

Ethics in Education: Contemporary perspectives on research, pedagogy, and leadership.

Social Pedagogy and Ethics

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Abstract

This chapter aims to answer three key questions: Do we have a shared view of ethical practice? What are the values that underpin ethical practice? And, What are our ethical responsibilities as pedagogues? In it I discuss the problematic nature of being an ethical pedagogue in a post-modern world where there has been a move away from both absolute and relative morality. I propose that social pedagogy can provide an anchor in this context, as it aims to support marginalised others to develop skills to empower themselves and tackle social injustice. I explain how social pedagogy is a practice and a perspective, requiring pedagogues' behaviour to be underpinned by their personal values. The social pedagogical term 'Haltung' is introduced as a conceptual framework for aligning our practice with our values. And another social pedagogy concept, the Three Ps (the professional, the personal and the private self), is proposed as a tool to develop ethical, authentic relationships with others. In this chapter I suggest that pedagogues should adopt Life World Orientation to support children and families to effect change in line with their hopes for a more fulfilling existence, which requires deep understanding and a non-judgemental stance. Finally, I reflect on ethical leadership and how the social pedagogy model of The Learning Zone can be used as a means of reflection in social pedagogical leadership, avoiding the frequently dissatisfying implementation of person-specification reviews.

Key words: ethics, social pedagogy, Haltung, The Three Ps, Life World Orientation, The Learning Zone model

Introduction: time for a reset

Perhaps one of the most poignant events of World War 1 was the 1914 Christmas Day truce that took place in no-man's land between the trenches of the British and German troops. The soldiers reportedly exchanged gifts, sang carols, repaired dugouts, and buried casualties. There are even accounts of an impromptu football match. Reflecting back, was this a pivotal moment when the course of the war might have been altered? If the British Expeditionary Forces and their German equivalents had taken matters into their own hands and agreed to end the fighting, might this have begun a new age where conflicts were resolved in non-violent ways by the people who do the fighting? Writing this chapter as the world emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic where restrictions on movement, socializing and economic activity were referred to as "the great pause", this similarly, feels like an opportunity to consider what we want in the future. We have realised what really matters to us; food, access to good health services, nature, income security, education, and supportive relationships, and what matters less; that expensive perfume, watch or designer

outfit, perhaps. Cameron and Moss (2020, p.xvi) reflect on the opportunity for positive change the pandemic might bring:

Nothing could be worse than a return to normality. Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us.

Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.

For those of us with an interest in education and learning this “portal” opportunity prompts contemplation on what the “imagined other world” looks like. To consider whether there is enough momentum to stop the use of education as a political football that benefits the privileged. Education has the potential to be part of the wider solution to end child poverty and inequality, if it were more inclusive and collaborative. Social pedagogy provides a framework for this more inclusive approach to education and learning.

What is social pedagogy?

Social pedagogy is a concept more familiar on the European continent than in the UK. The German philosopher, Karl Mager, was the first to use the phrase in 1844, and it has grown in popularity across Europe as each country has sought to find educational solutions to the social inequalities of its culture (Petrie, 2020). It is an approach that considers how different societies educate their children in a way that brings out the best in them (pedagogy), how people relate to one another (the social) and how to tackle the exclusion of certain groups in society (social pedagogy). Walsh (2018, p.46) describes it as an “holistic, ‘whole child’, personal approach to working with children and young people... [where] pedagogy, care and education meet. It is about raising children, and is ‘education’ in the broadest sense of that word” (paraphrasing Petrie, 2009). Hämäläinen (2012, p. 4) proposes that there are two objectives of social pedagogy: to prevent marginalisation and social exclusion, and promote “welfare, community life and the social development of the individual and the wider population”. Social pedagogues, therefore, have a responsibility to create the conditions whereby individuals can develop the skills to improve their lives, whilst also engaging in social justice campaigns to end oppressive practice. It is concerned with both the individual and the collective, the micro and the macro. Ethical leadership and practice, underpinned by personal values, are at its heart. It is both a practice and a perspective.

Because social pedagogy emerged in different cultures as a specific educational response to contextual social problems, it is difficult to have a shared, overarching, understanding of it. There is, however, a connection between our individual values and authenticity in practice. While it may not be possible to agree a shared view of ethical practice across all contexts, a sincere concern for the world and other people is a disposition common to all social

pedagogues. In this regard it is not possible to be an unethical social pedagogue practitioner.

