

# **STUDENT GUIDE TO SOCIAL PEDAGOGY PRACTICE**

**A POCKET  
HANDBOOK**

**YVALIA FEBRER & KELLY GITTENS**

# **Student Guide to Social Pedagogy Practice**

## **A Pocket Handbook**

**Edited by Yvalia Febrer & Kelly Gittens**



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First published in 2024 by Kingston University Press

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A catalogue of this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 909362 82 6

Typeset in Espiritu, Franklin Gothic Book and Georgia

Artwork © Rose Taylor (1, 7, 10, 17, 27, 37, 47) Bekah Sutton (12, 30, 31) and Social  
Pedagogy Professional Association (4, 5)

[www.sppa-uk.org](http://www.sppa-uk.org)

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KINGSTON UNIVERSITY PRESS

Kingston University

Penrhyn Road

Kingston-upon-Thames

KT1 2EE

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# Introduction

By Yvalia Febrer and Kelly Gittens

This pocketbook will introduce you to some of the key foundations of Social Pedagogy Practice.

At its core, Social Pedagogy is a way of theorising and relating with people and communities, focusing on the context in which those relationships happen, with the ultimate goal of empowerment. Even if you've never heard of it before, this book will give you an idea of what Social Pedagogy is about and how it is currently being used in various helping professions.

The pocketbook has been written by a group of students who completed a degree in how to work with children and young people using Social Pedagogy. Each chapter is written by two such students, and you will hear their stories of how they've applied some of Social Pedagogy's principles and theories in their work, both while they were studying and since they've graduated and started jobs working with people in a range of different contexts.

The stories highlight the way love and patience can be used in practice, and how being flexible in our approach to working with people can lead to real transformation and action, not just for the people we work with but also for ourselves. It is through these stories that this pocketbook will introduce you to some of the key ideas and theories in Social Pedagogy, such as the Diamond Model, the Common Third, and the 3 Ps.

If you're already interested in Social Pedagogy, this pocketbook will give you a deeper insight into how it's being used by Social Pedagogy Practitioners in the UK and Ireland, where Social Pedagogy is overseen by the Social Pedagogy Professional Association (SPPA), the organisation who professionally endorse the degree our authors completed, and gave them their title of Social Pedagogy Practitioners.

You can also find video chapters to accompany the written chapters in this pocketbook on SPPA's YouTube channel, and the e-

book on their website.

We hope this pocketbook gives you insight and inspiration and would like to thank all our authors for their contributions, and SPPA for supporting us.



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# A Charter for Social Pedagogy in the UK & Ireland



**1. We consider ethics and social justice to be the foundation for practice.**



**2. We believe in the importance of engaging with others and the world of which we are a part, in ways that are congruent with our values and beliefs (Haltung) and informed by theory.**



**3. We value the capacity of all to foster compassion, community, love, care, and empathy.**



**4. We believe in walking alongside others, recognising their uniqueness and, with them, co-creating meaning and purpose.**



**5. We understand the value of our participation in everyday activities as a basis for creating human connection, enhancing a person's sense of wellbeing and quality of life.**



**6. We endeavour to develop authentic and reliable relationships.**



**7. We believe in relationship-centred practice that recognises and engages with the whole person and the networks, systems and communities that impact upon their lives.**







**SPPA**  
Social Pedagogy  
Professional Association

February 2022



**8. We value creative and playful approaches to lifelong learning that are theoretically informed, risk sensible and draw on people's potential.**



**9. We value professional curiosity in our work with every individual, group, and family.**



**10. We use theory, critical reflection, and self-awareness to inform practice.**



**11. We value teamwork, mutual aid, and collaboration with others.**



**12. We strive to bring about positive change for individuals, groups and families and communities, built on an understanding that practice is affected by political, social, and cultural contexts as well as by individual differences.**



**13. We believe in the social and political agency of individuals and groups to make significant choices about their lives and to contribute to their community.**



# Love

By Georgina Browne and Sophie Jones

Social Pedagogy places a huge emphasis on relationship-based holistic practice, and this includes the sharing of love. There must be space for love within professional practice as love is in the UK and Ireland's Social Pedagogy Charter: We value the capacity of all to foster compassion, community, love, care, and empathy<sup>1</sup>. The desire to love and be loved is hard-wired within each human and allows us to feel like we belong in a community due to being social creatures. Over the centuries the concept of love and how we show love has changed, from how we show love to children, to how we love ourselves. Nonetheless, love is still frowned upon and feared within social care professional practice. It is important to understand that emotions and feelings, such as love, are usually looked upon as being an individual matter rather than a social one. The concept of love in relation to Social Pedagogy and how people function is often not seen as being of great importance when studying relationships<sup>2</sup>. However, we as professionals can change this. Social Pedagogy Practitioners who introduce the concept of love in a professional context may face challenges from other professionals, but through discussion and communication, progress can be made towards redefining the word 'love' within a professional setting. As stated by Taggart, 'love may be a necessary part of intelligent professional practice'<sup>3</sup>.

