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Article

Older people and creativity: What can a social pedagogical perspective add to this work?

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Abstract

While for some older people longevity is a blessing, for others it is a curse. This article draws on the author's experience of working through the National Lottery Fund's Ageing Better programme with groups of older people in Leicester, many of whom are marginalised in terms both of society and under-represented in research. Four psychosocial challenges are identified from this experience: handling change; chronic loneliness; meaninglessness; and loss of a social role. The article explores the significance of creativity whether linked to the participatory arts or creative thinking and problem solving in addressing these challenges. It acknowledges the value of the participatory arts but highlights problems of accessibility and sustainability. The article explores briefly the concept of 'everyday creativity' and touches on the underexplored areas of how creativity can link to freeing up some rigidities in mindset and opening older people up to new possibilities. Finally, it examines the principles and practices of social pedagogy. Despite there being very few examples of practice with older people in the UK named as social pedagogy, it is suggested that the perspective is highly relevant to this area of work. Not only do the values and skills match what is needed, but adopting a social pedagogical perspective across the sector might enhance the self-confidence of staff and volunteers, the quality of the work, and provide a much-needed common language. Psychosocial knowledge and skills could, with benefit, be integrated.

Keywords: older age; creativity; everyday creativity; psychosocial challenges; psychoeducation; social pedagogy

Introduction

This article is intended as a think-piece rather than a scholarly treatise. In part this is because of the limited research on its key themes both separately and in particular in areas where they overlap:

- The lives of older people – in particular, older people in working-class and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities – and the way older people think about their lives;
- The actual and potential significance of creativity in their lives and in particular to their psychosocial challenges;
- Social pedagogical practice (as opposed to principles) with this particular demographic.

Our approach, though experimental, is informed by the field of creative problem solving:

The ability to take two or more concepts and put them together to form something new and to create something useful. (Onarheim, 2015, n.p.)

Our main concern is to explore how this relatively small pool of theory can illuminate the limited practice that already exists at the junction of these three domains and how it might guide future activity.

Across the article the author will draw on examples from the work of Leicester Ageing Together (LAT), an alliance of 16 voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisation partners, others in the Ageing Better community and reading from and conversations with academics.[1]

In this article we first comment on four main psychosocial challenges experienced by a significant minority among older people, a demographic on the margins of social pedagogy practice in UK. We then examine the notion of 'reclaiming creativity' as one means of supporting older people to address those challenges and helping them to lead bigger lives. Finally, we ask how and to what extent taking a social pedagogical perspective can add value to work on creativity for older people and explore how such a perspective can support, extend and challenge current practice.

Older age

UK society is conflicted about ageing. The dominant cultural narrative is of older age as a period of atrophy and decline. Humour highlights cognitive and physical impairments. There's a growing industry around the denial of ageing. Even in the UK's minority ethnic communities, among whom older age has long been more venerated than in the West, this narrative is weakening and being replaced by that of problem and burden.

There is a counter-narrative: how marvellous it is that we, on average, are living longer. Carstensen (2011) tells us that the decade 65–75 years of age is the second happiest of our lives (after mid-childhood) and that the dip thereafter is only minor.

The reality is that generalisations across such a wide age span – perhaps from 59 to 105 – are bound to stumble. Socio-economic inequality, however, is a strong influence on different experiences of ageing:

Huge inequalities exist. As we get older, the steady accumulation of a lifetime of advantages or disadvantages, together with differences such as in our ethnicity, in where we live, and in our income, results in vastly unequal levels of health, wealth, happiness and security in later life. And there are worrying trends for the future. For example, earlier progress made in reducing pensioner poverty is beginning to reverse. (Centre for Ageing Better, 2019, n.p.)