Re-examining Ethics

'Ethics' is derived from the Greek word *ethos* meaning **character** or disposition. It can be used to define an individual's guiding beliefs, or applied more widely, for example to an institution such as a school, or a nation, and is closely related to culture (Solvason, 2005). Ethics are based on moral principles affecting the choices we make and the way we behave. They can help guide us in deciding what constitutes a good life, what is right and wrong, and our responsibilities. Ethics can provide rules and principles to prevent us acting irrationally or selfishly in the heat of the moment when emotions are strong.

There is some debate as to whether it is possible for everyone to have a shared view of ethics (Ellemers, van der Toorn, Paunov and van Leeuwen, 2019) and some would argue that there are universal moral truths that are not selective (ibid). For example, few would agree that it is ethical for staff members to discuss the shortcomings of a parent within the earshot of the child. It would be unacceptable to say that it is wrong for other people, but not for us. If everyone was encouraged to determine their own morality, there is a danger that they would choose a version that was the easiest for them. This *moral absolutist* view (Kim and Wreen, 2003) adheres to the idea that there are universal truths that apply to everyone, for example the *Declaration of Human Rights* or the *Constitution of the United States of America*.

Moral relativists, on the other hand, would argue that it is not possible to have an agreed set of ethical principles that apply universally because much of ethics is culturally determined, and cultures evolve over time (Kim and Wren, 2003). In the past, for example, it was considered morally acceptable to administer corporal punishment to children both in school and at home. This view has altered in line with changing societal attitudes to using physical force against children, as well as growing evidence of the negative effects of corporal punishment on children's behaviour, cognition and well-being (Cuartas, 2021). From a moral relativist position of ethics, corporal punishment is neither right nor wrong, it is entirely dependent on what the protagonists view as right in those circumstances. The difficulty with this position is that there are, surely, some ethical positions that do transcend culture and are not right in any context, for example, slavery.

As thinking regarding post-modern ethics has progressed there has been a growth in "tolerance" with many people taking more of a middle ground between a moral absolute and moral relativist position (Balg, 2021, p. 2). Many would agree that there are some universal absolutes that are right or wrong in all contexts, but that other positions are more flexible and open to individual and cultural interpretation. It follows that there can be no definitive ethical code to guide individuals' behaviour, which may leave some people feeling adrift when faced with difficult decisions.

In noting that in the post-modern world there is an absence of a helpful agreed moral code of what is 'right' or 'wrong' to direct our actions, Bauman (1993) proposed a re-examination of morality and ethics. Viewing this as a positive step, he wrote that "re-personalising

morality means returning moral responsibility from the finishing line (to which it was exiled) to the starting point (where it is at home) of the ethical process" (p. 35). The use of the terms "finishing line" and "starting point" suggest a metaphorical racetrack where the individual begins the race "guided by empathy rather than reason" (ibid p.179-180) and applies this as a principle in all contexts, rather than following generic procedures based on absolute morality.

A popular discourse has arisen in the Minority World that any human behaviour is acceptable if it does not hurt others (Kim and Wreen, 2003). The complexity lies in how to take this rather glib position and apply it to situations where the individual must act with responsibility and accountability, but also according to their values. Those of us working in social professions are directly impacted by this new individualised view of ethics based on empathy as an intrinsic motivator for behaviour. There are no simple answers to ease our conscience that we have followed protocol and can rest then assured that we have acted correctly. There is no multiple-choice test at the conclusion of our involvement with children and families. As Bauman (1993, p. 20) explains, we 'look in vain for the firm and trusty rules which may reassure us that once we followed them, we could be sure to be in the right.'

