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Research article

## A human approach to restructuring the education system: why schools in England need social pedagogy

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## Abstract

In this article, we contend that the current schools' system in England needs to be carefully reconsidered if we are to offer opportunities for success (in its broadest sense) to those whom our current, technocratic education system excludes. With a focus on social pedagogy and human-centred learning systems, we argue that continued modifications to the existing education system are no longer sufficient and that an ideology overhaul is needed before any significant positive progress can be made. To this end, we suggest various ways that schools might work towards developing healthier and more inclusive communities, built on the key social pedagogical foundations of positive relationships, democracy, inclusion, creativity and pedagogical love. We also make recommendations for an education system in which the teacher, as a highly trained professional, can enjoy a professional autonomy commensurate with their level of qualification. Finally, we dispel some of the myths that have prevented radical, community-focused change to date.

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**Keywords** technocratic education; inequality; social pedagogy; human-centred learning systems; relationships; professional love

## Introduction

By the start of the twentieth century, academic researchers began to outline the concerning direction that the education system in England was taking. Harris and Ranson (2005) referred to teachers' diminishing autonomy in an education system built on 'the twin pillars of accountability (inspection, test scores, league tables) and standards (target setting, monitoring, raising achievement plans)' (p. 573). Meanwhile Ball (2006), referring to the increasingly outcomes-driven culture of education, stated: 'Ethical reflection is rendered obsolete in the process for goal attainment, performance improvement and budget maximisations ... Value replaces values, except where it can be shown that values add value' (p. 11).

Over time, successive English governments have constructed an educational production line, which, despite the occasional government ministers' nod towards inclusion and diversity, is restrictive and divisive. There are those students lucky enough to have access to all the components necessary to produce a perfectly formed (and suitably accredited) graduate, and then there are 'seconds', those who do not have a fighting chance because they are missing one of the components needed. An obvious example of this is wealth.

In a research report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies (Farquharson et al., 2022) there was overwhelming evidence that the education system in England continues to leave students from a poorer background behind, with 'inequalities, such as the disadvantage gap at GCSE ... barely changed over the last 20 years' (n.p.). It was noted that the Covid-19 pandemic had particularly impacted on the education of poorer children in primary schools. Bridget Phillipson, the Shadow Education Secretary, summarised that: '12 years of Conservative governments have utterly failed to tackle inequalities across the education system', resulting in a system that was 'holding back young people's opportunities and life chances' (Weale, 2022, n.p.). It is only fair to say that our previous, neoliberal government played their own small, but significant part in the steady narrowing of opportunities for children who do not fit the privileged, white, middle-class mould, too.

When Solvason et al. (2020) interviewed leaders at maintained nursery schools located in areas of deprivation, all of them shared how, as a result of persistent cuts in funding, they were now struggling to function. Most nurseries had resorted to consistent fundraising to provide basic necessities for the children, and many of the staff needed to sustain a second form of paid employment to reach a living wage. They persevered because they felt a moral obligation towards those families with whom they worked, helping them through poverty, homelessness and mental health issues, as other local government, social welfare systems disappeared. More recent, unpublished research by the authors reported school teaching assistants accessing food banks intended for the struggling families at a school during the Covid-19 pandemic. When Ambrose (2022) spoke with The Childhood Trust's chief executive, Laurence Guinness, he likened 'the government's response to the cost-of-living crisis [post-Covid-19] ... to a sticking plaster on the gaping wound of growing inequality' (n.p.). Dorling (2018) referred to the inequity in Britain as a ticking time bomb. There is a sense of crisis looming, and it is our younger generations, having already experienced such a significant upheaval in their lives during the pandemic, who will continue to bear the brunt of this deprivation.

The current landscape in England is not an attractive one; mental health is in decline (House of Commons Library, 2021), while Brexit has caused food and energy bills to soar (Bakker et al., 2022). Of course, we also share the worldwide concerns of climate emergency, further pandemics, an ageing population, increasing polarisation and threats to democracy. It would be easy at this point to imagine that our education, and other social systems, are beyond repair, and simply throw our hands up in defeat. Or we could propose solutions for an imagined better future. A future that is 'human-centered ... involving all players in the system to be active co-creators in a joint effort' (Rautiainen and Tyrvaïnen, 2021, n.p.).

