

Social Pedagogy in the Classroom

Supporting Children and Young People in Care

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The hypothesis at the heart of this chapter is that you, the target reader of this book, have chosen to enter the teaching profession for a specific reason: you want to make a difference to the lives of the children and young people in your classroom.

As fellow professionals in the education sector, we recognise that demands such as implementing a high stakes accountability-driven curriculum can, without careful consideration, be to the detriment of supporting the emotional needs of the children and young people in your care. Drawing on the work of Cameron, Connelly and Jackson's (2015) *Educating Children and Young People in Care: Learning Placements and Caring Schools*, we argue that for children to thrive and flourish, the integration of care and education in daily life is key. We believe this is particularly pertinent to those children and young people who have experienced difficult childhoods. As such, it is these children who are the focus of this chapter. In an effort to support you in establishing and maintaining the synergy between care and education, we present the field of social pedagogy for your consideration.

Children and young people in care

As Chapter 12 has confirmed, the legal term for children and young people in care is 'looked-after children' (or LAC). These children and young people have been separated from their birth families – often for their own safety – and placed into the care of the local authority. They are considered one of the most vulnerable groups of children

and young people in society, particularly when they first come into care. Most of these children and young people live in foster care and some live with extended family, while others are placed in residential children's homes. Many children and young people in care live in a state of flux, moving from placement to placement for reasons beyond their control. In contrast, however, a significant number are able to live in long-term placements, establish and maintain healthy relationships, perform well at school and describe feeling safe and happy.

Although children and young people in care are bound by a legal status,¹ they are not a homogenous group. That said, it is important to note that they usually share common traumatic experiences relating to separation, neglect, abuse and loss. Children and young people in care have often been subject to multiple forms of distressing events over a long period of time. Cairns (2013) explains that when placed in these situations, our bodies produce a toxic level of stress hormone (cortisol). This survival response has the power to influence our physical, psychological and social ways of functioning such as our ability to coordinate our body, focus on presented tasks, relate positively to ourselves and the world around us and to form relationships with others. Supporting children and young people through these difficulties is by no means an easy feat. We propose that *social pedagogy in the classroom* not only acts as a springboard to recovery for those who have experienced trauma, but also provides a context for establishing and maintaining the synergy between care and education for all children and young people in your classroom.

Social pedagogy in the classroom

In many continental European countries, social pedagogy is considered both a profession and a discipline (Bennett and Tayler 2006; Petrie *et al.* 2009). It can be traced back to the work of educational philosophers such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Frobel. It has influenced a range of children's services and organisations such as teacher education, youth work, early childhood education, community education and social work (Cameron *et al.* 2011a). In the UK, social pedagogy is becoming an increasingly familiar term in educational policy and

1 For a detailed analysis of legislation surrounding the education of children and young people in care, see Cameron *et al.* (2015, pp.24–42).

reform. Over 2000 care, education and related practitioners have attended social pedagogy short courses in the UK since 2009. Under the previous Labour government, Petrie *et al.* (2009) argued that the social pedagogic approach was well suited to English policy concerns relating to how society best served its children and young people. The recent changes made to the *Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice* (2015), which emphasises person-centred practice, have highlighted an ideal context for this plea, once again.

In practice, social pedagogy is considered a dynamic, humanistic approach to education that takes account of, but goes beyond, subject learning (Kyriacou *et al.* 2009). Humanism, as outlined in Chapter 1, focuses on developing human potential through relationships, wellbeing and happiness, holistic learning and empowerment (Eichsteller and Holthoff 2012). To demonstrate what this might look like in your classroom, we present some distinctive features of a social pedagogical approach below.

The classroom teacher as a social pedagogue

It would be a mistake to consider social pedagogy as reducible to a collection of techniques. Instead, it is helpful to consider it as an art form that connects the teacher to their fundamental values and beliefs. Cameron *et al.* (2011, pp.14–16) provide a helpful summary of a social pedagogical approach which, for the purposes of this chapter, have been rearranged to provide a useful insight into what it might look like in your classroom. Cameron *et al.* (2011) suggest that social pedagogues:

- Focus on the child as a whole person. They recognise that children are immersed in a complex relational system of support. They are aware that children and young people think, feel, have a physical, spiritual, social and creative existence, and that all of these characteristics continually interact in unison. Similarly they bring themselves as a whole person to their work.
- Constantly reflect on their practice. To overcome the challenging demands they are often confronted with, they draw on and apply theoretical understandings to their everyday practice (Petrie *et al.* 2009). They make decisions

about moving forward according to the best interests of the children and young people in their care.