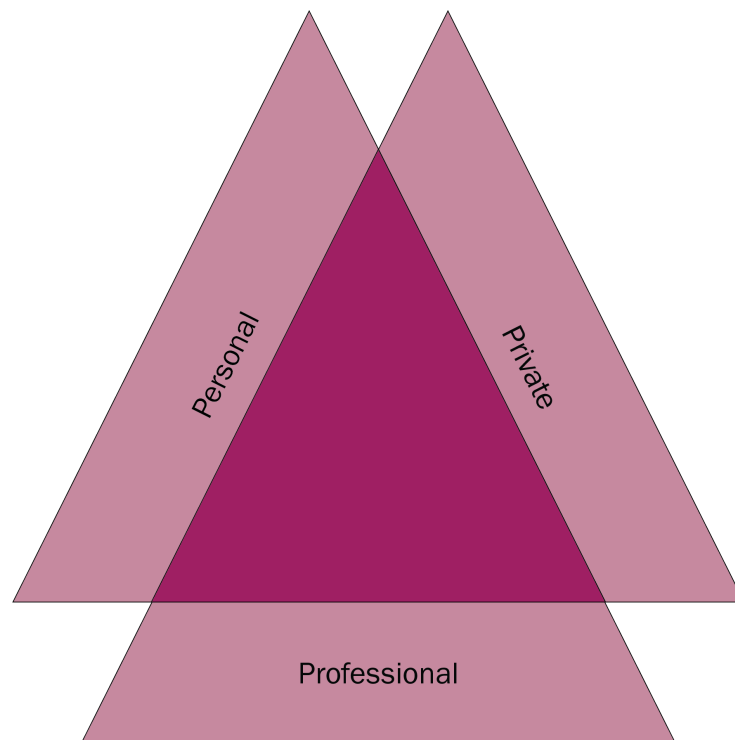
My working life has consisted of two fields: medicine and education. I have spent approximately six years working in the NHS and four years in childcare and education settings. I have worked in a school setting as a Medical Room Assistant which is the perfect blend of education, childcare and medicine. Demonstrating love, care and compassion in my job roles, past and present, has been essential. During my time spent working in nurseries, predominantly in the three-to-eighteen-month-old room, showing love and physical affection came easily and always felt second

nature. My job involved comforting children, providing them with affection when needed, giving bottles and putting children down for naps. All these roles need an element of love to allow the children to feel safe and nurtured. Professionals who cannot provide loving, sensitive and responsive interactions in such a setting could impede a child's cognitive and socio-emotional development.

Love comes in many forms. Showing love in a personal capacity to family members and friends will differ greatly from how love is shown in a professional capacity towards the children we work with. As part of my interaction with all the pupils who come into the medical room, I make use of Jappe's 3 Ps theory (Professional, Personal, Private)<sup>4</sup> by remaining professional while sharing aspects of my personal life but avoiding sharing my private self<sup>5</sup>.

The 3 Ps is a concept all Social Pedagogy Practitioners should use. 'Professional' means using knowledge, skills and experience I have gained and following guidelines and frameworks that influence my work. 'Personal' means sharing a piece of myself, and my personal life, with the people I work with which changes the dynamics of relationships and helps them build. 'Private' is the information that wouldn't be comfortable or appropriate for me to share with people I'm working with. It allows boundaries to be set.

## The 3 Ps

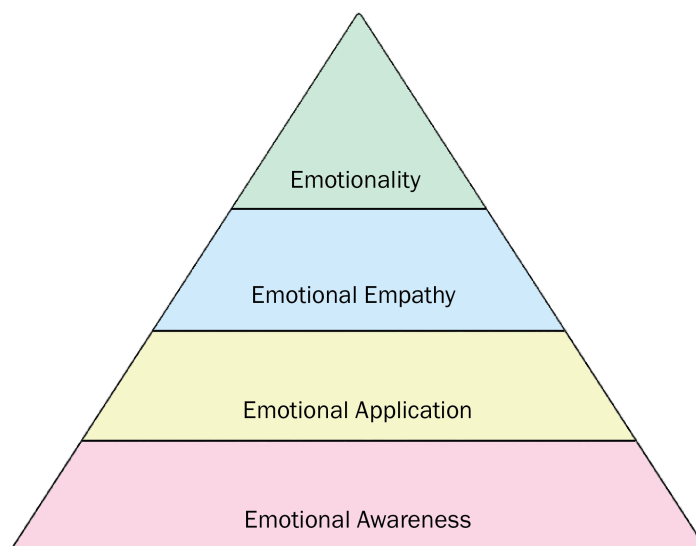


As adults we are able to provide children with the ideas and concepts of how a healthy, loving relationship looks and feels – whether this is a friendship, a relationship with family members or a romantic relationship. By demonstrating this, we hope children and young people are able to mimic these concepts and feel empowered to know their own needs and boundaries. As professionals, we must acknowledge that a child's understanding and interpretation of love may differ from ours depending on culture, upbringing, exposure to 'love' and other considerations. McPhail<sup>6</sup> created an 'emotional awareness' hierarchy and suggests that for a child to have an understanding of 'love' as an emotion, they will develop emotional awareness, be able to reflect on, regulate and learn from their feelings. The child's emotional awareness helps me tend to their needs more successfully – whether these needs be emotional, physical or social.

Professional love can be expressed through displays of positive physical affection. Physical affection can provide a sense of security and protection to a child or young person and can convey empathy

and gratitude. However, maintaining a professional boundary and being able to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate touch when working with children and young people is crucial<sup>7</sup>. I feel that all my job roles, past and present, have required an element of physical affection to benefit the children in my care.

## McPhail's Hierarchy of Emotional Awareness



In my role as a School Medical Room Assistant, some children need the occasional arm around the shoulder or hug when they feel vulnerable, upset or are having an 'off' day. On the other hand, some pupils shy away from unwanted, unsolicited physical affection and may find it intrusive. It is imperative that I am aware of any subtle cues the children may provide about whether physical affection would be met with resistance or not. I have also observed that some professionals frowned upon and did not offer physical affection to the young children we were working with, and mostly erred on the side of providing a 'tough love' approach.

A lack of physical affection and emotional availability appeared to cause children to shy away from those certain staff members who did not offer that positive, warm affection.

Our second example also involves showing love and demonstrating how healthy love and relationships can be, as oftentimes adults need this as much as children do.

