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Social Pedagogy within Key Worker Practice: Community Situated Support for Marginalised Youth

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This article explores social pedagogic practices that are embedded, but arguably unrecognised, within a variety of support worker roles. I will argue that the work done within intersubjective relationships formed with marginalised youth is best understood as social pedagogy and not, as support workers themselves typically insist, youth mentoring. Through the exploration of this relationship dynamic it becomes possible to 'open-up' objectivist professional roles to 'make room' for a mode of engagement that connects with marginalised youth at an intersubjective level. Support workers often establish this dialectical mode of engagement anyway, but lacking a structured discourse with which to articulate their pedagogic strategies, they fall back on the concept of mentoring as a best fit model. If this thesis is accepted, there are two significant implications. Firstly, an integration of social pedagogic concepts within this new practice space has the potential to improve outcomes for marginalised youth and, secondly, an exploration of the work done within similar relationship dynamics could potentially answer the question 'what is social pedagogy?'. Beyond this, there is value in exploring the apparent nexus that exists between the fields of youth mentoring and social pedagogy, as much could be gained by elucidating their shared conceptual links.

Key words: *social pedagogy; leaving care support; youth mentoring; professionalisation; social inclusion*

Introduction

This article explores various aspects of the interpersonal relationships formed between marginalised youth aged 16-24 and a range of community situated support workers aiming to promote the transition towards independent living. The article draws upon a piece of small-scale multi-method research completed in October 2012 (cf. Morgan, 2012). Research participants (n = 15) consisted of a range of support workers and marginalised young people, typically defined as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) in the UK.

At this time of the fieldwork I worked for a local charity delivering a bespoke life-skills education programme. The programme participants were young people who had been referred by various agency key workers, with a view to promoting independent living and engagement with employment or training, as part of a broader package of support. The particular circumstances surrounding each young person were very diverse but tended to involve issues such as

homelessness, psychological disorders, drug and alcohol misuse, breakdown of parental relationships, offending, long-term unemployment – and combinations thereof.

Data was gathered though semi-structured interviews with purposively sampled participants accessing the charity's services – including those enrolled in the life-skills programme – and an online survey questionnaire completed by a wider range of professionals. The fieldwork was conducted in a rural community setting largely isolated from the main UK conurbations.

A key theme emerging from the study is that support workers misrecognise social pedagogic practices, undertaken informally within the context of their primary key worker role, as youth mentoring. Furthermore, when the informal aspect of these support worker roles is understood as social pedagogy, a new dimension of practice opens for exploration. This new dimension gives form to the concept of social pedagogy and, moreover, offers a mode of engagement for marginalised youth that could have important implications for wellbeing and improving the material conditions of daily life.

As such, I will tentatively explore the conceptual roots existing between social pedagogy and youth mentoring, and make the case for a pedagogic mode of engagement with marginalised youth. Following this, I will attempt to differentiate professional practices and procedures from social pedagogic relationships through a discussion of the pedagogic practice space. This, in turn, leads to a discussion about the definition of social pedagogy in relation to work with socially excluded youth.

When is mentoring not mentoring? When it's social pedagogy

When discussing with support workers the range of strategies they typically deployed to undertake their role, all were predicated upon establishing a strong relationship with the young person as a pre-cursor to facilitating change. The process of establishing this relationship and, moreover, using it as a vehicle to get work done, was invariably described as mentoring:

> *Mentoring ... as a secondary activity ... I'd absolutely go along with that. (Key worker)*

> *It's enmeshed, totally enmeshed. You can't go through a conversation, if you're doing this work right, without doing mentoring. (Key worker)*

> *Very much so and I'd say it follows two patterns. One is pro-social modelling ... the other is more direct intervention mentoring. (Key worker)*

Although these support workers are emphatic in their assertion that they are mentoring young people, the term mentoring is arguably insufficient to describe their informal interaction with young people. The supposed deficiency arises because, firstly, mentoring is an activity typically associated with volunteer adults drawn from the community (cf. Rogers & Taylor, 1997; Colley, 2003; Philip & Spratt, 2007) and not a role undertaken by professional support workers, although there are numerous examples to the contrary (cf. Leader, 2000; Rose & Jones, 2007; Angelides et al., 2009). Secondly, these support workers felt it necessary to 'set aside' their service delivery objectives in order to establish meaningful communication with young people at an intersubjective level. The apparent tension existing between professional and personal identities, when working with marginalised youth, is not readily explained within the context of youth mentoring.