The need to move away from "trusty rules" was addressed Professor Eileen Monro in 2011, with the publication of her government commissioned review of English safeguarding practice. It concluded that government-imposed targets should be scrapped, and professionals, (particularly social workers) be given the freedom and responsibility to make their own professional decisions guided by their values and based on moral judgements. She argued that "Any shared ethical code cannot give reassurance that we have not only done "things right" but done "the right thing" (Monro 2011, p.6), acknowledging the ambiguity within which we work and the common humanity on which we must draw. This links to the work of Freire (1970) who boldly referred to the guiding moral compass within individuals as love; not what the Greeks would term *eros*, romantic love, or *philia*, a close friendship, but *agape*, empathetic, universal love. Freire (ibid, p.70) suggested that to make the world more equal there was a need to enter into dialogue; he noted that "dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love of the world and for people . . . Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is a commitment to other". Love as a guiding moral compass can sit uneasily with modern professional life, even within occupations that require care of, and for, the children and families. Yet every committed relationship has love at its core. Martin Luther King Jr in his 1967 "Where Do We Go from Here?" speech reclaimed love from philosophers whom, he argued, had gone "off base". He explained how love should be applied by those who are committed to supporting others to flourish:

One of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites - polar opposites - so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love... We've got to get this thing right. What is needed is a realisation that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anaemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.

As a discipline underpinned by a combination of love and power in action as ethical practice, social pedagogy can provide a philosophical framework to both “get it right”, and to “do the right thing” (Monro 2011, p.6). It can anchor those navigating the middle ground between absolute and relative morality, providing a support structure to enact powerful love for an individual, as we commit to walk beside them as pedagogues and proactively advocate for their social inclusion as equal members of society. As Hämäläinen (2003) wrote, “social pedagogy does not happen because of the methods utilised but rather as a result of social pedagogical thoughts” (cited in Charfe and Gardner, 2020, p.7). It is the motive behind our actions that is key; social pedagogues’ actions are guided by a respect for the dignity of all, rather than seeing other people as a means to their own ends. You may, for example, purchase a resource that you know will appeal to a child that you are working with. If you bought the resource because you wanted to show that child that you ‘held them in mind’ and cared for them, your motive would be consistent with social pedagogy principles. If, however, you bought the resource because you wanted to impress your peers or manager, or even the child’s family about how thoughtful you are, then you are using the child as means to your own end. This does not respect the dignity of the child and is therefore not consistent with social pedagogy principles. However, social pedagogy is not prescriptive and does embrace the ambiguity of ‘it depends’ as a starting point for reflection when considering appropriate action. Eichsteller and Holthoff (2011a, p.179) explain that “the nature of social pedagogy lies in creating opportunities for learning — a process that is always unique and cannot be achieved by applying technical methods in an unreflected way”.

This is particularly relevant to those of us who work in regulated professions today. The recommendations outlined by Professor Monro in 2011, that professionals be encouraged to think, question, reflect and contest and then “do the right thing” (p.6), have, in England at least, been replaced by an expected application of ‘what works’ a government reductionist approach to policy and procedure focusing on value for money and delivering results (see for example the What Works Network, 2018). Moss and Petrie, (2002 cited in Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2012, p.35) contend that this “pragmatic-instrumental approach to practice trivialises the complexity of human life and takes little account of people’s individuality and contextual factors characterising their life-world.” To counteract this, they propose focusing instead on “ethics as first practice”.

Haltung

Even the most reflective practitioners are not immune to a top-down pragmatic-instrumental approach that focuses on measurable aspects of effective practice; for example skills and qualifications, rather than individual values. The concept of Haltung can draw us back to what is central in ethical leadership and practice. Haltung is a German term that is not directly translatable into English. It means “mindset”, “ethos” or “attitude” (Eichsteller, 2010, p.1), or how you ‘carry’ yourself, and relates to an individual’s value base. Charfe and Gardner (2019, p.3) compare it to a “moral compass that guides every action taken in every area of an individual’s life”. There is a clear link between the German

understanding of Haltung and what we understand by the term *ethos*, defined previously as a personal, institutional or national character or disposition.

A common criticism of multi-agency working is that professions frequently work in 'silos', whereby they do not liaise with the other agencies involved in a child or family's life, leading to fragmented support (Solvason and Winwood, 2022). Less familiar is the idea of 'personality silos' where we compartmentalise our behaviour dependent on context and expectations of our role within that context, for example, in our role as romantic partner, parent, practitioner, child, sibling, or member of a community. Each of these roles potentially carries an implicit value system. Without an inner moral compass (Haltung) it would be easy to find ourselves behaving in an instinctive rather than an intentional manner, living according to the role, environment or even the mood we are in at the time. When working with young children, for example, we may be upbeat and speak gently. When dealing with a tradesperson who has failed to carry out some agreed work, we may react with sternness. When responding to elderly parents we may be demure and respectful, or exasperated and impatient, depending on our life stage circumstances. Without Haltung there may be a tendency to respond emotionally and perhaps irrationally, later regretting our actions.