This article is a personal take on what we have found in one of the National Lottery Fund's (NLF) Ageing Better programme partnerships, LAT. Those 6,000+ older people with whom we have worked over four years are, of course, 6,000 individuals with individual pasts, individual strengths, individual challenges. But there are also similarities. They live essentially in five wards of Leicester, in working-class

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[1] LAT is a partnership of 16 VCS organisations in Leicester, England (Lead Partner: Vista), funded under the National Lottery Fund's (NLF) Ageing Better programme. It is one of 14 programmes across England funded by the NLF to address social isolation and loneliness among the 50+ population. Between 2015 and 2019 LAT worked with over 6,000 older people in disadvantaged communities, of whom 66 per cent were from BAME.

communities, 66 per cent belong to BAME communities. For purposes of shorthand, we will refer to them for the rest of this article as the LAT demographic.

A fundamental question for societies across the globe in a time when life expectation, though plateauing, has increased dramatically over time (Kings Fund, 2019) would seem to be: is longevity a blessing or curse? (Grattan and Scott, 2016).

For many, perhaps representing up to a quarter of the national population, the picture is not rosy. Failing health and limited income apart, our work with this cohort over the last four years has suggested that they are at risk of experiencing four intertwined what might be called psychosocial phenomena:[2]

a.   The challenges of handling change
b.   Chronic loneliness
c.   A sense of meaninglessness
d.   The loss of an acknowledged social role.

We will briefly expand on each before examining the significance of creativity in finding ways forward and why taking a social pedagogical perspective might play an important part in successful approaches.

The challenges of handling change

Contrary to the belief of many, older age is a period of substantial change. Change is often linked to the ability to handle loss. Loss of the structure and social setting of work; loss of any status that may have gone with it; of the recognition of wisdom acquired in the world of work; loss through bereavement of a partner or close family; the loss through death, illness or moving away of close friendships; the impairment and loss of physical and mental faculties; and the loss of independence which often accompany these with, for some, the major change of moving into residential care.

Most of these changes are externally imposed. Emotional and physical adjustment can be painful. The lack of a sense of being in charge, of having an 'inner locus of control', can produce substantial stress.

Recent research suggests that it is the way we *think* about and *process* these changes that is as significant as the material change itself (Robertson, 2019).

Chronic loneliness

Loneliness is part of the human condition. Cacioppo and Patrick (2008) compare it to hunger: hunger drives us to eat in order to assuage it; periodic loneliness reminds us of our essentially social nature and drives us to socialise. Chronic loneliness, however, can lead to a downward spiral and has been linked to physical health deterioration as well as depression and even dementia (Robertson, 2019). It is not confined to older people and, in older age, may not actually be increasing percentage-wise, merely rising in proportion to proportion of the population living longer.

Victor and Sullivan (2015) distinguish social loneliness (not enough friends as I would like) from emotional loneliness (not the quality of relationships that I would like). There are signs that well-run community projects can provide social interventions that alleviate social loneliness. But questions remain about how long-lived such benefits are and there is limited evidence of their impact on emotional loneliness.

A particular phenomenon is those elders who have self-isolated, who have become emotionally stuck, have lost the self-confidence to go out and engage with others, even if physically capable of doing so, because of fear of humiliation, of rejection or of lacking the skills to connect. They teeter on the edge of narrative foreclosure (Freeman, 2011).

There is a small but growing interest in the need to support people with these anxieties to change their mindset, to challenge their own patterns of rumination on past 'failures' and self-blame.

Meaninglessness

Christine is a stalwart of recent community developments on one of the white working-class estates where LAT runs. Her involvements, she says, have helped her move from the life of a bag lady, recently

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[2]Pertaining to the psychological development of the individual in relation to his or her social environment.

discharged from the mental health system, sofa surfing for 18 months, to reclaim those skills and satisfactions as an informal community activist she practised as a young mum. The Leicester City Football Club Memorabilia Team were coming to run a session at the local WEA-run pop-up café in the community centre. Christine thought her older brother might enjoy it and rang him to say so. 'That might be good,' he said. 'What time should I be there?' 'I'll be there at 9.30 am,' said Christine. There was silence at the end of the phone. Then her brother said: 'Oh, I couldn't do that. We don't get up till 11 am because if we do the day is too long.'