However, when the key workers' alternative mode of engagement is framed in terms of social pedagogy, a new space for humanistic interaction is revealed. In other words, the support workers interviewed were effectively acting as social pedagogues, but lacked a structured discourse with which to articulate their pedagogic practices, and so fall back on the concept of mentoring as a best fit model. That said, I acknowledge the point that social pedagogy is a way of thinking as much as an expression of practice (Hämäläinen, 2012; Smith, 2012). It could be useful therefore to view these

key support workers as proto-pedagogues; skilled support workers applying a range of ad-hoc psycho-social concepts in order to make sense of the social dynamics observed when working with marginalised youth. As such, I tend to envisage social pedagogy as a dimension of professional practice, rather than the standalone Personal Adviser role identified by Higham (2001).

Before continuing, it is useful to note that within the context of this article, intersubjectivity refers to the 'manner in which self's experience is to a significant degree determined by the people with whom self is in relation' (Thompson, 2005, p. 36). Furthermore, intersubjectivity is presumed to precipitate mutual recognition, which not only requires one person to recognise another, but that the 'person being recognised judges that the recogniser is capable of conferring recognition' (McQueen, 2011; no page nos.). It is arguably a foundational condition for humanistic relationships as each acknowledges the other as an autonomous and rational being capable of self-determination (ibid.). Recognition is, moreover, critically important for maintaining our sense of wellbeing since 'feelings of self-worth, self-respect and self-esteem are possible only if we are positively recognised for who we are' (ibid.).

As such, the scene is metaphorically set to develop a 'pedagogic perspective' (Paget et al., 2007, p. 20) to a range of professional and paraprofessional support worker roles. And since McGowan, Saintas & Gill (2009) argue that mentoring and social pedagogy are close areas of practice, fundamentally linked through the common interest in empowering young people to take action and stimulate change, I propose to intentionally conflate the terms throughout this article. I am therefore establishing something akin to a semantic field; analysing the appearance of one concept – social pedagogy – in relation to other concepts, notably youth mentoring and social exclusion (cf. Andersen, 2003). This analytic approach serves to examine the socio-historical roots of a concept and, moreover, projects the meaning of the concept forward into the future (ibid.).

Why social pedagogy for marginalised youth?

Transitions to adulthood appear to becoming ever more complex and hazardous (Rogers & Taylor, 1997; Levitas et al., 2007; Philip & Spratt, 2007; Kay & Hinds, 2009; Munson & McMillen, 2009), and within the context of youth mentoring, there has been a surge in the prevalence of schemes for young people deemed to be at risk of social exclusion (Rose & Jones, 2007; McGowan et al., 2009; Milburn, 2009). Such mentoring interventions are considered to be a self-evident good as they promote personal development and constitute some of the most significant relationships between youngsters and non-parental adults (Goldner & Mayseless, 2008). Mentoring typically serves to raise youngsters' aspirations and therefore has a role to play in reversing the significant decline in social mobility witnessed in modern day Britain (Milburn, 2009), and apparently in the US (AACC, 2012). Mentoring, as with social pedagogy, therefore seeks to address problematic social issues associated with modernity:

> As a result of the urbanisation, industrialisation and modernisation of lifestyles, traditional social structures have been destroyed, and the educating potential of families (homes) has weakened, thus the rise of social immaturity and disassociation and non-integration are global problems (Kraav, 2003, p. 122)

The scale of the issues associated with modern life in developed countries should not be underestimated since, according to Borovoy (2008), one million young people have effectively gone into hiding in Japan, having withdrawn from society. While in the UK:

> There is an ambition crisis among our poorest young people, causing thousands to lose faith in their own abilities and aspirations. These feelings of hopelessness are often passed down from generation to generation and can spread throughout our most deprived communities (Prince's Trust, 2011, p. 2)