Mührel (2008, cited in Eichsteller, 2010) explains that Haltung is based on the two concepts of empathic understanding and regard. As an internal moral compass (Charfe and Gardner, 2020, p.3) it ensures that we consistently act according to our unchanging value system. It permeates and is integrated into every compartment of our lives. Because Haltung is genuinely value-based, before social pedagogues begin building relationships with children and families, they must reflect on their own values, and then act upon them with consistency. Regardless of the context, social pedagogues' actions should be in congruence with their values. Eichsteller and Holthoff (2011b, p.179) explain that:

Congruence also means regarding every person's human dignity, not just of those people we like and find easy to relate to. It is risky – the person who we show respect towards as consistent with social pedagogical values of sincere concern for others provides no guarantee that the person will respond in the same way towards us. Consequently, living by a social pedagogic Haltung is as challenging as it is significant.

It requires the disciplining of our character, learning to subordinate our feelings in favour of our values.

Haltung can be seen as "value-neutral" (Hämäläinen, 2012, cited in Eichsteller, 2010, p.3) as each individual will form their own Haltung, within the common social pedagogical dispositions of a sincere concern for the world and other people, and a commitment to promoting "welfare, community life and the social development of the individual and the wider population" (ibid, p.4). This will manifest itself differently in different people. For example, in the case of dealing with absent workmen, some may take an understanding approach, ('I appreciate that emergencies arise...'), others may be more assertive ('I feel angry that you did not have the courtesy to fulfil your obligations and warn you that I will

not tolerate this again'). What is important is that using Haltung as a philosophical framework can guide how we respond in a way that does not humiliate or abuse power. Just as our Haltung affects how we behave towards others, "so it colours their behaviour towards us" (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011, p.36), and so we contribute to the positive daily experience of others. This symbiotic relationship between our actions and the responses of others contributes to the social pedagogue's goal of promoting the well-being of individuals and communities. The key point is that this ethical orientation is constant in every situation, not only as part of our job role; Haltung is "a skin and not a jacket" (Eichsteller, 2010, p.3). Concern for others, and recognising our part in the extent to which they experience a good life (regardless of how they respond to us), requires all the courage and commitment described by Freire (1970, p.70).

Haltung, "I" and "We" ethics

As has been discussed Haltung is a foundational concept in social pedagogy. Although Haltung is unique to everyone (Eichsteller, 2010), if we examine it in more depth, it is clear that it necessitates a collectivist, rather than individualistic world view. Dr Viola F. Cordova (2004), the first North American indigenous woman to earn a PhD in philosophy, explained the difference between "I" ethics and "We" ethics. In "I" ethics there is recognition that we must do no harm, but the starting point is often the individual's interests. This is particularly evident in the advancement of neo-liberalism, where the social problems are framed as a deficiency within individuals, detached from the wider social and political context (Cameron and Moss, 2011). In England, for example, the *Troubled Families* initiative by the Department for Communities and Local Government (2016) was an attempt to encourage joined up working by all professionals involved in families experiencing multiple adversity. The very term *Troubled Families* suggests that the problem lays within the family, and that they are to blame for their poor outcomes, rather than the conditions in society that may have contributed to the families' adversity: "your fault" (I), rather than "our fault" (we). An example given in the evaluation of the *Troubled Families* initiative was poor school attendance, which was tackled by explaining the consequences of not attending school, rather than understanding the wider reasons why the children did not want to attend classes. A social pedagogy perspective would acknowledge that children need to be educated and attempt to change the conditions preventing this.

Social pedagogy is an action-oriented social science (Staub-Bernasconi, 2007, cited in Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011b, p.177) that does not defend the status quo when it needs reforming. The construction of our individual Haltung is a continuous process as we decide what action to take. This requires courage, energy and compassion, underpinned by an ethical stance that embraces the fact that we are all interconnected by the commonality of human experience: sorrow, adversity, loss and pain, as well as joy, safety, love and belonging (Harding 2019). In "We" ethics Cordova (2004) explains that relationships are of primary importance. The individual is valued as part of a caring community with responsibility for and to its members. If there is disagreement the focus is on restoring harmony by recognising the value of all members, including children and the natural world, and aiming to accommodate their interests. This necessitates an open mind, aversion to

causing distress to others when acting out one's values, and a disposition of cooperation. It is not anaemic "love without power" (King, 1967), "We" ethics does not deny the need for advocating for justice, but it is a restorative justice that sees, listens, and aims to heal, rather than one of opposition and confrontation.