This reaction is not uncommon. Researchers understand it as 'a tangle of inability and unwillingness to connect to one's actual life' (van Wijngaarden et al., 2015, p. 257). Many older people experience an enduring meaninglessness and pointlessness which erodes the spirit. After a lifetime of engagement in Leicester's low-wage/low-skill economy in jobs with limited stimulation, retirement sets them free into a structureless desert. Neither culturally supported nor with the energy or money to look beyond keeping a roof over their family's head and food on the table, self-actualisation has not been high on their agenda (Lamont, 2000). As Robertson (2019) argues:

> The lack of a strong sense of purpose can feed the (self-)exclusion of older people from many forms of social engagement. Without a purpose in life it is very difficult to have the motivation and self-confidence to engage with others, and this deficit can therefore precipitate and sustain a negative cycle of isolation. (p. 148)

Lack of a social role

We have the phenomenon of growing numbers of older people in our communities, many with unrealised social skills and emotional wisdom (Carstensen, 2011), many, too, eager to 'give something back' but for whom society has no clear social role. Explanations include:

- The marginalisation of 'community' in the welfare state. Beveridge (1948, quoted in Cottam, 2018) avowed in a lesser known report of 1948 that he had made a big mistake in leaving individuals and communities out of his thinking.
- National and local government institutions have taken a long time to wake up to the challenges and potential of an ageing society. In times of severely reduced funding, the former think themselves only able to be interested if the older person's physical and mental health issues are acute and causes severe damage to themselves or others.
- Ageism feeds the image that older people are 'past it' and unable to contribute. Internalised ageism, by which older people internalise this oppressive attitude and act it out as if it were true, leads older people themselves to expect little of themselves and to say 'I'm too old to . . . I can't'. The result is a substantial waste of human resource and spirit. A grouping that could make a major contribution to the resolution of many social problems: the need for community glue, for listening skills and emotional wisdom; the need for community organising – instead becomes a net consumer of already diminishing resources.

Grandparents across all ethnic groupings are seen by governments – and often by adult children – as a source of cheap childcare (leading often to exhaustion and additional problems within the family) rather than the active listeners, the informal educators, the social contributors that, with effective support and training, they could become.

What is the significance of 'creativity' to addressing these psychosocial challenges?

In order to clear some ground, we first touch on responses to a few basic questions, explored in the context of the LAT demographic.

What do we mean by creativity?

Many find themselves semantically confused around the words creativity, art, the arts and culture. Put these in a matrix with passive/active, consumer/participant, high or elite/popular and the picture gets

even more confused. Here, we focus on definitions of creativity which seem to resonate with the lives of the LAT demographic:

> Simply put, creativity involves transforming your ideas, imagination, and dreams into reality. When you're being creative, you can see the hidden patterns, make connections between things that aren't normally related, and come up with new ideas. (Ora Lobell, 2018, n.p.)

This can relate as much to helping Enid find ways to restore her relationship with her long-estranged sister as it does to the group exercise between a group of Year 5 primary pupils and residents of a care home in designing and implementing a wall hanging for the hallway.

> Creativity is the process of bringing something new into being. Creativity requires passion and commitment. It brings to our awareness what was previously hidden and points to new life. The experience is one of heightened consciousness: ecstasy. (May, 1975)

Similarly, a group of users of the pop-up café on one of the working-class estates in Leicester being supported to write a group poem about what the café means to them – and the surprise and delight in the final product. Or the processes which lead to Tahira's painting of her Pakistani home (see Box 2).