While psychology, under the cloak of medical science, has stepped in to manage various individual and social dilemmas (Borovoy, 2008), there is patently an issue with the trend towards social and cultural iatrogenesis – the process of incapacitating an individual by medicalising their level of social functionality (Scott & Marshall, 2009, p. 329) – since the practice can arguably trap people 'inside personalities and identities that are limiting for them' (Burr, 2003, p. 6), as the following from young people involved in the research suggests:

> *This fella assessed me, and back then I was taking medication, but when you get told it you believe it don't yer ... so now I tell myself I've got it [ADHD] but on other days I think maybe I'm just believing in a label (Young person)*

> *I've got autism, I've got special needs and learning difficulties ... I've got anxiety as well, and used to be diagnosed with ADHD, but I don't have it any more ... I've been diagnosed with stuff ... and that's just the way I am. I'll probably be like that for the rest of my life, and I will be a vulnerable adult for the rest of my life (Young person)*

Such diagnostic practices therefore have the potential to 'suppress difference' and 'pathologise and wrongly idealise people' (Sayer, 1997, p. 454). Beyond this, we also need to consider the ethical issues surrounding treatments that address the psychological impact of poverty but do nothing to improve the material conditions of life (cf. Turner & Lehning, 2007). We have to therefore remember that 'human qualities, needs and motives are in large part the product of social development' (Giddens, 1971, p. 226). It is perhaps for this reason that the 'role of psychology [was] reduced to half' in Danish models of social pedagogy (Hegstrup, 2003, p. 77).

And while mentoring relationships are no panacea to society's problems (Pawson et al., 2004), they can reconnect marginalised youth to their families (ibid, p. 34), peer network (Philip & Spratt, 2007) and the wider community. Mentoring thus acts as an antidote to the 'rampant individualism' (Bell, 1976, p. 16) and narcissism which has accompanied the collapse of moral authority in modern day life (Benjamin, 1990). It also enriches the social fabric by connecting marginalised youth to reliable and responsive people (Philip & Spratt, 2007; Daly & Silver, 2008) from across status groups (Pawson et al., 2004), so they develop mutual understanding through discourse (Morris, 2009). These reliable and caring individuals offer young people 'support, counsel, friendship, reinforcement and a constructive example' (MENTOR, 2005, p. 11) to help with issues arising from day-to-day living (Rose & Doveston, 2008). Mentoring therefore builds social capital by promoting civic engagement in a pluralistic society (Daly & Silver, 2008).

It is also important to recognise that despite the struggle for autonomy and recognition, most young people desire close family support (Morrow, 2001; Cook et al., 2009) and expressions of approval from parents and other significant adults (Liang et al., 2008; Renton, 2009), as the following comments suggest:

> *She [key worker] listened to what I had to say and spent time with me. But she understood because...her mum was like my mum, had bipolar, so she understood a bit, and she spoke to me. (Young person)*

> *I want someone who is going to be there every day. I know you can't ask for that ... I just want my mum. Well, not my mum, but a mum. I want someone who's there, just to ring up, when I'm having trouble with my little boy. Who do I ask? (Young person)*

> *He's a good laugh and a great key worker, he's a sound lad...he makes sure I have a great time, that I'm safe and sound and he'll be there until I get back to [supported accommodation]. (Young person)*

These examples demonstrate that mentoring, and by extension, social pedagogic relationships, have the potential to be 'complementary to or compensatory for existing family ... relationships' (Philip & Spratt, 2007, p. 14). Indeed, what is missing for the young mother cited above is the guidance of an older matriarchal figure who 'could serve as a replacement for that which the

adolescent does not receive from her mother or existing social network' (Bogat et al., 2008, p. 327). Developing such relationships is perhaps very significant for young people in care who typically experience accelerated transitions into adulthood and independent living (Munson & McMillen, 2009). It should be noted, therefore, that mentoring relationships do not occur in isolation (McGowan et al., 2009) and should be viewed as part of a broad social integration strategy (Rogers & Taylor, 1997) involving parents/carers and, where relevant, caseworkers (Keller, 2005; Broadbent & Papadopoulos, 2009).