You put your whole self in

Effective pedagogues are aware that they are a critical part of children's experience of education; the ability to form good relationships with children has been shown to be foundational in children's success. Noddings (2003a, p.249) writes:

Working with young children, good teachers are keenly aware that they might have devastating effects or uplifting effects on their students. Some of these effects last, or at least are remembered, for a lifetime. This first great good of teaching—response-ability and its positive effects—is clearly relational.

Noddings goes on to further explain how these positive effects go beyond the transmission of information and include the feeling of safety in an emotionally secure space, the growing intellectual love for a subject, and learning that when we show care for others, they in turn learn how to show care for us.

Bearing in mind the lasting impact we can have on children we have an ethical "response-ability" (Noddings, 2003a, p. 249) to treat them with compassion, seeking to educate the whole child, aware of the power that we hold to humiliate or enhance their fledgling esteem. Unless we nurture trusting relationships with children, Noddings (2003b, p. 194) claims, we will have limited success, arguing that "it is absurd to suppose that we are educating when we ignore those matters that lie at the very heart of human existence". Compassionate relationships are central to social pedagogical practice and for those who are drawn to the social professions they can be life-enhancing. We need, however, to recognise our limitations, mentally and emotionally, so that we do not become drained by the burden of dealing with children and families who are experiencing adversity. In a metaphorical sense, there is no point in getting into the pit with someone, we want to help them to find a way out. The social pedagogy concept of the Three Ps can support how we manage bringing our whole selves to our work with children and families without becoming worn down in the process.

The Three Ps

As pedagogues we recognise that we bring our whole selves to work, there is no 'checking out' our experience or emotions. Building trusting relationships with others can be enhanced by sharing the warmth of our personalities, bringing appropriate laughter and fun to lighten the mood and create bonds of trust. It also reduces hierarchies and signals to the child and family that we are genuinely invested in them as individuals. From a social pedagogical perspective this emphasises a commitment to the person, rather than their need (Charfe and Gardner, 2020) and honours the inherent dignity within everyone. An essential skill in enacting our "response-ability" (Noddings (2003a, p. 249) is active listening,

encouraging the child or family member to talk openly about their circumstances and feelings by maintaining eye contact, giving non-verbal cues such as nodding and smiling, reflecting back what has been said to clarify that the message has been received correctly, as well as interpreting visual and vocal cues, such as sighs or a crack in the voice. Listening intently to a child's story, however, might arouse difficult, suppressed emotions in ourselves. This may be because we have had a similar experience, or perhaps the child or family member has made decisions that conflict with our values. In these situations, sharing either our painful memories or values that contradict the child or family member is not helpful and could adversely affect the relationship. When we discuss bringing our whole selves to our practice this is guided by the philosophical framework of the "Three Ps", the Professional, the Personal and the Private (Jappe 2010, cited in Charfe and Gardner, 2019, p. 39). It proposes that we all consist of these three aspects and will draw upon them as part of our work with children and families.

In the *professional* aspect of our relationships with others we recognise that our engagement with the child and/or family has a formal or official purpose, for example in a role as a teacher. In this role we will draw upon our professional knowledge of policy, theory and research, and statutory requirements. We may also draw upon our previous, professional experience and reflections on judgements we have made in the past. This overlaps into the *personal* aspect of our selves, but applies it in a professional way. We may be faced with a child who struggles to regulate their behaviour, for example. When drawing on the professional strand we may refer to research about attachment theory or co-regulation; we might talk to other professionals about their experience or reflect on what strategies we have implemented in the past that might be applicable.