Stobbs (2023) refers to the 'great pause' that the pandemic affected, encouraging us to consider what was really of value, an 'opportunity to consider what we want in the future' (p. 2). Cameron and

Moss (2020) explain how, 'Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew' and emphasise how, considering the failures of so many 'innovative' approaches implemented to boost our academic success in the past, 'Nothing could be worse than a return to normality' (p. xvi). We know that our traditional processes do not work and at this point should take heed of innovative ways of working, such as the Human Learning Systems concept developed by Lowe and Plimmer (2019). We should also 'recognise people's humanity – that human beings are intrinsically connected to others in a complex bio-psycho-social/political system' (Rautiainen and Tyrvaainen, 2021, n.p.). The answers lie in people, not processes or systems.

## The framework for this discussion

For the reasons stated above, in this article our aim is to move beyond a critique of the current education system in England, to calling (with something of desperation in our voices) for action. That action, we argue, would be best propelled by the underpinning values of social pedagogy. We approach this discussion from our positions as teacher educators in higher education, who are responsible for equipping future practitioners to nurture the hearts and minds of the very young – a task that is performed within an educational context where test scores, inspections and accountability weigh heavily on teaching professionals. From this viewpoint we consider the potential for positive change, should some of the principles of social pedagogy be used to underpin teacher development in England. Azumah-Dennis (2023) argues that through imagination we think about 'what is and what is not desirable for ourselves, for others, for our collective and individual democratic body and citizenship' (p. 125). We imagine what our education system *could* be like, were we to underpin it with people-centred values, and realign it with social pedagogical concepts and practices in their widest sense. Because of this we offer you a sample, a mere *hors d'oeuvre* of ideologies, that we do not have capacity to explore fully here – but that we hope might spike your own curiosity to investigate further and to imagine different education futures for our youngest and most vulnerable children.

Before we begin, let us first acknowledge that social pedagogy already exists within education across the globe (Bourn, 2015). We are by no means suggesting that this is something new – social pedagogues already enrich the education experience of many children; yet they remain relatively unrecognised in England. Below we explore a selection of key social pedagogical thoughts (Charfe and Gardner, 2019) that might move us to act creatively and equitably towards a more human-centred approach to education in England.

## Less troubleshooting, more relationship building

The popularity of the behaviourist approach to 'managing' children's behaviour in schools has held fast since its emergence in the early twentieth century, with Skinner (1938) and Watson (1924) being two early advocates. This approach proposes that human behaviour can be learned and controlled by reinforcing rules and applying sanctions and rewards as required. Indeed, in England this approach is still endorsed by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). In their guidance report to schools, updated in 2022, the regulating body advises that appropriate rewards include: 'verbal praise ... certificates, prize ceremonies ... and positions of responsibility, such as prefect status' (Department for Education [DfE], 2022, p. 16). And that punishments should include: 'sanctions ... removing a pupil from a lesson ... and in the most serious of circumstances, permanent exclusion' (DfE, 2022, pp. 16–17). The 126-page document is deceptively simplistic in its tone, implying that 'managing children's behaviour' is a linear process that can be achieved by following prescribed steps. This is consistent with Foucault's (1977) position that schools maintain social order by use of assessment, categorisation, surveillance, punishment and reward.

The glaring limitation of this approach is that it does not consider the reasons *why* children misbehave. Not looking past the behaviour and only taking punitive action, such as exclusion, does nothing to support children's growth or development. The use of the social pedagogical concept of lifeworld orientation, developed by Thiersch in the late 1970s, proposes that when working with children and families a holistic approach to understanding their world from their perspective should be adopted (see Jacaranda, 2015). This means considering 'a person's personality, strengths, likes, dislikes, their extended family and friends, culture, religion, place of upbringing and significant events in their lives'

(Jacaranda, 2015, p. 43). This comprehensive list touches on individual identity, physical characteristics, personal and community goals, beliefs and perceived future and current roles. The multiplicity of factors that drive individual behaviour can easily be ignored by adults in the interests of facilitating easy classroom management, and well-intentioned interventions can 'too easily be overtaken by political agendas seeking simplistic answers to complex social issues' (McDowall Clark, 2017, p. 77). Children who are excluded from school become someone else's problem.