The social pedagogic dimensions of practice

If social pedagogy is an embedded parallel practice, albeit one misrecognised as mentoring, it is necessary to understand the humanistic principles underpinning social pedagogy and acknowledge the tension arising between these principles and those encoded within the discourses associated with professional duties. In order to gain an insight into this issue, Boddy & Stratham (2009) broadly differentiate the role of the social worker role from that of a European-style social pedagogue: the social worker is concerned with assessment, care planning, co-ordinating and sustaining statutory responsibilities, whereas the pedagogue is 'likely to be engaged in direct day-to-day work with children and families. They provided intervention and support that focused on working with relationships and the everyday worlds of the clients' (p. 7). The key workers interviewed are typically providing just such support:

> We don't hold back on the distinction between our time and their time. They have our numbers, they can ring us in the evening. I'll be out with them on a Sunday ... I'm out anyway [to an event], and I like being with them, it's not work, so they might as well come along. And they tell you stuff when you're not working, and they don't know whether I'm working, or not, it's all the same. (Key worker)

> So the girl was effectively homeless at 17 ... Myself and two ladies who knew this young lady worked with her to get her into good accommodation where we actually went in with her and talked to the landlord and made sure she was safe. We worked with her on things like budgets, food, cooking, hygiene. (Key worker)

> With [young person] I was phoned up at 11 at night and I went running down to [supported accommodation] because I thought she'd self-harmed ... .If I hadn't have reacted, I think she would have self-harmed ... and all that work we'd done together would have been for nothing. (Key worker)

The intersubjective dimension to these relationships is important because, according to Thake (2009), welfare services have 'corporatised and distanced themselves from the communities they serve' (p. 172). Furthermore, counselling, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, and even social work itself, have all undergone a process of professionalisation in recent years (Goldstein, 2007; Rizq, 2008), leading to positivistic and 'narrow notions of evidence-based practice' (Loewenthal, 2005, p. 121) and uniformity of approach for clients (Ramey & Grubb, 2009). If this is indeed so, social pedagogic relationships within the context of professional practice arguably restore a humanist dimension to professional roles; a dimension which 'emphasises the importance of practical help and of 'being with' clients as they live their lives, rather than the application of quasi-legal, procedural, casework (Higham, 2001; Smith & Whyte, 2008). This dimension is therefore concerned with establishing mutual recognition by transcending the untenable objectification of the other (cf. McQueen, 2011), and thereby enabling the discovery of the real self (Rowan, 2006) through a process of self-actualisation (cf. Maslow, 1943), or co-actualisation (Motschnig-Pitrik & Barrett-Lennard, 2010), to produce a fully autonomous and balanced individual who can take responsibility for their being in the world (Rowan, 2006).

The support workers interviewed would undoubtedly recognise aspects of their work with marginalised youth in the above narrative. However, it is not clear where the boundary lies between discharging their procedural duties and undertaking their informal pedagogic interactions. Within the literature, Leader (2000) ruminates upon a similar point: 'How do the roles of mentor and "therapist/role model" overlap, coincide or co-exist?' (p. 120). In an attempt to bring some clarity to this issue I have formulated, as an analytic product of my study, the following table to differentiate between these disparate aspects of the support worker role.

Before presenting this table, however, I should point out that conceiving vast swathes of professional practice in terms of the loose dichotomies given, subject to contestation and revision as they undoubtedly are, is highly problematic and will invariably attract criticism.

Table 1: Differentiating procedural from social pedagogic dimensions of professional practice

Procedural dimensions of practice	Social pedagogic dimensions of practice
Objective 'facts'	Intersubjective meaning
Reactive (referral, casework, compulsion)	Interactive (lifespace, being, experience)
Production / process / efficiency	Social / understanding / relationships
Rational-technical (competence)	Emotional (caring, spiritual, connectedness)
Deterministic / procedural / repeatable	Creative / risky / spontaneous
Quantitative (measured outcome)	Qualitative (intrinsic value)
Strategic / assessed / planned	Emergent / responsive
Behaviourist / realist / reductionist	Humanist / constructivist / holistic

I indeed recognise that the desire to be technically competent, say, does not necessarily preclude the possibility of caring, since caring could be a personal driver towards becoming highly competent. These dimensions of practice are therefore complementary to each other, with the various elements expressed along a continuum within a given role. And despite the potential for accusations of essentialism – a belief that social pedagogy exists as an essential kernel of professional practice awaiting recognition – this table is presented as a simple heuristic for practitioners to consider the extent to which their role expresses a social pedagogic dimension of practice.