After university, I began working for a domestic violence charity and was working with a young woman. We were close in age and both of us had daughters, however she had a traumatic past with her ex-partner, the children's father. On meeting her she was very quiet and withdrawn, and it felt like I was doing most of the talking. After our meeting, I reflected on how I could engage better with her and foster a relationship where I can walk alongside her instead of leading her like other professionals in her life have done. At our next meeting I had the radio on quietly in the background to create a more relaxed atmosphere and sat on the armchair instead of at the desk. When she arrived, I offered her the seat on the armchair next to me instead of us sitting opposite each other. This changed the dynamic straight away and she started smiling. We had some general chit chat about how the week had been and what she was looking forward to in the upcoming weeks. This time, she did most of the talking and I did the listening.

After this meeting, I decided that at the next session I would share more of my personal self to improve the relationship between us even further. At the third meeting we sat together and sang the song that was playing on the radio before we started chatting.

Quite quickly she broke down into tears, and when I gave her a hug she said she didn't have any presents for her daughter's 5th birthday coming up. I comforted her and told her we would work it out. I decided that I would share that I have a daughter who was a year older than hers, and would sort through some of her toys that she didn't play with and could be given as birthday presents to her daughter. We spent the rest of the meeting setting goals for the next six months, all the while listening to music playing in the background.

When she left, I reflected that I could empathise with the position she was in as a single parent, and that I had shared some of my professional and personal self with her during our meeting and this had proven to strengthen our relationship. Love was shared through building the relationship with background music, singing together,

sharing a hug and most importantly supporting her so that she could recognise that she is a fantastic mother and that her daughter will have a good birthday no matter what.

As Social Pedagogy Practitioners we can share love and share our personal selves with the people we work with, while making use of our professional skill and knowledge and maintaining a boundary around what is private.

# Patience

By Georgina Browne and Abigail Baldwin

In Social Pedagogy practice, patience is an essential underlying principle. Cultivating and demonstrating patience are not just a learned behaviours, but are broader concepts that play into all aspects of professional practice and becomes intrinsic to your ethos, or Haltung<sup>8</sup>. This includes spending time with your own struggles and showing compassion for them. I practice this by allocating myself time for reflection, where I work towards a positive self-image. This is a struggle for many of us, but if we work on improving our own self-esteem and remind ourselves that we deserve the best as individuals, the work we do with others will be more authentic – then we may actually know what it means to encounter self-love and compassion. If we have been through the process of confronting and working through our struggles, it may become easier to help the people we work with set goals and know what to aim for in this regard in their own lives.

Developing a patience-based practice can be frustrating at first. It can sometimes mean putting your gut reactions to the side, biting your tongue and handling situations in a totally different way than you would in your personal life. However, the result is learning things about yourself that you wouldn't have otherwise and establishing better and more effective approaches, such as learning to play the Social Pedagogy 'long game'. When issues arise in my work, I can't give up, and so patience becomes a foundation to fall back on. Long-term, sustainable change takes time, and waiting for that to set in takes patience. I have had to nourish and take care of myself to be able to stay committed to helping the people I work with to the best of my ability.

In Social Pedagogy, there are no 'quick-fixes' that lead to positive and sustained transformation. It can take weeks, months, years, even decades. And during this time, you always need to be asking yourself – whose change is it that we're working towards? Who



defines the goal or the end game? You need to let go of perfect, let go of how you define 'good', and work patiently with the person not just joining them from their starting point, but engaging with their end point or goal rather than imposing your own. Sometimes, your work with them may finish and you won't get to witness that, so it must be enough to remind yourself how far you walked with them, even if you don't see a conclusion.

## **Sandra's Story**

When I met Sandra, she had been drinking heavily for a number of years. She wouldn't classify herself as an alcoholic but would acknowledge sometimes consuming as many as forty units per week, which is over the recommended maximum of fourteen units per week<sup>9</sup>.

This was a result of enjoying parties with her friend group and eventually, drinking became a habit, a way to relax the mind and a way to cope. Although my role as a carer is to assist her to live her life as she sees fit, it is also to look out for her best interests.

It was mentally taxing to be the one to get Sandra her drinks knowing the health issues that drinking heavily and regularly can cause, even if she was requesting them and had capacity to make those decisions for herself. Her drinking wasn't out of control, but was regular enough to be an issue. Being witness to this, I felt I had to do something but deciding how to approach this was tricky. I took a holistic, strength-based approach<sup>10</sup> and a commitment to patience made all the difference. By being a steady, reliable and encouraging presence in her life, we gradually planted the seeds together for a healthier daily routine. As we built a positive and warm working relationship, her self-esteem seemed to improve.

One day she decided to get back into doing her exercises, stretching and doing squats using both her wheelchair and her standing and raising aide. As the idea to do this came from Sandra, she found it easier to stick to and eventually built up from fifty to eighty squats every morning, all while increasing her flexibility.

By connecting to her body and getting her blood flowing every morning, she started the day on a positive note. I watched as her request for a drink in the evenings got less common. During this time, she also went back to swimming. This was a relaxing and empowering experience, as she had more control while in the water and it helped to relax her muscles. Of course, long-term habits are hard to break, and there were periods where she drank more again, but overall, she seemed more in control and aware of this.

Sometimes, we would have a chat about how she was feeling instead of Sandra reaching for a drink and, although this didn't

always solve the issue, she knew that I was there and open to listening if she needed it. We spoke about how I supported her to maintain this routine, she said that it was helpful that I never insisted that she do her healthy routine, or ever limited her from drinking, as she would have felt less inclined to make the positive choice if it felt like I was the one deciding. Sandra had to do that herself. This approach was informed by a core value of non-hierarchical working<sup>11</sup>, where I never assume that I know what is best for her, stepping back and supporting her to decide how best to take the next step.