As has already been established, schools in England operate against a backdrop of performance accountability, pressurising head teachers to seek quick solutions, and the longer-term well-being of pupils can sometimes fall by the wayside. It is far easier for school systems to perpetuate sameness than to consider the more disruptive nature of difference (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). In a more human-centred approach to children's behaviour, considered approaches, such as restorative justice and conferencing, can offer means to build relationships and support the development of genuine change in individuals. Cameron and Thorsborne (1999) suggest that restorative justice focuses on reparation, problem-solving and making changes to the systems that engender harm, while also focusing on compassion and rehabilitation (Lustick, 2021). Harold and Corcoran (2013) explain how this approach entwines the development of behavioural expectations with pastoral care (p. 48). This alternative approach does not discount the possibility of sanctions, but these are not applied as a one-size-fits-all approach; rather they are negotiated within a relationship, 'because complex challenges are context-specific' (Rautiainen and Tyrvaïnen, 2021, n.p.). This more agile and authentic stance places relationships, rather than data, at its core and encourages us to function as supportive and interactive communities (Cliffe and Solvason, 2022).

## Let us rethink our approach to democracy and inclusion in schools

At the ideological core of the current English curriculum is individualism. The focus on the 'unique child' as an overarching principle of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2021), for example, could easily be interpreted as one of singularity: 'we are on our own; no one owes us a living'. Somewhat ironically, despite the emphasis on the 'unique child', the education system in England has increasingly become a 'conveyor belt' with a 'lack of individualisation' that offers no real 'acknowledgement of individual differences' (Buckler, 2021, p. 72). In fact, Anderberg (2020) argues that rather than fulfilling the more democratic aim of promoting lifelong learning and inclusion, English schools are 'exacerbating segregation, differentiation and exclusion' (p. 12). Children who conform to the concept of the 'ideal student' in English education – those with educated parents who fully uphold the values of the schools system; those who are able, but also placid and docile, waiting to be filled with the prescribed knowledge (that they are willing to regurgitate onto exam papers); those who fully subscribe to the government's view of educational success and do not wander from the path into creativity or vocational training (Cornish, 2023) – those are the children who the English education system 'sees', and those are the children primed to succeed.

Social pedagogy starts from a different place, contending 'that education takes place primarily for the society or community' not for individual success (Hämäläinen, 2012, p. 99, citing Salo, 1952). And a community is, by its very nature, made up of diversely talented individuals who fulfil the disparate needs of that community. There is not regulation of skill development but a complementarity. Individualism does not mean to compete for the same, but to develop one's own strengths and skillset for the benefit of all. Such a culture is similar to *Ubuntu*, 'a South African term with many definitions but all based upon the idea of a shared humanity, whereby we sustain one another and take responsibility for one another's mistakes' (Solvason and Kington, 2019, p. 9). The premise of such an approach is bidirectional: education can create inclusive communities, which in turn fosters inclusive individuals; and inclusive individuals form inclusive communities. As families become increasingly transient and communities less religious, schools (by default) need to pick up the wider role previously undertaken by the extended family, community and church. As Nikolaou et al. (2017) explain: 'the task of the teacher and the school is also to create citizens and help them integrate to the community with the prospect of a properly functioning society' (p. 6). Our hope is for English schools to widen their scope to include the key *social* pedagogical focus of 'bringing up children' rather than simply filling them with knowledge; and by doing so to provide diverse education opportunities that embrace "'education" in the broadest sense of that word' (Petrie et al., 2009, p. 3).