Identifying the practice space

Habermas' (1987) account of modernity maintains that instrumental and rational systems – notably economic and state systems – have been separated out from the socio-cultural lifeworld; 'areas of everyday life in which actions must be carried out communicatively' (Edwards, 2008, p. 302). And while this is not in itself problematic, there is a danger of 'over-extension of strategic action as part of the "colonization" of the lifeworld by systems' (Fairclough, 2003, p. 110), as exemplified by the UK coalition government's Mindspace approach to 'nudging' people towards more desirable behaviour (cf. Dolan et al., 2010). Such over-extension of systems into the lifeworld is problematic since:

Colonization erodes communicative forms of interaction by replacing them with actions mediated by money and power. These actions are not coordinated through consensus, but through a functional interlocking of system 'inputs' and 'outputs'. (Edwards, 2008, p. 304)

Within the field of youth mentoring activities can become 'subservient to and displaced by organisationally driven bureacratic [sic] processes and agendas' (McGowan et al., 2009, p. 628), thereby limiting the extent of the communication between participants (cf. Ritzer, 2003). The strategic aims of the sponsor organisation therefore takes precedence over subjective goals negotiated between participants (Clayden & Stein, 2005). Unsurprisingly, tensions invariably arise between service-led and participant-led programme aims (ibid.). This can be problematic if a young person resists the pursuit of a programme's specified outcomes and interactions become formulaic and standardised so they no longer flex to meet the needs of individuals (Newburn & Shiner, 2006). It is a concern raised by key workers when asked about the risk of formalising their otherwise informal relationships with young people:

I do have problems with defining it, putting a structure on it and putting outcomes on it because I think that then detracts from the real benefits of mentoring. We don't sit down and plan a life, a journey for our kids with identified outcomes ... to make it too prescriptive, and that would be my fear ... and the outcome they want are their outcomes [public services], rather than what the mentee wants. Sometimes they coincide, but it can become something that's inflicted on someone. (Key worker)

My fear would be that mentoring becomes a tick box process ... that you make it so formulaic that you're looking for a results, a pre-determined result, it would be a great shame, because often the results aren't the ones you expected. And you may not know what those results are for a long, long time. (Key worker)

There's a lack of obvious structure with our work. It's very much on an understanding between the two of us and other workers. Whilst we obviously have structured policies, risk assessments etc., there's a lot of flexibility built into those policies to allow us to adapt to the individual. I feel that the more corporate structures don't deal with the individual to the same extent. (Key worker)

Putting a label on it, putting training around it, putting an actual plan around it. All the stuff that I don't necessarily [agree with] ... why take away the magic by calling it something? (Key worker)

These concerns arguably reflect a sensitivity to the potential extension of strategic action into the lifeworld sanctuary where their informal interactions with young people occur; a disenchantment, to use Weber's term, of an otherwise special relationship. As such, any development of a social pedagogic perspective to support worker roles needs to be sensitive to these real and valid concerns. That said, the development of social pedagogy should not be impeded by these issues, not least because they also tell us something about how social pedagogy both should, and should not, look in practice. Furthermore, sensitivity to these concerns helps to better define the concept which, in turn, strengthens the arguments for protecting and enhancing its special attributes.

Within the context of working with marginalised youth, the fundamental concern is that large numbers of young people are struggling to establish themselves in an increasing technical-rational social world where mutuality, as an important aspect of self-development and autonomy, is largely overlooked (Benjamin, 1990). Nevertheless, 'we achieve self-understanding only when we place ourselves in relation to others' (Eriksson & Markström, 2003, p. 12) and the thing that really makes the difference, as Pirrie et al. (2011) conclude when evaluating provision for the some of the most troubled pupils in the English education system, is 'the quality of personal relationships' (p. 536). Social pedagogy to support marginalised youth should, therefore, be primarily located within this space: the personal, intersubjective relationship, as the following key worker suggests:

> *In their eyes you're not a professional, and that's where the mentoring comes in. You're not seen as a professional, you're seen as somebody who has something to offer in a social way. (Key Worker)*