All professionals who work with children and young adults will know that patience is crucial, but that it's often the hardest thing to achieve and the first thing to lose in the moment. Through persistent practice, the art of patience can quickly become an embedded part of our Haltung (*see page 17*) thus showing more authenticity to those we work with.

Practising patience and developing it as a skill in a professional context is a long process that takes time and it is not something that can be achieved overnight. It is a skill that needs to be honed in order to benefit you and the children and young adults you work with.

## **Annabel's Story**

From a young age, I knew that I was destined to work with children and young people, and have most enjoyed working in the Baby Rooms in nurseries. Learning to practice patience, in an environment such as a nursery, can help build up resistance to burnout for you as a professional. It must be acknowledged that these small humans are highly dependent on others and often unknowingly, and unwittingly, test people's patience throughout the day. It was essential that I resisted the temptation to become frustrated or angry with them. The other benefit of patience is that it gives us time to think strategically. By allowing situations to unfold before we react, as professionals, we allow ourselves the chance to analyse the situation and figure out solutions. Pira also suggests that 'patience can make us better leaders... as leaders, we need to work with people to help develop their skills and bring out the best in them'.

Working in the medical room of a school, I also encounter all sorts of issues the pupils bring to my attention – whether this be medical, emotional or otherwise. Annabel regularly attended the medical room over a period of approximately six months for, what appeared, at surface level, to be minor ailments and needs – mostly minor abdominal aches and the request for a hot water bottle to sooth the ache. She usually attended twice a week and was happy, chatty and appeared physically well in herself. When triaging pupils who are complaining of abdominal ache, I always ask if they have eaten. Annabel always reassured me she had. I began to notice that she was quick to change the conversation away from the topic of food and eating. I let her know, in a passing comment, that the school nurse and I were always here for a chat about anything should she feel the need.

As part of my job, it is important to report any safeguarding concerns to the school staff member in charge. In my gut I knew her regular attendance in the nurse's office was a concern and reported it. When she returned complaining of abdominal ache, she asked for a hot water bottle and took me up on my offer of a chat. She disclosed information regarding her eating habits, previous bullying

and her need to make herself sick after eating. A few months after reporting her disclosure to the school's staff member in charge of safeguarding, it was brought to my attention that Annabel has now been diagnosed with bulimia nervosa. The staff member in charge of safeguarding informed me how impressed she was with my patience and perseverance to provide such quality of care. They felt that without Annabel being provided a safe, trusting environment to be able to make a disclosure, as a school, we may not have found out about her diagnosis.

This example highlights the importance of not passing judgement, remaining calm when a disclosure occurs and most importantly, having patience. On every occasion that I spoke to her, I included active listening<sup>12</sup> to help her verbalise her emotions and made use of non-verbal communication skills such as eye contact, reassuring nods and smiles and a relaxed position to indicate that she was important to me and that I was interested in what she had to say. Body language is important when communicating with others as it enhances our conscious understanding of others' needs and emotions. According to Mehrabian, communication is made up of spoken words, thirty-eight per cent is tone of voice and fifty-five per cent is body language<sup>13</sup>. Knowing this, we must not only feel patience within ourselves, but demonstrate it with our words, our body language and our actions. Patience is an active stance. It's more than simply waiting – it's holding space for yourself, for the person, their situation, and the journey of change. It is an active and engaged part of the Social Pedagogy process.

# Flexibility

By Uzma Rashid and Chiola Sutherland

This chapter explores how flexibility and creativity can be used both in thinking and action, reflection and planning and ‘in-the-moment’ challenges when using Social Pedagogy. The case studies demonstrate how adaptable Social Pedagogy practice is and how creative our responses can be when working flexibly with children and young people.

## **A Father's Story**

The bond between a parent and child is of utmost importance. The child relies on their carer to provide for their basic needs so that they can develop into flourishing adults. Parenting does not come with a manual, only experiences from which you can learn. Flexibility, in my opinion—after having two kids—is essential, and Social Pedagogy approaches encourage and allow this flexibility. Positive responses are facilitated by adjusting and adapting to the circumstances or the requirements of the child. Lifting the distinction between adults and children creates room for all levels of participation. The youngster is given room to express themselves when the hierarchical attitude is removed from the equation.

Someone in my workplace became a single father and custody of the child was divided. When the daughter was staying with her dad, he showered her with affection and attention, giving her no room to grow to accept the shift. When I was speaking to him, I noted several behaviours that suggested he was overwhelmed with the sudden change. He was angry, frustrated and lacking confidence as a parent. His daughter grew to be an aloof, quiet and seemingly emotionless teenager.

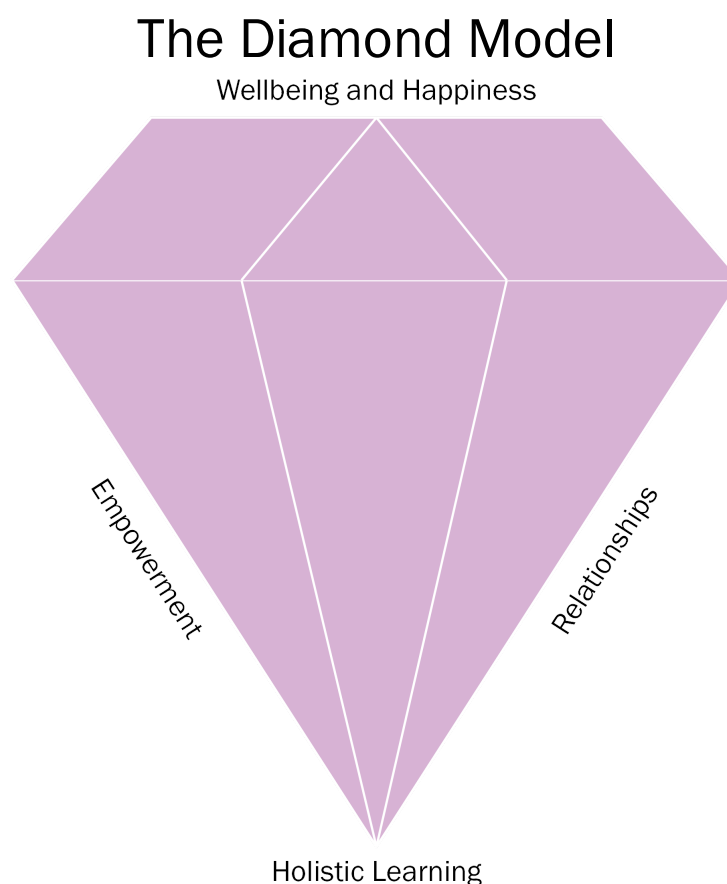
This began to resonate for me personally. I became a single mother when my two children were seven and nine years old, and we had several difficulties. With this shared experience, I believed I could help this father and his daughter by sharing what I had learned, so I set up a playdate between us and a few other families to take the pressure off him and his daughter.