Jacaranda (2015) proposes that through adopting a reflective lens and drawing on the social pedagogical concept of 'lifeworld orientation' (p. 43), teachers can root the child's interest in their own social and political context. Rather than the current, formulaic approach to curriculum delivery, we call for more holistic activities in schools 'which are gentler than those of the formal education system and more adaptable to the cognitive, meta-cognitive and social characteristics of young children and adolescents' (Kyridis et al., 2015, p. 31). If we are to model democratic values we must include the voices of all children, and value their interests. Schools should be centres of respectful debate, challenge and imagining of new possibilities; for example, through storytelling, art and other creative media, providing opportunities for empowerment. For schools to become safe spaces for students who are cohabiting the same culture, there should be opportunity to interrogate one another's unexamined values and assumptions. For teachers to facilitate 'the possibility for students to understand who they are in ways that are different from identities informed by the dominant culture' (Simon, 1987, p. 378). For them to see alternative ways of being. As Popkewitz (2008) suggests, when we make the child, we make society.

## A caring approach to teaching

Parker (2020) explains that a common characteristic of young people who have gained adverse childhood experiences is a reluctance to trust others, often accompanied by feelings of anxiety. During the pandemic, cases of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression significantly increased in children (Office for Health Improvement Disparities, 2022). The World Health Organization (2022) defined the need to better support the current mental health crisis as 'indisputable and urgent'. It was already recognised that when teaching is not pitched within the correct boundaries of emotional safety, no progress can be made as all energies are deployed in controlling anxiety (more can be found about Jacaranda's 2015 model of the 'Learning Zone' in Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2017); however, post-pandemic this has become even more crucial. Referring to Barton's (2021) concept of 'psychological safety' (p. 7), Stobbs (2023) explains it this way:

To learn and develop we must leave the safety of our comfort zone and venture into the unfamiliar learning zone where we accept new challenges. If the nature of the challenge becomes overwhelming, the anxiety we experience drains our energy resources, leaving nothing in reserve for learning and we are no longer able to process information. (p. 18)

Human-centred learning systems (Lowe and Plimmer, 2019) have trust at their heart, and one way of developing this in an education environment is through creative activity, taking the 'Common Third' approach (Parker, 2020). This approach focuses on activities that become meaningful when shared, where there is no right or wrong answer and where children can experience belonging and deep involvement, particularly when they occur in their community; for example, working to create a community garden or starting a running group. Creative pursuits such as art, drama, storytelling, music, dance and visual arts are established media for providing safe expression of unconscious emotions in trauma-experienced children, and the merits of creative therapy are widely acknowledged (see, for example, Moula, 2021, and Sassen, 2012). In these activities children are not judged on their academic performance and they 'allow the young person to move on from being stuck, towards personal development through purposeful engagement' (Parker, 2020, p. 7). Social pedagogy is not intended to replace professional support but such approaches can develop the vital aspect of trust.

Creativity and Common Third activities also have the potential to inspire possibilities beyond the 'here and now' of specific contexts. Vygotsky (2004) reasons that everything that has been created was imagined first. Creativity provides children opportunities for re-imagining an alternative future. If we do not provide children opportunities to believe that they can transform their own future, we will continue to see a continuum ranging from schoolchildren who rebel and resist through acts of defiance, through to passive children tolerating school until they can escape through the gates at the end of the day.

The climate emergency has also contributed to creating an urgency to re-evaluate curriculum content. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2021) recently called for schools to adapt teaching round a 'Learning Compass 2030', to help children navigate their way to the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. A social-pedagogical approach urges creative, imaginative responses to current crises that can prepare children for an uncertain future. Common Third activities can develop a shared understanding of our common world (see, for example,

Common Worlds Research Collective, 2020). Re-imagining schools as creative and imaginative spaces and communities of discovery can re-orient children towards visions of a good Anthropocene (Bennett et al., 2016), in contrast to the relentlessly negative news headlines that they are currently buffeted by.