Charfe and Gardner (2019, p. 39) point out that there is always an "insertion of self" when working with others and to be effective we cannot avoid drawing on the *personal* even when acting professionally. Relationships are key in the Three Ps and relationships are reciprocal; we cannot totally cut off our personal selves. How we choose to reveal this when building relationships with children and families does depend on our professional judgement, however. We may choose to reveal a small part of our personal self at the beginning of our relationship with children and families, for example, sharing that we were soaked by a car splashing us as it drove through a puddle that morning. We may share more of ourselves as the relationship grows in trust, for example that we are meeting a friend for lunch to celebrate our birthday. The personal self can only be effective if we understand the boundary between this and our *private* self, however. Through reflection we can be aware of what would be unethical to share as part of our role, which is dependent on the context and the particularities of our relationship with the child or family we are working with. If a child is experiencing distress due to the breakup of their parents' relationship you may relate to this because this is something that you also experienced. It is not necessary to share your experience with the child, however, as this may be an additional burden to them as they try to process your experience along with their own distress. You will, however, draw on your private experience in your professional role, perhaps in the questions that you choose not to ask.

As is always the case in social pedagogical practice, what should be concealed from others in the private self; and what could be shared as helpful personal detail that can enhance the reciprocity of the relationship depends on the context and your professional judgement. If you had a difficult relationship with your parents and you felt that they were strict to the point of harshness, for example, you may ordinarily keep this within the private aspect of self. There may, however, be some value in sharing this with a colleague who has strong views on child discipline to help them understand your position, and possibly lead to them reflect on their own values. As mentioned earlier, there are no “firm and trusty rules” (Bauman 1993, p. 20) that will tell us when it is appropriate to move an aspect of self from private to personal, but our Haltung can help us navigate the dilemmas we face. As a starting point we could reflect whether the two aims of social pedagogy as proposed by Hämäläinen (2012, p. 4), which are, to prevent marginalisation and social exclusion, and promote “welfare, community life and the social development of the individual and the wider population” will be furthered by consciously sharing something private in a professional relationship.

Life World Orientation

In our work as pedagogues, we are encouraged to plan educational programmes based on children’s interests (DfE, 2021). This can lead to a somewhat superficial interpretation of what children’s interests are, for example a practitioner who notices a child playing with dinosaurs may create a worksheet for the child to join the dots to reveal the outline of a stegosaurus. This tokenistic response is based on a deficit view of the child, and does not delve into the possible myriad of reasons why children may behave in a certain way at a certain time. The social pedagogy concept of life world orientation offers a more holistic understanding of a child’s intentions and enables us to plan for opportunities to learn in a more ethical way.

Life world orientation is a concept developed by Thiersch in the late 1970s as a reaction against the reductionist approach that was creeping into public service work (discussed in Jacaranda, 2015). Thiersch took the phenomenological approach of beginning with the individual’s perception of their circumstances and building on strengths rather than perceived deficits; a “bottom up” method. These might include “a person’s personality, strengths, likes, dislikes, their extended family and friends, culture, religion, place of upbringing and significant events in their lives” (Jacaranda, 2015, p. 43), a whole person approach. This demands more than casually watching a child, but sustained observation over protracted periods. Learning opportunities (as opposed to activities), according to Pestalozzi, should then be based on “close observation of children and on deep insight into the way a child’s mind works and develops” (Heafford, 1967, cited in Eichsteller and Holtoff, 2011, p. 41). Active listening, asking clarifying, open questions and responding in a non-judgemental way, even when the answers go against what might be considered ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ are important skills that can help us appreciate the life world of the individual. We may all have been tempted to say, “I can’t believe they did that!” or “I would never do that!”, however, this should be avoided as there is no shared reality with another person. We cannot ever fully comprehend the impact particular social issues may have had on their

lives, the effects of poverty or broken relationships, for example. Consciously taking a life world orientation can prevent the unintentional transfer of our own value system onto others, reminding us that what we consider to be the best outcome might not correspond with the hopes and expectations of the individual.

Another aspect of the whole person approach to consider as part of life world orientation is an understanding of how the person views their ability to effect change and make decisions. It involves enabling an increase in confidence to access the resources within themselves and their family and community (Jacaranda, 2015). One of the key aims of social pedagogy is to support individuals to integrate into society and to include children and families in decisions that affect them, whilst, at the same time, modelling decision making skills. This is consistent with the view that social pedagogy is “education in the broadest sense” (Walsh, 2018, p. 46, paraphrasing Petrie, 2009), and fits with the social pedagogy view of empowerment. Charfe and Gardner (2019, p. 13) explain that “empowerment is not ours to give” rather it is supporting others to develop the skills that they need to enact change in their own lives. The idea that individual and societal development should be the aim of ethical and democratic practice builds on the work of Bauman (1993, p.185), who proposes, “Thus, individually and collectively, we can help society construct the social sphere and ensure that the social context enables human growth”. Social pedagogues aim not only to help people out of their difficult circumstance through holistic learning opportunities, but they also have an ethical responsibility to raise awareness politically, by speaking up in public debates regarding social justice.