I made dough that could be used to make pizza or Naan, and cubed a variety of veggies into little pieces before our trip. I brought pesto, cheese, tomato sauce and various seasonings. I also took a blank canvas, paint, chalk, stickers and glue. The dad, who had a special ability for making birdhouses, was asked to organise a session to teach us how to do it. The intention was for the day to proceed as effortlessly as possible. I had to be flexible to grasp the needs of the situation and give the young girl and her father the greatest possible environment in which to express their emotions.

We got there right before noon, settled down, and then discussed

the lunch menu. The idea was that everyone should contribute, and kids should feel like they have a voice. With the dough and supplies we had, they decided to prepare pizza. Parents were not to get involved until the pizza was ready for the oven. While the kids cooked, I spent time with the dad. It helped me to better comprehend what was going on from his perspective.

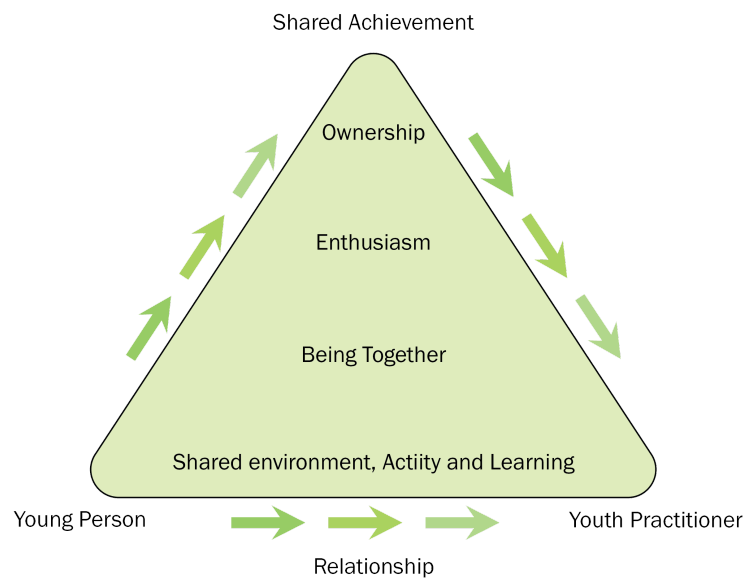
When I think back on the day, the Common Third<sup>14</sup>, the 3 Ps (*see page 9*) and the Diamond Model<sup>15</sup> were some of the practises that helped me tremendously. While my objective was to help the dad through this difficult time, upon reflection, I realised that I actually got to spend some one-on-one time with my teenage daughter for the first time in a long while. After this, my daughter and I made the decision to take more lengthy road trips and see new locations.





On the ride back home, my daughter questioned me about my background in ways she hadn't felt comfortable doing previously. Although I'd set up the playdate to help someone else, my attention and emotions had pivoted to my own daughter and to our relationship, which I hadn't expected. I had gone into the day with one intention, but had to be flexible to what arose from it, even when what arose was unexpected and deeply personal.

## The Common Third



Flexibility can help you develop by enabling you to challenge your previous assumptions and explore new possibilities. You discover facets of who you are and what you are capable of doing that you may have overlooked in the past due to personal barriers, institutional systems, individual beliefs, cultural conventions, or societal oppression<sup>16</sup>.

### **An Empowerment Story**

Social Pedagogy is a conceptual framework where care and education meet<sup>17</sup>, and at the time of this story I was working with young women in a domestic violence centre. Due to the trauma that the women had faced such as domestic abuse, homelessness and financial issues, it was decided that an empowerment workshop would be the most suitable way of connecting further with them.

It was felt that this would create a productive environment for young women, validating them as active and resourceful people, while showing them care in a way that helps them develop their own resources while empowering them at the same time. The key Social Pedagogy concepts incorporated in developing the empowerment workshop were the Diamond Model<sup>18</sup> and the 3 Ps<sup>19</sup>. The Diamond Model views holistic learning as a contributing factor to our well-being, and when planning the workshop, it was identified that well-being and happiness are subjective and individual.

The workshop was designed to facilitate opportunities for the women to build meaningful relationships with each other, as a group of people who had faced similar experiences, but who each had a unique relationship to that experience. I was able to raise awareness of the long-term effects of trauma, not only on themselves but also their children. By using the 3 Ps (*see page 9*) I was able to relate to the young women personally and share their experiences which is fundamental, because it ensures that the relationship being built is both professional and personal.

The professional self makes the relationship with a person purposeful because as professionals we will work together to set goals. For example, the workshop provided information about the law and their rights as women. It allowed them to discuss their life goals by having guest speakers on various topics, ranging from communication skills to support with writing CVs and empowerment techniques. In this sense, the professional self frames the relationship and ensures that I remain focused on those aims and that everything I accomplish has a purpose.