We hold to a wide definition of creativity:

> Creativity is not a magical force or an uncontrollable entity. *Creativity is not exclusively attached to artistry*. Creativity is problem solving with relevance and novelty, nothing more, nothing less. (Mumaw, 2012, n.p., author's emphasis)

...and in the world of the LAT demographic where craft is more immediately accessible than art. Ellen Dissanayake has suggested that there is an inherent pleasure in making. She calls this *joie de faire* (like *joie de vivre*) to indicate there is something important, even urgent, to be said about the sheer enjoyment of making something exist that did not exist before, of using one's own agency, dexterity, feelings and judgement to mould, touch, form, hold and craft physical material (Dissanayake, 2000).

And we are particularly attracted to the concept of everyday creativity (see Box 1).

Box 1. Everyday creativity.

> In recent years there have been attempts to 'democratise culture', to make the arts more accessible and creative expression more a part of our day-to-day lives. Siccama (2015) defines everyday creativity as:
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> > a process in which you may do every day and not realize it. It's those small ideas and 'ah-ha' moments that enrich and enhance our lives . . . Little 'c' creativity is the creativity that may be stimulated from your daily interactions, the conversations you have, the sights you see, the people you meet, the big and small problems you solve on a daily basis. (n.p.)
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> In its early years, LAT partnered with 64 Million Artists (64MA), a leader in this movement. One of their main projects is the January Challenge (64MA, 2019). Every day for 31 days participants (for free) receive an email featuring a challenge designed to be fun, to help them see their world differently, and which is completable in 10–15 minutes using resources found in most households. In January 2019, its fourth year of operation, over 15,000 people took part, including schools and an NHS Trust, as well as individuals aged from 12 to 75+. In an independent evaluation, 95 per cent said that taking part had had a positive effect on their mental wellbeing. Challenges included the art-related tasks such as: 'make a piece of art out of the stuff from your drawers' or 'write a poem about January in a style of your choosing in 10 minutes'. Others are wider: 'sketch a map of the world and draw links you have with other countries: favourite foods, where relatives live, travel dreams etc.', 'ice some pre-made buns with symbols which make you happy' or 'go for a walk and pick up six items and make them into a collage'. In addition to this DO part of the challenge, participants are encouraged to THINK – note the thoughts and feelings that came up while doing it – and finally SHARE the DO and THINK with others, online, on a family or work WhatsApp group, with grandchildren or with a neighbour. On 64MA's work with LAT, the Kings College, London, evaluation writes: 'Rather than thinking in terms of "artists and organisations" developing projects with older people, it treats older people as artists already' (Gross, 2018, p. 15).
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> Jo Hunter and David Micklem, the co-founders of 64MA, were commissioned by the Arts Council England to write a report on everyday creativity (64MA, 2018). This is influencing strategy.

Is everyone creative?

The humanists believe that we are all born creative (Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1961; Jackins, 1965). Neuroscientists say their science backs this up. From the early months of life the baby's experiments light up areas of both hemispheres of the brain (Skillicorn, 2014). Numerous studies have shown that we are at our most creative in the pre-school years but that we have lost this by late teens (Land and Jarman, 1992; Onarheim, 2015). Postman and Weingartner (1971) explained this by:

- The toddler being uninhibited by too much knowledge
- The older child coming into contact with rules and being rewarded for finding 'the right answers'
- Schools as cultures of criticism and rebuke.

Add to this the cultural oppression of this generation of older working-class and BAME people, exposed to little creative thinking and activity even in their schooldays and limited support for originality. Most say they were socialised into a culture of keeping their head down and not making mistakes. Maslow (1968) has suggested that social constraints, normative expectations, and peer pressure act as barriers to creative expression and that a person whose behaviour is produced by habit and limited by fear cannot be creative.

Do we lose creativity in older age? Again, the research suggests not highlighting similarities between the ageing brain and the creative brain:

> The ageing brain is characterised by a broadened rather than focused state of attention. This state of attention allows the individual to have disparate bits of information in mind at the same time. Combining remote bits of information is the hallmark of the creative idea. (Carson, 2009, n.p.)

