journal of Social Education*, 16/17, 49–61.
- Coussée, F., Bradt, L., Roose, R., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2010). The emerging social pedagogical paradigm in UK child and youth care: Deus ex machina or walking the beaten path? *The British Journal of Social Work*, 40(3), 789–809.
- DHSC (Department of Health, Social Care). (2014). Care and support statutory guidance (updated 2020). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-act-statutory-guidance/care-and-support-statutory-guidance#general-responsibilities-and-universal-services>.
- Eichsteller, G., & Holthoff, S. (2012). The art of being a social pedagogue: Developing cultural change in children’s homes in Essex. *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, 1, 30–45. [CrossRef]
- Fielding, M. (2007). On the necessity of radical state education: Democracy and the common school. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 41(4), 539–57. [CrossRef]
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Hadi, J. (2018). Dreaming of new horizons: Unaccompanied children and the common third. <https://sppa-uk.org/news/dreaming-of-new-horizons-unaccompanied-children-and-the-common-third/>.
- Hämäläinen, J. (2003). The concept of social pedagogy in the field of social work. *Journal of Social Work*, 3(1), 69–80.
- Hämäläinen, J. (2012). Social pedagogical eyes in the midst of diverse understandings, conceptualisations and activities. *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, 1(1), 3–16.
- Horton, M., & Freire, P. (1990). *We make the road by walking together*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Kern, D. (2012). Social pedagogy and older people in France: Towards a social geragogy? In J. Kornbeck & N. Rosendal Jensen (Eds.), *Diversity of social pedagogy in Europe*. Bremen, Germany: Europäischer Hochschulverlag.
- Kings Fund. (2019). *More people asking for social care support but fewer getting it as demand leaves social care system at crisis point*, 26 April. www.kingsfund.org.uk/press/press-releases/social-care-system-crisis-point.
- Kornbeck, J., & Rosendal Jensen, N. (Eds.). (2009). *Diversity of social pedagogy in Europe*. Bremen, Germany: Europäischer Hochschulverlag.
- Kornbeck, J., & Rosendal Jensen, N. (2011). *Social pedagogy for the entire lifespan* (Volume 1). Bremen, Germany: Europäischer Hochschulverlag.

- Kornbeck, J., & Rosendal Jensen, N. (2012). *Social pedagogy for the entire lifespan* (Volume 2). Bremen, Germany: Europäischer Hochschulverlag.
- McDermid, S., Holmes, L., Ghate, D., Trivedi, H., Blackmore, J., & Baker, C. (2016). *Evaluation of head, heart, hands: Introducing social pedagogy into UK foster care. Final report*. Loughborough: Centre for Child and Family Research.
- MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government). (2014). *Guidance: Health and wellbeing*. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/health-and-wellbeing>.
- Moore, N., Jakara, M., Bowie, J., & Marriott, J. (2013). *Social pedagogy: A scoping project for Derbyshire County Council, summary report*. Derby: International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS), University of Derby. <https://derby.openrepository.com/handle/10545/294879>.
- Morrow, V., & Mayall, B. (2009). What is wrong with children's well-being in the UK? Questions of meaning and measurement. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 31(3), 217. [CrossRef]
- Moss, P., & Petrie, P. (2002). *From children's services to children's spaces*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Natorp, P. (1899). *Sozialpädagogik, theorie der willenbildung auf der grundlage der gemeinschaft*. Stuttgart, Germany: Frommanns.
- Payne, M. (2005). *Theories of social work*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Petrie, P. (2002). Social pedagogy: An historical account of care and education as social control. In J. Brannen & P. Moss (Eds.), *Rethinking children's care*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Petrie, P. (2007). Foster care: A role for social pedagogy? *Adoption and Fostering*, 31(1), 73–80. [CrossRef]
- Petrie, P. (2013). Pedagogy in the UK: Gaining a firm foothold? *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 21, 37. [CrossRef]
- Petrie, P., Boddy, J., Cameron, C., Simon, A., & Wigfall, V. (2006). *Working with children in care: European perspectives*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Petrie, P., & Cameron, C. (2009). Importing social pedagogy? In J. Kornbeck & N. Rosendal Jensen (Eds.), *Social pedagogy for the entire lifespan* (Volume 1). Bremen, Germany: Europäischer Hochschulverlag, Volume 1.
- Petrie, P., & Chambers, H. (2010). *Richer lives: Creative activities in the education and practice of Danish pedagogues, report to Arts Council England*. www.sppa-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/social-pedagogy-and-the-arts-v3.pdf.
- PHE (Public Health England). (2014). *The link between pupil wellbeing and attainment: A briefing for headteachers, governors and staff in education settings*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-link-between-pupil-health-and-wellbeing-and-attainment>.
- PHE (Public Health England). (2015). *Promoting children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414908/Final_EHWP_draft_20_03_15.pdf.
- PHE (Public Health England). (2018). *The wellbeing of women in prison*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/women-in-prison-standards-to-improve-health-and-wellbeing>.
- Rothuizen, J. (2008). Work practice: Qualification of knowledge in action. Conference paper presented at 'Towards professional wisdom – Practical deliberation in the "people professions"', Edinburgh, UK, 26–29 March.
- Smith, M., & Monteux, S. (2019). Social pedagogy and its relevance for Scottish social welfare. *Insights: A Series of Evidence Summaries* 49. Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services. <https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/insights/social-pedagogy-and-its-relevance-scottish-social-welfare>.
- Statham, J., & Chase, E. (2010). *Childhood wellbeing: A brief overview*. London: Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre.
- ThemPra. (2018). *The professional, personal, and private self of the social pedagogue*. <http://www.thempra.org.uk/social-pedagogy/key-concepts-in-social-pedagogy/the-3-ps/>.
- Úcar, X. (2012). Social pedagogy in Latin America and Europe: looking for new answers to old questions. In J. Kornbeck & N. Rosendal Jensen (Eds.), *Social pedagogy for the entire lifespan* (Volume 1). Bremen, Germany: Europäischer Hochschulverlag.

- Werquin, P. (2010). *Recognising informal and non-formal learning: Outcomes policies and practice*. OECD iLibrary. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264063853-en>.
- WHO (World Health Organization). (1978). *Declaration of Alma-Ata*. International Conference on Primary Health Care, Alma-Ata, USSR, 6–12 September. http://www.who.int/publications/almaata_declaration_en.pdf.
- Winkler, M. (1988). *Eine theorie de sozialpädagogik*. Stuttgart, Germany: Klett-Cotta.