- Bring their hearts to their work as ethical and emotional beings. They are connected to their fundamental values and beliefs and are constantly aware of how these express themselves in the outer world (Eichsteller and Holthoff 2012). They are aware of how their own emotional reactions can affect their relationships and communications with children and others. Through their relationships with other people they show empathy and respect. They value, listen to and respond to the point of view of others, knowing that this will often be different from their own.
- Are both practical and creative. Simple activities that make up the many aspects of children's daily lives, such as preparing meals and snacks, or making music and building kites, are viewed as a medium for building safe trusting relationships (Petrie *et al.* 2006).
- Share their space. While they are together, children and adults are seen as inhabiting the same life space, not as existing in separate, hierarchical domains (Petrie *et al.* 2009).
- Value teamwork. They actively seek the contribution of other people in supporting children and young people. In doing so they form good working relationships with parents and carers, other professionals and members of the local community.

Now that we have briefly introduced you to social pedagogy and how this might influence you as a beginning teacher, our focus turns to how you can use this approach to establish and maintain the synergy between care and education in your classroom. We present to you what is often referred to as the 'head, heart and hands' triad of social pedagogical practice.

Exploring the head, heart and hands of your practice

The humanistic nature of social pedagogy is often encapsulated in the expression 'head, heart, hands' (Eichsteller and Holthoff 2012). This phrase was first coined by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, a Swiss

educational reformer, in the late 18th century, to demonstrate how the whole person is involved in the art of teaching. Pestalozzi believed that the spirit of teaching came to light through the interaction of these three elements (Soertard 1994). From a social pedagogical perspective, the synergy of care and education in the classroom can be established and maintained through an art of ‘being’ with children as opposed to ‘doing’. In this way, the focus of practice is directed toward:

- The values and beliefs you hold relating to education (Head).
- How you express these values and beliefs (Heart).
- Activities that form part of your everyday practice (Hands).

Exploring these elements in more detail provides a useful framework to explain how we believe the social pedagogical approach can support you to establish and maintain the synergy of care and education in your classroom.

Head: The values and beliefs you hold relating to education

In *Radical Education and the Common School*, Fielding and Moss (2010) [AQ] explore the influential works of Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia approach, and his successor Carlina Rinaldi, a leading pedagogical thinker. Through this exploration, two fundamental questions relating to the values and beliefs you hold about education emerge: (1) What is your theory of learning? (2) What is your image of the child?

It is important to note the significance of these questions as your answers will inevitably shape and inform every aspect of your practice. The theory and image you hold will push you to behave in certain ways and influence your ability to understand and support children and young people in your class (Malaguzzi 1994). To support you with this we provide two opposing views for your consideration. These are presented to prompt reflection.

What is your theory of learning?

For some of you, education may be characterised by knowledge acquisition, league tables, performance and data recording. Here the role of the teacher is technical and focused on delivering the

curriculum; learning is seen as a form of linear progression en route to a prescribed goal and caring or pastoral duties become the responsibility of specialists (Wetz 2009).[AQ]

For others, education may be characterised by hypothesis testing, creativity and originality. Here learning is seen as ‘something which shoots in all directions with no beginning and no end, but always in *between*, and with opening towards other directions and places’ (Rinaldi 2006, p.8; original emphasis). In this manner the role of the teacher is as facilitator, and learning is seen as a process of co-construction (Fielding and Moss 2010).[AQ]

What is your image of the child?

Some of you may view the child as a passive receiver of knowledge, an ‘empty vessel’ into which you must ‘pour’ knowledge. For others, children are considered to be ‘rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and most of all, connected to adults and other children’ (Malaguzzi 1993, p.10).[AQ]

Drawing on the work of Cameron *et al.* (2015), we believe it is necessary to adopt a view that considers learning to be a genuine, interactive and collaborative process. Building trusting and secure relationships is key to this process, particularly for children and young people in the care. To emphasise this point, Cameron *et al.* (2015) call on the work of Nel Noddings, an American feminist, educationalist and philosopher. Noddings (1992), like many others, argues that the academic objectives of schools cannot be met unless teachers provide students with a caring and supportive classroom environment. The emphasis on care in education is further reflected in the second element of the triad, the heart.

Heart: How you express your values and beliefs

Pestalozzi presents the ‘heart’ as a second element intrinsic to the everyday practice of the educator. This element cuts to the core of human relationships. It acts as a ‘relational prompt’ for the educator faced with the complexity of knowing how their daily interpersonal behaviour impacts on the development of children and young people in their classroom. People are viewed as relational participants in their own unique context. Their perception, awareness and consciousness are intertwined with their relationship with language, people and

things (Heidegger 1996). Put simply, 'we are of the world, not merely in it' (Arendt 1971, p.22).