The LAT demographic will have experienced layer upon layer of closing down. However, on a more optimistic note, neuroscience also suggests that the weakening of the temporal lobes in older age can decrease self-consciousness and self-criticism, allowing people to take more risks, to 'show themselves up' in pursuit of fun and 'having a go'. Given this, Carson (2009) takes out the metaphorical whip:

> I suggest that we change our expectations of the elderly. Instead of the ageing problem we should expect our seniors to be productive throughout the lifespan. (n.p.)

Can we reclaim creativity?

Neuroscience again suggests we can (Carson, 2009; Skillicorn, 2014).

There is a concrete set of methods and environmental factors that can be used to enhance your imagination, and by optimising these variables your creativity naturally increases. Unfortunately, these tools are rarely presented in a formalised way. As a result, creativity appears to most people to be something magical rather than the natural result of a clear set of processes and conditions (Seelig, 2012).

There are techniques: the cultivation of curiosity; the importance of incubation or mulling; the ability to handle two concepts in apparent tension; the need constantly to exercise the muscle of creativity (see Box 1). But there is also the practice of celebrating one's life, re-evaluating the past and separating oneself from extraneous baggage, as LAT has been doing with biographical work: Your Story Counts, Guided Autobiography and Life Review.

> Those who age best are those who travel lightest, who can jettison the prescriptive ideas they've clung to at any one stage of their life when they find them ill-suited to another. A certain suppleness of spirit is needed. (Karpf, 2014, p. 23)

So, having posited a broad concept of creativity, suggested that all human beings are inherently creative and that although our creativity can be drummed out of us, we can reclaim it even at the end of our lives, we now feel that 'older people and the arts' can be seen in a clearer context.

We appreciate that what most people understand by 'creativity' is related to the arts. Very few of the LAT demographic engage with live performance arts: theatre, opera, concert music, galleries. Indeed, the

Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value (2015, n.p.) found that, 'despite the good work of funded arts organisations, regular audience attendees remained at 8% of the population.'

For the older generation of the white working class the general opinion is 'it's not what we do' – they had very limited experience at school and few post-school opportunities and it was culturally a low priority. For some BAME communities things are different. Perhaps because there is less of a divide between high and popular culture in these communities, perhaps because cultural performances are so central to preserving a sense of cultural identity, these will still attract substantial numbers of the LAT demographic: 400 regularly attend cultural events run by one of LAT's partners. It might be that initiatives such as Age-Friendly Cultural Champions (Manchester City Council, 2019) might open up pathways.

The participatory arts are, however, more generally popular: singing – whether traditional 'community singing', community choirs or even karaoke – practical arts sessions, poetry groups, community theatre, community dance, storytelling, representational arts and a number of forms of crafts. There is no doubt that participation here can bring really important benefits: fun, a vehicle for developing social relationships, a means of self-expression, a sense of individual or collective achievement and self-efficacy – all addressing in some way the four psychosocial challenges mentioned earlier. In addition:

> Through the arts, we can enjoy ourselves in the present, we can deal with our experience in our own time and our own way. Art is flexible. It stretches our imaginations, our memories and our experience. It addresses our feelings. It gives us confidence and skills. It offers us companions if we want them. It makes new people of us and also reminds us who we are and have been. (Frances, 1999, p. 65)

There is growing evidence of the mental and physical health benefits for older people from engagement with the arts. In February 2017, Age UK published an index of the factors influencing wellbeing in later life. Based on the responses of 15,000 people aged 60+, it was found that participation in creative and cultural activities made the highest overall contribution to wellbeing in later life (Age UK, 2017). There are more specific links too: for example between dance and falls prevention (more popular than NHS falls prevention programmes and at a reduced cost) (Age UK, 2017). And there is an accumulating body of evidence suggesting that participatory arts activity in care homes also makes economic sense, reducing medication costs, improving ratings and leading to higher staff satisfaction and performance (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2019).