What perhaps makes this pedagogic practice space so appealing is that young people do not perceive the interaction to be a disciplinary and supervisory mechanism of political power designed to ensure that problematised individuals conform to rational and moral norms (Marston, 2008; Morris, 2009). Indeed, young people often value the informality of the relationships established with mentors who have no access to official files and no statutory responsibilities (Clayden & Stein, 2005). Perhaps young people sometimes resist the rationalising authority of professionals simply because their practices represent an instrument and vector of power, a 'technology of power over the body' (Foucault, 1979, p. 30) and possibly the soul, as the following key worker recognises:

> *For me, it's the most important element ... not [having] control. I don't have control over them – and it's a significant part of why they don't run. Why say you want to participate in something and then run away? (Key worker)*

As such, the social pedagogue recognises that 'people are more likely to grow and change in a positive direction on their own than if they get caught up in a battle of wills' (Wormer, 2007), and are then better placed to act as 'guide not master' (Rose & Doveston, 2008, p. 145). However, this does depend upon whether the support worker has the discretion, as per the example above, to set aside, and be seen to set aside, their professional obligations in order to establish a humanistic relationship with the young person.

What is social pedagogy?

Having briefly explored why there is a need to develop a social pedagogic approach to working with marginalised young people, and discussed the dimension of practice and the practice space, it is now possible to offer a tentative response to the question 'what is social pedagogy?'.

Although social pedagogy is difficult to define (Paget et al., 2007; Storø, 2012), it is fundamentally concerned with 'social action' (McGowan et al., 2009, p. 625) which promotes the 'personal development, social education and general well-being of the child alongside or in place of parents in a range of educational and social care settings' (Kyriacou et al., 2009, p. 75). According to Paget et al. (2007), such settings can include 'childcare, youth work, community development, family support, youth justice services, secure units, residential care and play work, with adults as well as children, and in universalist as well as specialist services' (p. 8).

As such, social pedagogy is 'either pedagogy that is social in some way, or social work with an element of education' (Eriksson & Markström, 2003, p. 9), and the focus of social pedagogical praxis is 'on the social and emotional side of raising and guiding a child into the socio-political and sociocultural frame of a society' (Fog, 2003, p. 29) where the young person 'is seen as a social being, connected to others and with their own distinctive experiences and knowledge' (Boddy & Statham, 2009, p. 6). However, where marginalised youth are specifically concerned, social pedagogy in its idealised form relates to *the work done communicatively to promote social inclusion through an intersubjective relationship conducted within, and co-constructing of, a young person's lifeworld*.

The lifeworld concept is clearly similar to the idea of lifespace (cf. Smith, 2005; Smith, 2012), but these two concepts are not to be conflated. Within this article, lifeworld specifically refers to Habermas' (1987) construct, developed within the context of his theory of communicative action. Within Habermas' theoretical framework, the lifeworld is elucidated as a symbolic space composed of culture, society and person, where social integration occurs through the process of establishing

mutual understanding as a basis for rational action. So while lifeworld and lifespace concepts share various features, notably an attempt to grasp the essence of social situations, the lifeworld concept has neither the therapeutic, nor indeed, pedagogic, intent associated with the lifespace idea.

It would appear that the notion of lifespace, invoked where children and young people experience residential care, overlaps with the concept of the lifeworld. But where post-16 marginalised youth are concerned, the lifeworld extends fully into civic society, as opposed to existing as a miniaturised facsimile of social relations enacted within the residential setting. No criticism is intended of the lifespace concept, but the legal and moral framework for mutual recognition and action is clearly very different for autonomous youth transitioning to independent living and work. That said, I would suggest that a harmonisation of lifeworld with lifespace – that is, an integration of therapeutic/pedagogic intent through the medium of communicative action – has the potential to become a foundational theoretical concept for social pedagogy.