On entering a classroom, it does not take long to recognise this complex relational system at work. As the bell rings, the hustle and bustle of the school day begins. Individuals with their own unique history of experiences, thoughts and feelings come together to embrace a carefully planned schedule of events. Amongst this hive of activity children and adults share a multitude of interactions. It is the quality of these interactions that play a key role in children and young people's emotional development and educational progress.

Establishing and maintaining positive, encouraging and caring interactions can, at times, for a variety of reasons, be difficult for both children and adults alike. However, the importance of doing so is amplified through a growing body of literature exploring teacher–pupil relationships (e.g. Cemalcilar 2010; Furrer and Skinner 2003; Kennedy, Landor and Todd 2011; Schaps, Battistich and Solomon 2004). Findings suggest that the quality of this relationship influences not only the child's emotional and academic development, but also their sense of belonging to the wider school community. The psychological need to belong has long been recognised as one of our basic human needs (Maslow 1943). Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that establishing and maintaining positive social connections is so important to human beings that it is a fundamental psychological motivation, determining what we think, feel and do.

Teven and McCroskey (1997) suggest that it is difficult for a teacher to care for every child or young person at all times, particularly when teaching large classes. They propose that although it is most favourable for teachers to truly care about their student, it is the perception of caring that is critical. 'If a teacher cares deeply, but does not communicate that attribute, he or she might as well not care at all' (Teven and McCroskey 1997, p.167). The emphasis on how to communicate in such a manner is further reflected in the third element of the triad, the hands.

Hands: Activities that form part of your everyday practice

The final element of the triad gives consideration to the 'hands'. This element concerns itself with how you demonstrate your practice. Due

to the early experiences of children and young people in care, and the complexity of the difficulties they face as a result, they often need a bespoke relational approach to their education. The concept of an 'everyday expert' introduced by Cameron *et al.* (2015) is a helpful means to understanding what this might look like in the classroom. The 'everyday expert' fundamentally provides a model for what good parenting would provide. This can be achieved in the classroom through:

- Engaging in a 'common third' activity. The 'common third', a Danish concept central to social pedagogical practice, describes the act of engaging in an activity that connects both the adult and the child. An activity that creates mutual curiosity and provides an opportunity to plan, share ideas and enjoy the process of completing something together has the potential to become a 'common third' activity.
- Getting to know students, especially the 'hard to reach'. Listen to the children and young people speak to each other, the topics in which they choose to contribute; get to know their sense of humour, interests, passions and frustrations. Use this to support conversations with the child or young person. Official forums such as the school council may also provide a helpful platform for achieving this. Participation in forums can raise your awareness of the issues children and young people face.
- Encouraging and supporting children in care to access out-of-school learning. Participating in sports activities or clubs of interest provides an important platform for developing friendships and widening social networks. They also act as an important source of stability and consistency in the children's lives (Hollingworth 2012).
- Viewing education as a partnership (Prensky 2010). Plan learning opportunities that create a partnership between yourself and the child or young person or through a peer-to-peer partnership. Encourage children and young people to follow their passions. Allow them to research and find information through a variety of means, and share their thoughts and opinions using whatever technology is available to them.

- Making the world an exciting place to be. Use your personal experiences and connections to support and reinforce the children and young people's talents, hopes and aspirations. Open career pathways and make further education tangible.
- Valuing play. The benefits of play are not confined to the early years of development; joy and discovery can be at any age. Through play we learn how to refine concepts and test out theories, learn to regulate our emotions and interact with others. This is particularly relevant to those who may not have had this modelled in their formative years.
- Reflecting and questioning what challenging behaviour may be trying to communicate. Challenging behaviour can often leave both the child and the adult feeling frustrated, blameful and confused. As such, reflecting on the contributing factors to this behaviour and formulating a plan of support is important in maintaining the balance of care and education in the classroom.

The values and beliefs you hold relating to education influence the approach and execution of learning opportunities in your classroom. Similarly, what you plan for and demonstrate in your classroom can provide an interesting insight into the values and beliefs you hold relating to education. An explicit understanding of your position can help you immensely when faced with difficult, challenging or unfamiliar situations. Reflection is a method that seeks to support professionals in understanding situations with the intent of moving forward.

Reflecting as an essential part of everyday practice

There is a passing reference to reflection within the minimum requirements for trainee teachers working towards qualified teacher status (Teacher Standard four). This calls on trainees to 'reflect systematically on the effectiveness of lessons and approaches to learning' (DfE 2016). In order to establish and maintain the synergy between care and education within an accountability-driven curriculum, we believe the process of reflection warrants a standard of its own and should be underscored.