## Let our teachers enjoy greater professional autonomy

As the late Sir Ken Robinson pointed out, the three components of formal education in England are curriculum, teaching and assessment, with teaching viewed as no more than the vehicle to deliver the other aspects; this 'FedEx' approach to teaching in England, Robinson and Aronica (2015) argue, 'demeans teachers and their profession' (pp. 100–1). Reductionist approaches are implemented through evidence-based education policies and practice (Pellegrini and Vivanet, 2021), not only in England but across Europe. For example, in Italy in 2008, considerable financial investment allowed interactive whiteboards to be introduced into 42 per cent of Italian schools; English schools were encouraged to follow suit. After two years of use in England, and much expense, the positive impact on mathematics, English and science results was zero (Pellegrini and Vivanet, 2021). Education cannot be reduced to input and output ratios, yet the government continues to try. As Berliner (2002) explains, environmental factors such as 'differences in programs, personnel, teaching methods, budgets, leadership, and kinds of community support' influence education data to the point where it is impossible for it to be regarded as 'scientific' (p. 19). Pellegrini and Vivanet (2021) stress the significance of local contexts on effectiveness:

if an educational program is effective in a specific context because it is designed specifically for that context, it will be difficult to reuse it in a different context. By the same token, if an educational program is reusable in many contexts because it is not designed for a specific context, it may not be particularly effective in meeting the educational needs of any one context. (p. 36)

They go on to stress that there is no such thing as 'one size fits all' when it comes to applying evidence across contexts, and that by prioritising the deepening of our understanding of educational approaches in general we can empower ourselves to question the approaches and policies that are dictated within our own culture. By doing so we place ourselves in a stronger position to challenge those who propose a 'recipe book' (Pellegrini and Vivanet, 2021, p. 35) approach to pedagogy, which assumes that outcomes can be reproduced regardless of context. Human-centred approaches enable us to see unique children, their families and communities in all their colour, not league tables and standardised targets.

In Crehan's (2016) attempt to learn from the top five performing countries in the Programme for International Student Assessment tests, which included insights from Finland, Singapore, Japan, China (Shanghai) and Canada, the author concluded that a key principle for high performance and equity was how teachers were treated. Although the focus of Crehan's work is on outputs, rather than the intrinsic happiness and holistic development of children, it still makes an important point about the perception of, preparation of and professional autonomy of teachers, which is highly relevant here. In all five of these countries, being accepted onto a teacher-training programme is extremely competitive, but following their training, and after a probationary period during which they are closely supported, new career teachers are allowed autonomy to teach in their own style. Their training and qualification identify them as having competent, professional judgement.

Ryan and Decci (2000) discuss how intrinsic motivation is cultivated through relatedness, autonomy and competence. Unfortunately, the approach taken to teacher training in England is very different, and more in line with what Crehan (2016) describes as a 'deprofessionalising' cycle (p. 252). Within this, anyone with 'minimum standards' can train, and then their teaching is strictly monitored through a prescriptive curriculum and assessment. The 'intrinsic motivation' that might be experienced through an autonomous role is replaced by 'bribes or threats', which Crehan forewarned, would eventually lead to the teacher shortage that we see in England today. In 2018, the DfE in England found that over one-third of teachers left the profession in their first five years of employment, citing debilitating working conditions, feeling overworked and undervalued. In the same report, when asked what might make them stay or return to teaching, one of the key incentives, *before* increased pay, was 'professional recognition and greater autonomy'. Others included: 'change the philosophy of education so that it was child-focussed and de-politicised' and 'less focus on targets and results' (DfE, 2018, pp. 36–7).

Allowing greater teacher autonomy has been shown to increase feelings of empowerment and professionalism and to decrease stress (Pearson and Moomaw, 2005). Crehan (2016) makes a persuasive case for increasing teacher training entry requirements and allowing more independence, which will then 'build in' intrinsic motivation (p. 252). Let us change the direction of teacher training in England. Let us return to a human-centred education system where individual expertise is valued and trusted.