Such an approach potentially offers, without wishing to overindulge in Durkheimian style analogies, an antidote to the anomie, alienation, ambivalence, and other such variant social pathologies, brought about by the disempowering over-extension of strategic action intruding into the lifeworld. As such, engaging a young person on an intersubjective basis to develop social skills/knowledge, strengthen social solidarity and agree a plan of rational action, arguably raises their critical consciousness by restoring meaning to their actions:

> I never realise how bad a situation is until [key worker] says it to me. She makes me analyse everything, she makes me realise why I've done things. (Young person)

However, operating as a facilitator orientated towards the needs of a beneficiary (McGowan et al., 2009) is, by the very nature of social exclusion, 'inefficient'. This is because the social development of marginalised youth cannot be hurried as a managed and controlled process, due to the limited impact of universal services and the diminished educating potential of home environment (Kraav, 2003), as the following suggests:

> I've been here for 10 years so I've been able to see children from the ages of say 7 and now they're 17, and I've been able to talk to them as an adult, outside the family situation, and influence them over a long period of time. (Key worker)

> It's a slow process. I would say that anything less than 18 months you won't see a change. There will just be hints that things are going the right way. It can though take a long, long time. We have some older people in their mid-twenties and they say to us about things we've helped them with, but maybe we weren't even aware that we were helping them at that time, in that particular topic or subject, so we do get that in the long run … .and we've known them for over 10 years and there's normally been a gap of two or three years where their attendance [fluctuates], or they even disappear for a year or so, and they come back as young adults and explain what role we had. So it is a very, very slow process. (Key worker)

This makes measuring outcomes emerging from such relationships problematic, especially where baseline conditions cannot be easily established:

> How do you show what you've prevented happening? How do you show that that young person hasn't gone to prison because of something you did? We look for clear indications, like have they got a job, have they re-engaged in education, have they got qualifications, have they got somewhere to live. We can look at those, and they are good clear signs, but they're the structure upon which everything else will hang, and it's the everything else that's the difficult bit to measure. (Key worker)

> There's no way you could measure your influence on a young person. You can sense it … but if I were to describe to somebody who didn't know … that this person has achieved by not actually doing something, you can't measure it. Their progress is that they actually haven't gone out and shoplifted. This week they haven't gone out and got so drunk that they had to be taken to

hospital. They actually haven't done anything, which is progress. But measuring nothing is very difficult. (Key worker)

Given the time taken to influence behaviour through the transmission and absorption of secularised value norms – as per the 'you shall not steal' example cited above – and the difficulty with measuring outcomes, there could be 'real limitations to what can be accomplished with short-term interventions aimed at children and families, even when we engage them on their own terms and in their own milieus' (Littell, 2006, p. 470). It would therefore appear that the 'dominant mode of thought' is beginning to recognise the limitations of its own orthodoxy (Giddens, 1971, p. 43) rooted as it is within a pervasive framework of patriarchal capitalism. Perhaps we will eventually abandon a belief in social algorithms that produce exact outcomes (Diefenbach, 2009) and instead accept that within the social realm 'there exists translations between mediators that may generate traceable associations' (Latour, 2005, p. 108. Original in italics).

This challenges both policy makers and practitioners to agree an accountability framework which recognises the difficulty of achieving prescribed outcomes, but nevertheless provides assurances that the relationships formed represent a worthwhile undertaking, and possibly good value for money. However, other significant barriers remain to integrating social pedagogy into social welfare practices, including general unfamiliarity with the term and its underpinning philosophy and traditions (Hegstrup, 2003; Boddy & Statham, 2009), the cost and scale of training and the limited body of academic literature on the topic (Paget et al., 2007).

What has not been expounded, largely because it is beyond the scope of this article, is how the social pedagogue is expected to facilitate inclusion through the establishment of the intersubjective relationships with marginalised youth, nor indeed what factors can impede the process. This is an important issue because 'getting beyond befriending … is the bane of youth mentoring' (Pawson et al., 2004, p. 36) and there are, presumably, similar issues with social pedagogy where working with marginalised youth is concerned. Interviews with support workers have typically highlighted shared activities, analogous to the idea of the *common third* – a shared situation or activity around which the relationship can develop (cf. Paget et al., 2007) – as an important aspect of facilitating inclusion. Further discussion around the importance of a shared activity, particularly with regards to Bourdieu's conceptual triad of habitus, capital and field (cf. Grenfell, 2008), formulated as practice-theory (cf. Harcourt, 2007), could provide a theoretical basis to understanding the process of social integration. Indeed, as 'Bourdieu's theoretical concepts offer a useful foundation for studying marginalized youth more broadly' (Jeffrey, 2008, p. 740), there is potential to better describe practice that is both theoretically sound and valid as practitioner guidance (Storø, 2012).