Critical reflection is regarded as a core part of a number of health and care professions such as nursing and psychology. Macfarlane *et al.* (2014), among others, argue that reflection is an essential part of practice integral to learning and development. Although it is often referred to as a key skill, we believe its real meaning and value is often misunderstood or lost, particularly in the context of the busy school.

Macfarlane *et al.* (2014) define reflection as:

- an ability to organise activities within your daily work
- a means of improving practice
- a way of connecting theory to practice.

It can be carried out on your own, within supervision, or as a team, and inevitably involves the cycle of experience–reflection–action (Cameron *et al.* 2015). There are many models and theoretical approaches to reflecting, such as Circles of Change (Macfarlane *et al.* 2014), Reflecting Teams (Hornstrup *et al.* 2008) and ThinkSpace (Swann and York 2011). A useful case study that highlights the impact of using a reflective approach to understand a complex case can be found in *Taking Action for Looked After Children in School: A Knowledge Exchange Programme* (Carroll and Cameron 2017).

The key to any model, according to Macfarlane *et al.* (2014), is to provide the professional with a scaffold or framework. To be most effective we believe the chosen model should provide the professional with the opportunity to examine issues beyond apparent constraints, construct new understandings and take action.

Reflection is valued as a way of making sense of what is going on in your classroom. As such, the ‘Reflection Points’ task at the end of this chapter provide you with the opportunity to reflect using the CLEAR model as presented by Hawkins and Shoet (2007).

Final thoughts

We are a miracle of complexity; billions of dynamic processes, both internal and external, are at play from the very beginning of our existence (Perry and Hambrick 2008). Our journey through life is both unique and malleable. We show the world our very own collection of strengths and vulnerabilities. While for many the journey through life is full of positive, healthy connections, others have been subject to

very difficult experiences, particularly children and young people on the edge of or in care.

It is important to note that, for children and young people in care, it is often the care and commitment of an individual teacher that makes the critical difference to their development (Cameron *et al.* 2015). We propose that social pedagogy in the classroom provides an ideal context for you to demonstrate this commitment, and to manage the inevitable tensions that come with being a teacher.

REFLECTION POINTS

Take some time (approximately 40 minutes) to identify a positive change you would like to see for one of the children or young people in your care. Use the CLEAR (Hawkins and Shohet 2007) supervision model (see below) to reflect on the challenges you face. An example to guide you through this process is provided in the right-hand column. This can be completed in isolation or with the support of a colleague.

CLEAR supervision model	Example
<p>Contract</p> <p>What outcome do you want for you, the student or the class?</p> <p>What do you want to focus on?</p> <p>What challenges are you facing?</p>	<p>I am on my second teaching placement and struggle with Kelsey, a particularly challenging student. I want to focus on behaviour management and want Kelsey to be able to conform to everyday expectations. Kelsey arrives late, is openly defiant, and seems determined to interrupt the flow of my class.</p>
<p>Listen</p> <p>Can you report what you see?</p> <p>Can you describe the emotions the situation evokes?</p> <p>How would others see the situation?</p>	<p>I know that Kelsey is in care and I have observed this behaviour in other contexts. I find Kelsey intimidating and difficult to deal with, the issues are low level, and she presents as beyond all of my strategies. Others might regard Kelsey as a hard-to-reach student and that I am a trainee who is bound to struggle with the complexity she presents.</p>
<p>Explore</p> <p>What does your intuition tell you about the situation?</p> <p>Are there any feelings you have not expressed?</p> <p>Can you think of different ways of tackling the situation?</p>	<p>I think there is something going on for Kelsey, and I'm not sure what her behaviour is trying to communicate. Perhaps she is fearful and that is why she appears angry and is intimidating. As a trainee I do not want to admit that I am struggling or that I am on edge when she is in the room. I need to share this with a colleague and consider how I can get alongside Kelsey.</p>

CLEAR supervision model	Example
Action What is your objective? What are the pros and cons of each possible strategy? What is the first step you need to take?	I want to form a relationship with Kelsey so that this translates into fewer difficulties in the classroom. This might not work as she is so defiant and dismissive, but I've got nothing to lose. I need to find out more about her and take advice on how to approach her. I wonder what her interests are and what works for children in care.
Review What have you decided to do next? How did what you plan work out? What feedback did you receive? What have you learned? What worked well and what could have been better?	I have spoken to her form teacher and have a better understanding of her home life and what she is interested in. She has advised that I approach Kelsey as being developmentally younger. I am going to try to support her to join the school council. The designated teacher for looked-after children has commended my insight, and agrees that getting to know her in a different context will help me to see things from her perspective, create a sense of us working together, and could improve how she is in the classroom.

Read more widely around the CLEAR approach (see Hawkins and Shohet 2007) and try to employ the CLEAR approach to help resolve future difficulties.

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