The social pedagogue’s obligation to bring about good

Bloor (2010) writes of the researchers’ obligation to not only do no harm, but to actively bring about good, the concept of beneficence. Even when not formally carrying out research with families and communities, social pedagogues continually reflect on their practice and recognise their responsibility to be reflexive and responsive educators. They accept their role in supporting individuals to make good choices, draw on inner and family/community resources whilst also not individualising problems largely created by an unfair social structure that works against some groups (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011b). The ethical obligation to bring about good suggests that social pedagogues cannot be passive bystanders, patching up damage caused by flaws in political systems without highlighting these injustices (ibid). For example, a practitioner may fundraise to offset costs of an educational outing for children. While this may alleviate the immediate issue there is a danger that it inadvertently reinforces a societal perception that an inability to contribute towards their child’s school trip is due to parents’ poor decision-making skills, or a mismanagement of finances, rather than a systemic failure of political policies that have caused many of the problems, such as zero hours contracts or unemployment. Social pedagogy is an “action-orientated social science” (ibid, p. 177), and our responsibility is to support individuals and actively contribute to the discourse about the inherent inequalities in societal structures.

Social pedagogues are realistic that societal problems such as the marginalisation of children, exclusion, bullying, victimisation, discrimination, absenteeism and dropping out of school are complex issues with no easy solutions, however they can help by framing and defining social problems (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011a) for and on behalf of individuals who lack the social and cultural capital to do so themselves. In an ideal world social pedagogues would be so successful that they would no longer have a job. They accept, however, that they will always be needed and that they cannot solve social problems on a macro scale.

At Gwent university the metaphor of the “happy Sisyphus”, borrowed from the French Nobel Prize winning author, Albert Camus is used to symbolise the relationship between supporting the individual and working for a more just society whilst recognising that this may not result in positive change. In Greek mythology Sisyphus is condemned to roll a boulder to the top of a mountain, only to watch it roll down again. He must start again, continuing his futile mission until the end of time. The myth is regarded as symbolic of the human quest to find meaning in an uncaring world. Roose, Bouverne-De Bie and Roets (2012) explain that Sisyphus becomes happy when he accepts that the stone is never going to stay at the top of the mountain, nevertheless his role remains to push the stone to the top each time it rolls down. This is his only duty, to stay engaged without becoming frustrated at impossibility of the task. Similarly, social pedagogues work closely with children and families but seek opportunities to draw attention to the structural aspects of social problems without becoming frustrated if their efforts produce no visible outcome.

The ethical social pedagogy leader

As has been explained throughout this chapter, social pedagogy is concerned with well-being, learning and growth, working alongside individuals in a holistic way to support them to fulfil their potential, and with families and communities to enable participation and inclusion (Jacaranda, 2015). Although individuals act according to their own *Haltung*, social pedagogy is a relationship-based practice situated within teams, institutions and organisations. Eichsteller (2009) explains: “The team, the organisation and the wider system need to function as an interlinked system, based on similar principles, philosophies and visions” (cited in Eichsteller, 2012, p. 32). In leading a project introducing Social Pedagogy into care homes in Essex, Eichsteller (2012) reflected on the importance of an agreed *Haltung*. Articulating previously informal beliefs and practices contributed to a shared ethical understanding about the care workers’ practice. Taking a strength-based approach from the beginning nurtured a positive culture of care. It also encouraged “staff members whose values and beliefs might not benefit children in their care to rethink whether this was the right job for them and be supported to find less people-focussed alternatives” (ibid, p. 32).

When practicing in a social pedagogical way we use the warmth of our personality to build authentic connections with those who we work with and support their continued growth. There is great satisfaction in seeing children and their families respond to this support and make improvements to their lives. However, as previously mentioned, we can become affected by the lives with which we become entwined. It is, therefore, essential that we

protect our own well-being and that of others. Leaders of teams have a responsibility to ensure that the values of social pedagogy are applied not only to the children and families that we work with, but also to the team members as part of an organisational culture. This might be through ensuring that there are practical systems in place, such as reflective supervision and frequent debriefs and the intentional enactment of the team Haltung. By reflecting on what has worked and what has not we can improve what we do, which in turn contributes to an open and honest workplace ethos.