Social Pedagogy allowed me to be creative with ideas in the

moment when challenges arose, for example, I was able to adapt the workshop to meet the needs of the women. If they arrived to the workshop and an incident had occurred during the week, I was able to spend time with them to discuss this and assist them in exploring coping mechanisms and solutions, rather than pursuing the scheduled programme of the workshop.

Social Pedagogy practice is very context-specific and highly responsive to the individual rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. Holistic learning is a life-long process involving Pestalozzi's 'head, heart, and hands'<sup>20</sup>.

Social Pedagogy is about creating learning opportunities, so that people get a sense of their own potential and how they have developed. As we are all unique, so is our potential for learning and our way of learning and developing. The pedagogic relationship must be a personal relationship – Social Pedagogy Practitioners make use of their personality and must be authentic in the relationship, which is different to sharing private matters. Empowerment means that the individual can take on ownership and responsibility for their own learning and their own well-being and happiness, as well as their relationship with the community. Social Pedagogy is therefore about supporting people's empowerment, their independence as well as interdependence.

The power of experiencing something positive, something that makes someone happy, something they have achieved, a new skill they have learned, the caring support from someone else – has a double impact. It raises the individual's self-confidence and feelings of self-worth, which reinforces their sense of well-being, learning, being able to form a strong relationship, or feeling empowered. Building trusting and authentic relationships with children is very important in Social Pedagogy<sup>21</sup>. Through relationships we can show people that we care and demonstrate how they can have positive relationships with others. Each child is unique, and we can only appreciate their uniqueness if we know them well – what makes them jump with joy and what makes them sad. For children, these relationships are also very important, and they want to know who we are as a person, not just what we do as a professional.

The private self is who we are with those closest to us, our own

family and closest friends. The private self draws the line between what is personal and what is private. It sets the boundaries of what we cannot (or feel unable to) share with a child and should therefore not be brought into the relationship. It is acceptable to choose not to share some of our own experiences that have shaped who we are, especially if we haven't fully processed them or feel that sharing them would be harmful to the child. It is also important to understand that often, the private self influences how we engage with someone. For example, we might avoid talking to the woman who has just fled domestic violence if we've been through similar trauma that hasn't yet been processed. We need to reflect on our own behaviour and recognise when our reactions may be connected to our private self. We should be open to discussing this in professional supervision, so that we can gain a deeper understanding of our private, personal and professional self and improve our practice.

# Transformation

By Uzma Rashid and Abigail Baldwin

The idea of transformation is central to the goal of Social Pedagogy Practice. I love that word because it is more expansive than other words that may be used in social work, care and education like 'change' or 'progress'. It assumes not that the starting point needs alteration but that the starting point is a critical foundation from which a beautiful transformation can, with time, patience and love, take place.

Transformation values a person's lived experience, considering it to be an important tool to help identify how each person sees themselves and others. It identifies what their internal and external worlds look like and how understanding this can aid significantly in their transformation.

When I began my degree, I was an eighteen year old, fresh out of Sixth Form and I came to realise that my values were already aligned with Social Pedagogy. I was impressionable and keen to learn all I could about Social Pedagogy, both academically and practically. However, I was also innocent and sheltered, and during my studies I found a personal transformation was taking place. As our knowledge and experience of the world grows, our mind expands to incorporate this new information. Often, or at least in my experience, this process can teach you as much about yourself as about other people.

The Social Pedagogical theory of Lifeworld Orientation<sup>22</sup>, describes a person's ethos, their way of viewing and engaging with the world. This is an aspect of my practice that I developed constantly throughout my degree and since graduating. Social Pedagogy taught me how to empathise with people from vastly

different backgrounds to me, how to hold a sense of unconditional positive regard<sup>23</sup> for others and for myself and as I learned Social Pedagogy's role in dismantling systems of oppression, it directed my goals as I entered the world of work.

One of the most impactful lenses I learned to put on in everyday and professional life is that of anti-discriminatory practice, using the PCS (personal, cultural, structural) model and the theory of intersectionality<sup>24</sup> to contextualise how systems of oppression play out at different levels in day-to-day situations.

My first year in practice consolidated my learning in this area; I have worked as a Healthcare Assistant, both in a residential care home and supporting a disabled person in their own home.

If I could take one lesson from my experience after graduating it is that Social Pedagogy as an approach can be used in any job role when working with people. Although my training focused on work with children and young people, I found that the skills and knowledge I had accumulated were just as relevant when working with vulnerable adults. I was able to critically assess situations that arose within my work within a Social Pedagogical framework.

## **Sandra's Story Part Two**

My full-time job after graduating has been working with a young woman called Sandra whom I mentioned before, caring for her in her home on a shift pattern of four days on, four days off. She requires 24-hour care and support with physical aspects of her days such as washing, dressing and eating food. Her disability is purely physical, and she has capacity to run the rest of her life as she pleases. While I have been responsible for Sandra's care, I have witnessed ableism manifest on personal, cultural and societal levels. As Social Pedagogy Practitioners we need to be able to identify when discrimination (direct or indirect) is taking place and how to address it. On a personal level, some people infantilise her or treat her boundaries as flexible. In these situations, my role was to take her lead on how to react. After all, she has been navigating these microaggressions since she became a wheelchair user and is an expert in dealing with them. On a more structural level, we were met with pushback while trying to book accessible tickets to events, getting someone in to fix her bathroom door and getting the pool hoist at the leisure centre repaired, allowing her to go swimming after months of waiting. We speak openly about the barriers she faces every day, and my role is in helping to break these down and support her in overcoming them.