This is compelling and we have two main comments. The first concerns access. How accessible is such provision to the LAT demographic who

- are not formally vulnerable enough to access it through the NHS or the dwindling number of day centres where the costs of engaging artist leaders is small relative to their albeit overstretched budgets;
- don't access it through community provision of which the funding is being decimated;
- or don't feel motivated to prioritise paying it for it themselves at anything like full cost recovery?[3]

While continuing to press for more community arts and health funding, another way forward is to support the development of paid or voluntary leaders already working with the demographic – community workers, health professionals, activities co-ordinators in residential homes – to develop arts leadership skills. Many will already have a good relationship with the older people using their services and such a relationship is a prerequisite for the trust and safety to show oneself as being vulnerable and open oneself up to new possibilities. We see such capacity building as essential to the sustainability of these approaches in individual communities. Those we work with are frustrated by short-term provision which stays an ever-shorter time and then 'moves on to spread the resources around'.

The second comment concerns how we build on any successful experience in the participatory arts (and in other forms of creative activity) that older people may have had. Such experience is likely to

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[3]Some will be blunt: 'if they want it they'll pay for it and to think otherwise is excessively patronising and nannying.' Apparently a fair point? Except that many of the LAT demographic have severely limited discretionary income and face cultural constraints in how they spend what they have. As a society how do we develop rational policies to ensure equality of access to lifelong learning and creative activity?

have, however slightly, jiggled around with some rigidities of thought, opened up insights into their own behaviour and that of others, and prompted some small or large questions about 'who am I?' and 'who do I want to become?' While such cracks and openings sometimes appear to be prompted simply by the activity, the impact may well be more far-reaching if local leadership has the confidence and skills to help through reflection, the sharing of experience and the introduction of simple thinking techniques to enhance creative thinking and problem solving. Success here would support and extend further individual and collective exploration of how we think about ourselves and others and how we might become more compassionate to ourselves and more confident in taking greater charge of our lives.

Some might be wary: 'do you mean therapy?' Not only are the LAT demographic a long way away from willingly engaging in therapy, but LAT staff are not therapists. There is an important distinction between therapy and engaging with something that is therapeutic. LAT staff are essentially community educators and working on the edges of psychoeducation. Some LAT work, through one-to-one and group conversations with older people and through the design and execution of some projects, has tested this understanding with promising results, but we are at the beginning of this journey. We need greater understanding as well as greater skill and confidence to work systematically and effectively in this area.

What value does taking a social pedagogical perspective add to the potential of work with older people on creativity in addressing psychosocial challenges?

Some of the abovementioned skills are totally congruent with the principles and practices of social pedagogy. The outcome agenda of social pedagogy – wellbeing, learning and growth[4] – is precisely what is needed to counter the hegemonic belief that older people's wellbeing is of little consequence (the cynic would say because they are no longer productive in the workplace), there is no use in learning in older age, and older people are in physical and mental decline.

But it is the concept of *Haltung* (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011) that is so fundamental a contradiction to the internalised oppression of the LAT demographic: the belief that, in each of us, there is a diamond, often incrustation, but there. And that this can be reclaimed through relationships: the social pedagogue with the whole older person in their family, group, and community context; of the older person's relationship with themselves; and the importance of the quality of relationships within the older person's network. Through this focus on relationships, through being given genuine and regular attention and well listened to, cracks can appear in the incrustation and rigidities, and the individual can reclaim their sense of self, and self-confidence, and can rediscover the joy of human connection.

The main vehicle for these relationships is the 'common third', whether that might be the care assistant co-creating a story with the older person while administering personal care, the case study of Tahira in Box 2, the facilitation of the writing of a collective poem about what the pop-up café means to the group, or the intergenerational project between Year 5s and the care home residents, designing and creating a wall hanging for the central lobby. The balance of head, hands and heart is needed both in the facilitator as well as the group process.