Although most people might hope for workplaces such as this, they are far from common. Barton (2021, p.4, referring to the work of Laloux, 2015), in writing about her experience of embedding social pedagogy theory and concepts into a team, outlines the reality of many workplace cultures:

...many workplaces 'are places of drudgery, not passion or purpose' and this is reflected through all levels of organisations, 'not just the powerless at the bottom of the hierarchy', but also leaders experiencing a feeling of emptiness despite a front-facing view of success. 'All of us [are yearning] for better ways to work together – for more soulful workplaces where our talents are nurtured and our deepest aspirations are honoured'.

Barton (2021, p.7) emphasises the need for “psychological safety” and uses the social pedagogy concept of *The Learning Zone* as a theoretical tool. The Learning Zone model (Jacaranda 2015) consists of three concentric circles with the comfort zone in the centre, surrounded by the learning zone, and finally the panic zone. To learn and develop we must leave the safety of our comfort zone and venture into the unfamiliar learning zone where we accept new challenges. If the nature of the challenge becomes overwhelming, the anxiety we experience drains our energy resources, leaving nothing in reserve for learning and we are no longer able to process information. Everyone will have different points where they enter the various zones, so leaders should take time to reflect with team members and tailor support to the individual. In understanding each person’s tipping points a leader can ensure conversations are transparent and respect the dignity of the team member, encouraging them to honestly reflect on their own strengths and where they would like to go next, from comfort to learning zone, rather than using a review of a person specification or job role descriptor. Barton (ibid, p. 8) proposes that “when psychological safety and standards are both high, this creates a learning zone where collaboration, learning and innovation can take place”.

Psychological safety results when there is no ‘blame culture’ and we feel we will not be punished for making mistakes, as well being encouraged to share our own successes and celebrate the successes of our colleagues. Because social pedagogues do not have fixed ethical frameworks this does not mean that there should be no “ethical orientation points and landmarks” (Rothuizen and Harbo 2017, p.19). The sharing and reflection on our individual and team Haltung can orient us and ground our practice to our values. Growth in teams occurs when leaders create a culture where exposing professional vulnerability is safe

and routine, where supportive criticism is welcomed. Psychological safety, however, like social pedagogy, should not be misinterpreted as being 'soft' or just about being a good person. Barton (2011, p.8) is emphatic that this is not the case, explaining: "it is not about being nice; it does not equate to an environment of ease or comfort or an avoidance of difficult conversations because it is easier". In other words, compassionate communication does not avoid speaking the truth, as in the example of care workers being encouraged to find employment more suited to their values if they did not share the ethical principles agreed in the Essex Care Homes (Eichsteller (2012). Leaders of social pedagogy must embody the "love and power" equation described by Martin Luther King (1967), the ethics of "We" rather than "I" (Cordova, 2004) and ensure they do not abuse their power by allowing humiliation or toxic, passive aggressive behaviour to creep into a team ethos. This type of leadership is personified in Jacinda Ardern, prime minister of New Zealand, and the teenage Swedish climate change activist, Greta Thunberg who are influencing a generation who demand more than self-serving, authoritarian leaders.

Final Thoughts

I have proposed that social pedagogy concepts such as Haltung, the Three Ps, Life World Orientation and The Learning Zone can support the navigation of ethical practice in the absence of absolute morality. Social pedagogy is synonymous with ethical practice (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011b), first and foremost. It is the ethics of 'we' rather than 'I' that personifies a sincere concern for the world and other people as a common disposition. Social pedagogy does not claim to have all the answers, every situation must be responded to in its own unique context. It does, however, provide tools that support 'in the moment' practice and self-belief in our ability to do this. It also has an arguably more important aim, as Eichsteller and Holthoff (2011b) summarise:

By employing an ethical orientation we can help the people we work with believe that they can change, we can role-model through our Haltung how to take moral responsibility not just for ourselves but for the other. Thus, individually and collectively, we can help society construct the social sphere and ensure that the social context enables human growth.

For those of us who work with children and families, this is surely our noblest hope.

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