Using a Social Model of Disability<sup>25</sup> lens really helped here as we saw these barriers as the issue to be addressed, not Sandra or her wheelchair.

Many systems and processes have been built by non-disabled people and therefore are not always accessible, such as ineffective dropped curbs and buildings without ramps or lifts. However, the fight for accessibility and disability rights is one that everyone can play a part in, and only by demanding better will these aspects transform<sup>26</sup>. I stayed persistent and together we followed up each

call and email until we got that bathroom door fixed and no more precious shower time was wasted wrestling with it.

I have found that working with people often means putting your own gut reactions and ways of dealing with issues aside, as you are responsible for helping to manage someone else's life and so their wishes are the priority. It is essential to find a comfortable balance between allowing your personal life experience to help connect and empathise with people and self-reflecting often enough so as to not to allow your own ego to limit learning and transformation.



## **A Personal Story**

My experience from childhood, in a conservative and religious family, was that children should behave politely and submit to authority, that their feelings or wishes were unimportant, and that only adults were capable of determining what is best for them. When I got married and moved to the UK as a young adult, I had to undergo a mental and physical makeover due to the distinct culture, society, and beliefs in Britain, and the experience of now being a British Asian citizen. It is only when I started my studies, I realised that the Learning Zone Model<sup>27</sup> was something I was going through on a daily basis. As people, our performance and the outcomes we achieve tend to remain consistent when in a condition of relative comfort. From a place of continual ‘safety’ or comfort, we don’t learn very much, and certainly don’t transform. The journey becomes more intriguing once you can push through the comfort and fear zone to the learning zone. When you’re in the fear zone, you might attempt to persuade yourself that you are incapable of achieving your objective or that the opinions of others may be a limiting factor preventing you from moving ahead.

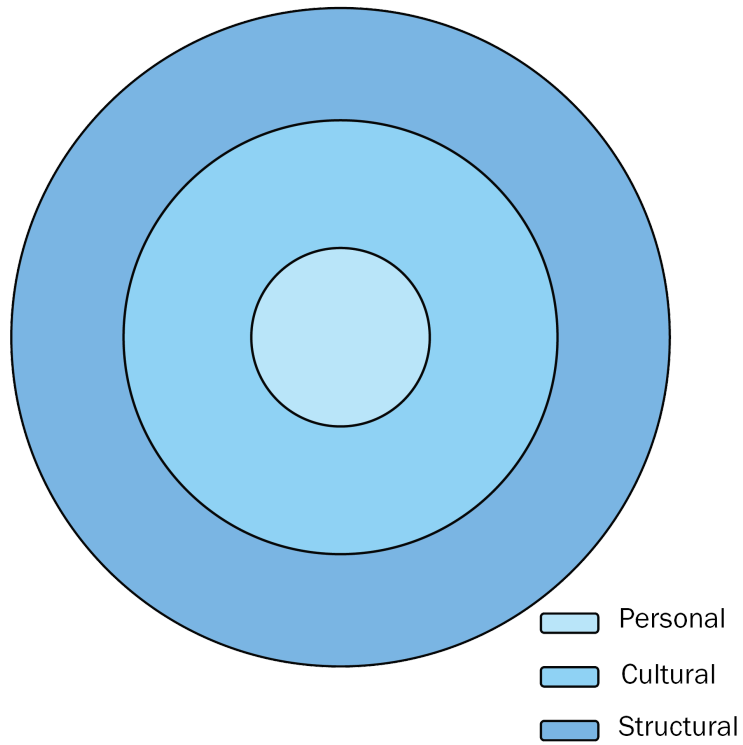
When we went on a trip as part of our course, I got to see a very different kind of educational facility. This opened my eyes and their ethos, which is that ‘Each individual has the opportunity to design their own future through experiencing meaningful relationships with the world, earth, and people’<sup>28</sup>, really struck a chord against my own childhood experience of living and learning. Here, each student’s unique ability was taken into account, and the learning period was not time limited. Dealing with the learning obstacle came first, then developing skills in a field of interest, and finally making a contribution to society. This experience helped me in my personal life as I raised two kids by myself. I had been unable to notice my children’s needs because of how I had experienced being

parented, pressure from society, culture and family members. I took my personal transformation from my course into my life, and started by interacting with my kids in a different way, encouraging them to be open and honest in expressing their needs and wishes. I encouraged them to ask me questions instead of withholding facts out of fear that they wouldn't comprehend. I've realised that individuals don't always learn from what is spoken to them, but rather by the behaviours of others.

The Common Third technique (*see page 29*) was a great way to encourage open communication, remove the stigma of being 'adult' and 'child', and take part in enjoyable activities. My children were growing not only as individuals but also as thinkers, and I was learning from them. It was necessary to be attentive of the situation in order to control feelings that were previously regarded as hostile, abrupt, or impolite. Even though it might be challenging at times, the Diamond Model (*see page 30*) reminds us that since every one of us has a diamond within us, we all have the capacity to shine. As parents and professionals, we can help the child develop their best qualities by offering our support, and we may gain by altering how we speak and listen to our own family, friends and colleagues.

You will face obstacles on your daring journey through transformation. Understanding the obstacles and the best ways to overcome them can help you make this as easy and natural as possible. Connecting with someone's journey will be made easier if you listen to their point of view. The person will meet you exactly where they are and where they are most at ease, and you can go from there. All throughout life, a process of transformation takes place. Our own lived experiences and the people who enter or leave our lives all have an impact on how we change.

# The PCS Model



# Action

By Thabani Mzizi and Stephanie Bader

Helping families often relies on multiple different services across several sectors with varying levels of accessibility (some open access, some by referral only and some with years-long waiting lists). When navigating this complexity, a Social Pedagogy framework is valuable as it is, by definition, concerned with understanding a person's situation as a whole.