In addition, social pedagogy's strong commitment to social justice and addressing structural inequalities is reflected in the need to understand the impact on older people, particularly those from working-class and BAME communities, particularly of health inequalities and oppressive cultural forces. We have seen above how racism, sexism, classism and ageism – and also resultant internalised oppression – fashion limitations to creativity and to many older people leading bigger lives. Social pedagogy's parallel commitment to community development is germane in actively addressing the challenges of social justice and structural inequality: to supporting in this case older people to play a part in the development of their own families, perhaps as a grandparent (see Box 2) or emotionally wise elder, and in their neighbourhood; to become 'a creator not consumer'. As Laura Carstensen's (2011) father said:

> Let's stop talking all the time about how to save the old folks. Instead let's talk of how the old folks can help to save us all. (n.p.)

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[4]See the website of the Social Pedagogy Professional Association, http://sppa-uk.org/.

Tahira was struggling. The group had been asked by Fawzia, the tutor, to draw 'a favourite place' and she was trying to draw the first house she remembered in rural Pakistan. But it wasn't going well. As she tried, her mind was full of self-criticism. 'You can't draw', 'Stop wasting your time' was escalating as her frustration grew into the more all-embracing 'You can't do anything well', 'Here we go again, dreams which will never be fulfilled'. She found herself in floods of tears. Fawzia responded empathetically: 'Yes, I appreciate it's really upsetting when you can't quite express yourself how you'd like to. Tell us a little more about how much that house meant to you.' The dialogue developed in the group about feelings raised by their 'favourite place' and, looking back six months later, Fawzia appreciated that that was when the mutual support now experienced throughout the group really made a step change. Over the weeks Fawzia introduced Tahira and others to simple drawing techniques but at the same time to ideas such as 'the inner critic', the value in identifying negative thinking patterns and consciously replacing them with positive ones linked to what had in fact gone much better in their lives and systematically reinforcing these and creating new neural pathways 'even at our age!'. Tahira eventually produced a drawing of her favourite place that satisfied her – but the icing on the cake was her reporting later in the year that she had told her grandchild about how we could stop our negative thinking and replace it with positive thoughts – and they were working on it together!

Important, too, is the emphasis placed by social pedagogy on reflective practice, on teamwork, on building collective theory with the help of rigorous learning from experience and on asking what we can learn from the literature from several relevant disciplines: psychology, sociology, lifelong learning: these can make for stronger practice in a field hitherto dominated by action but little analysis.

So the principles and practices of social pedagogy will resonate with many working with older people in communities. We believe that there is an additional perspective that it will be important to explore in future: the psychosocial. We are not advocating that social pedagogues should become therapists. However, greater understanding of how psychoeducational and cognitive behavioural approaches might help older people to re-evaluate and release themselves from thought patterns which prevent them from flourishing would be an important and congruent addition to the social pedagogic toolbox.

The social pedagogical perspective can, therefore, underpin, extend and challenge current practice in creative work with older people which seeks to address the four challenges identified in the Introduction. But it also offers added value to a more co-ordinated and coherent strategy in a sector currently fragmented and under-theorised. The principles and practice offer a common and inclusive language to those working with older people in other services: the National Health Services, day centres, housing associations and domiciliary and residential care, as well as community-orientated VCS organisations. This can not only help inter-organisational and interdisciplinary communication, but can also lead to greater professional self-confidence in a disparate field.

And finally, a more formal opportunity. UK government policy is currently promoting social prescribing as a means of finding community-based solutions to the needs of those 20 per cent who attend GP surgeries with non-medical symptoms. This opens a door for a social pedagogy (enhanced to include psychosocial approaches) to make a substantial contribution.

Declarations and conflict of interests

The author's daughter, Jo Hunter, is the co-founder of 64 Million Artists, the initiator of the January Challenge, co-author of *Cultural Democracy in Practice* and cited in the Everyday Creativity case study.

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