The postmodern practitioner

Social pedagogy, as conceived within this article, also points to a playful postmodern subversion (cf. Aylesworth, 2009) of traditional professional roles in order to 'open up' a new space for pedagogic interaction with marginalised youth.

Central to this playfulness is the notion of reflexivity and that of the reflexive practitioner. Giddens (1990) sees reflexivity emerging as a necessary feature of post-modernity, prompted by the realisation that the epistemological foundations of the modern world are unreliable. In short, equating knowledge with certainty is misconceived, thereby rendering the totalising impact of the Enlightenment unachievable (cf. ibid. p. 39). As such, we cannot be certain that our knowledge of a given situation is complete, nor that our actions will achieve the outcomes we desire, as Larrivee (2008) suggests: 'the dilemmas practitioners face in the real world do not lend themselves to neat solutions' (p. 88).

Reflexivity ameliorates this state of affairs by prompting practitioners to remain alert to structural conditions and the on-going flow of activities (Ritzer, 2003). This, in turn, ensures that thoughts and actions are refracted back upon one another; a process that instigates a perpetual revision of our situated understandings (cf. Giddens, 1990, pp. 38-39), and therefore cultivates praxis through 'a single dialectical process of practical reasoning' (Carr, 2006, p. 426).

The postmodern influence within the article therefore aims to prompt the 'search to understand multiple, localized, contextual truths' (Power, 2004, p. 859) in the absence of universal ontological truths about human actors and society (Harcourt, 2007), and the 'retrieval of the individual as a subject' who is otherwise lost as thing (Davis, 2007, p. 207) within a grand narrative surrounding social exclusion. Furthermore, as postmodernism sees language as a powerful constitutive of social life, there is potential to urge young people to think differently, become de-realized (Aylesworth, 2009), so they can reconstitute substantial aspects of their intersubjective identity through alternative narratives derived from pedagogic communicative action.

Conclusion

There is a need to create and maintain a space for communicative interaction in order to induct marginalised youth into the dominant socio-cultural frame of reference for our age. This is important because 'inside we stand shoulder to shoulder in respect to our common welfare concerns; outside is what threatens our welfare' (Andersen, 2003, p. 45). However, there is a recognition that a different kind of intervention with marginalised youth in the UK is needed, as a key worker cited above suggested: 'We don't sit down and plan a life, a journey for our kids with identified outcomes'. Perhaps 'we' (whoever this 'we' constitutes) do, but the plan is established communicatively within our co-constructed lifeworld. Importantly, we mutually and pragmatically shape that tacit plan to help the child achieve independence and realise their potential, accounting for the child's interests and motivations, and the availability of social/cultural capital and material resources. This approach to raising children is, essentially, a contemporary reflection of Rousseau's position: 'Teach [the child] to live rather than to avoid death: life is not breath, but action' (Rousseau, 1979, p. 16).

An intersubjective mode of engagement is therefore needed for marginalised youth; a mode that is largely free from the governmentality of the state – although various positive outcomes desired by the state might be achieved as a secondary effect of the interaction. Interviews with key workers, working across a range of professional settings, have revealed the extent to which such engagement already occurs, but which is also misrecognised as largely atheoretical mentoring. The key point is that my research led me to conclude that social pedagogy is often an important aspect of professional practice – an aspect that deserves proper recognition.

As such, there is an opportunity to formally integrate social pedagogy into a range of practitioner roles. I have tried to outline throughout this article how that might work on both a theoretical and practical level, in order to tentatively offer some coherence to social pedagogy's self-conception (cf. Hämäläinen, 2012). To this end, I have drawn upon a broad body of well-established social science theory and, moreover, utilised the field of mentoring as a proxy for social pedagogy. And while I believe this analytic approach has been helpful to conceptualise social pedagogy, it is apparent that the field would benefit from a full articulation of its metaphysical foundations – its ontological and epistemological orientation – in order to anchor the field's diverse expressions of thought and practice.

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