I once met a young person who had been subject to exclusion from his school for fighting with a teacher. As a Social Pedagogy Practitioner, my approach when working with young people is to support them in identifying and expressing their feelings through facilitated activities rather than imposing a prescribed service on them.

During our conversation he shared that he was one of five children in his household and that he did not know where his father was and that his mother had to work the majority of the time, which meant that he, as a twelve-year-old boy, was left in the house for long periods on his own. He knew he had other siblings but, unfortunately, he did not know them as they had been taken into the care of the local authority.

As I got to know him, I found out that he liked playing football. During our conversation he shared that he had a slight anger issue, which meant he struggled to manage his behaviour during conflicts. It became evident that he had personal vulnerabilities that he struggled with and did not trust people very easily. However, he was able to identify his challenges and talk about them.

When I initially picked him up, he sat in the back of the car. I found this unusual. Typically, when I would pick a young person up,

they have always chosen to sit in the front passenger seat. Because of his behaviour, I could tell that he did not yet trust me. While I was driving, he saw a roller coaster. He asked if it was part of a theme park, and I saw the opportunity to use the 3 Ps. I told him that it was, and we talked about the rides and how I had been to that park before.

In my own experience, youth workers play a vital role in a young person's life. I realised as I was working with him that it was these in between moments, in the car or walking from one place to another, where he opened up and where his trust started to build towards me. Much of the work that other professionals had done with him had been led by the report they needed to write, or the assessment they needed to complete, whereas my work with him was much more fluid. It was through this relationship building that this boy managed to start turning his life around. The lesson I learnt from this was to be patient and allow the relationship to provide space for positive action. I took this lesson into my work with another young boy.

I was working with a young person who was involved in drug trade. Although my initial thoughts were that he was exploiting other young children, I was able to challenge my thoughts with the concept of the Diamond Model (see page 30) and see that others were also using him. This model allowed me to build an excellent rapport with the young person, and gradually, I had established a sense of trust which allowed us to have meaningful conversations about how his involvement with the drug trade began. He shared that his mother and father separated, and he then lived with his mother and witnessed her struggle to pay the bills. At the same time, older boys already involved in selling drugs, had already started grooming him. He said he felt he had to help his mother, so he started selling drugs from about the age of ten. We also spoke about how this was having a negative impact on his life and family and how he could take control of his life. We spoke about turning

the drug trade situation into something positive, and how he could use his skills and channel them into something new.

## **Calling for Social Pedagogy Action**

We are all born equal. Our inalienable rights are born with us. Not bestowed upon one person more favourably than another. No life is more significant than another, and no person is less worthy than another. What separates humanity are the divides created by humanity itself. The circumstantial divides. Bias. Prejudice. Systemic discrimination. Economic injustice. Inequity. The societal 'norms'. The '-ism's'. The 'me and them' mentality. The 'othering' of humanitarian issues. Moreover, it seems that no matter where we turn, there is an endless stream of human suffering, disaster, acts of war, caustic politics, child deaths, poverty and disease.

The majority of these divides are socially constructed and, although they are not a reflection of inherent differences in value or worth amongst individuals, there is a definite sense of hierarchy amongst us. As a result of these collective human divides and suffering, our sense of humanity as a whole is starting to become lost. This loss is manifesting in a reduction of empathy and of compassion. It is a profound loss of love and the dehumanisation of society.

In a bid to relieve ourselves from feelings of helplessness when considering the state of society, what often happens is that we block or reduce our sense of compassion. We engage in avoidant behaviours or adopt negative attitudes to distance feelings of discomfort or situations we deem unpleasant. We thrive in mental or moral contortions to justify actions or adopt beliefs that act as a self-defence mechanism. But in this comfortable space of avoidance that we create for ourselves, suffering continues to flourish.

Of course, the responsibility does not fall on any individual to carry the weight of the world or to defeat famine or eliminate poverty. It is not one person's job to put a world of wrongs to right. However, addressing the above does require a commitment to fostering empathy by recognising and embracing our emotions – including compassionate ones. Promoting a more humane society

involves a change that comes in the form of recognising the humanity of all individuals without exception.

Social Pedagogy can be that catalyst for change. At its core, Social Pedagogy is the inherent belief that each person is valuable and deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. The belief that each person possesses untold potential which must be supported and celebrated. The benefits of adopting a Social Pedagogical framework go far beyond the realms of social care or education. They extend to ethical orientations by emphasising values such as empathy, empowerment, inclusivity and respect.

Social Pedagogy's transformative guiding principles can be woven into daily practices to provide clarity and direction in the face of complexity. They can foster meaningful relationships in the face of conflict or adversity, and they can develop understanding in the midst of multifaceted challenges.

The fundamental foundations of Social Pedagogy are a call for action. They inspire us to prioritise wellbeing, value self-determination and hold on to the unfaltering belief that everyone, irrespective of circumstance, is worthy.

## **Glossary**

These terms were chosen as words or phrases that are not necessarily social pedagogy terms but nevertheless will inform your practice in this fascinating and varied field. Definitions provided by Yvalia Febrer.

### **Ableism**

The assumption of able-bodiedness; discrimination in favour of able-bodied people and norms



**Anti-discriminatory practice**

Practice that actively fights discrimination and works to promote social justice

**Empowerment**

Facilitating people's agency, autonomy, and sense of belonging and achievement

**Inequity**

Lack of fairness or social justice; lack of equal opportunities and access to those opportunities for all

**Self-determination**

The right and freedom to make one's own decisions and choices

**Societal oppression**

Conditions, systems, and practices within society that oppress groups of people and contribute to inequity and injustice

**Systemic discrimination**

Discriminatory conditions, practices and norms that exist within systems in society, contributing to oppression of groups of people

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