## Let us accept and value the existence of pedagogical love within education

In the book *Miseducation* (2017), Diane Reay interviewed Josie, a white, working-class mother, six times over two decades. Josie describes 'the worst day of many awful days I spent in primary school' (Reay, 2017, p. 67), when she could not understand something and asked the teacher for further explanation several times. Eventually, because of her questioning, Josie was made to stand outside the classroom door. She was told on three occasions during the day that she could come back into the classroom if she 'apologised'. She shared: 'I stood there thinking what does apologise mean? ... I just didn't know what to do.' She describes how the furious teacher, presumably concluding that Josie was being deliberately defiant, shouted at her:

'How dare you not apologise?' I just burst into tears. I felt so awful. She went 'Um'. I said, 'I don't know what apologise means,' so she said, 'Oh, it means sorry.' I said, 'Well, I'm sorry.' As if, you know, I'd have known what it meant ... I was just too embarrassed to go in [to the classroom]. I was only seven. (Reay, 2017, p. 68)

Although one would hope that the insensitivity demonstrated by Josie's teacher here is rare, some schools do take a very hard line, and can be hasty to misconstrue a lack of understanding as defiance. For example, Reay's (2017) research showcased the opinions of school leaders who appeared to view their school more as a correction facility for the morally and culturally ignorant child (and parent) than an educational establishment (p. 60). It is important to consider how the negativity of such a stance might impact on already vulnerable children.

When discussing the lasting influence that teachers can have on young children, Noddings (2003) states that 'This first great good of teaching – response-ability and its positive effects – is clearly relational' (p. 249). If teachers do not practise this 'first great good of teaching', if they do not respond to children's individual needs, then children learn that their voice has no value, that they must remember and regurgitate and that they must conform. Teachers do not only teach English, science and maths, they teach *children* – children who yearn to feel valued. Subject knowledge is only one facet of effective pedagogy. As Noddings (2003) argues, 'it is absurd to suppose that we are educating when we ignore those matters that lie at the very heart of human existence' (p. 194). In contrast, human-centred education systems, such as those introduced in Finland by Rautiainen and Tyrvaïnen (2021), focus on developing 'human to human relationships' (n.p.). This, they argue, creates a 'virtuous cycle of learning together and trust building' (Rautiainen and Tyrvaïnen 2021, n.p.). Van Manen (1994) asks whether it is possible to be an authentic teacher without the qualities of responsibility, hopefulness and loving care towards the children we teach. Children need to feel seen and to feel safe.

The social pedagogy concept of *Haltung* deserves far more space than can be accommodated here, so we will summarise it as an 'ethos', 'mindset' or 'attitude' (Eichsteller, 2010, p. 1), which acts as a 'moral compass that guides every action taken in every area of an individual's life' (Charfe and Gardner, 2019, p. 3). It motivates our actions and informs how we respond in all contexts. Our personal *Haltung* not only underpins how we relate to learners, but also informs a deeper reflection on the values driving the children we teach, which at times may be quite different from our own. Teachers need to be flexible in their pedagogy, as there is no formula that will work for all learners in all situations (Määttä and Uusiautti, 2012, p. 32), but starting from a position of pedagogical love (Page, 2013) means that we see children as unique, and endeavour to understand and support them within their individual context.

## Conclusion

Radical steps are needed to overhaul the education system in England. At this point in time, changes to existing systems are not enough; our entire approach needs to be re-imagined. And this needs to

happen from a position that recognises a community of unique humans, each with their own individual talents and needs at its heart. We have suggested here that the steps to be taken towards this would be well supported by social pedagogy. In doing so, it is important to remember that social pedagogy is not simply another prescriptive set of rules to be followed, just as it is not a 'role'; instead, it is a stance, founded on a set of values. If we are to move forward in our approach to supporting *all* children's sense of self, to effectively supporting their thinking and their education, then we need to first understand the child. We can only fully understand the child within a relationship grounded upon security and trust. To create an authentic relationship such as this, and to develop 'a virtuous cycle of learning together' (Rautiainen and Tyrvaïnen, 2021, n.p.), we need to understand ourselves, where our own values and beliefs lie. We need to consider our own *Haltung*.

Social pedagogy can help schools become true learning communities, characterised by the interdependent lifeworlds of its human actors. interdependence should be both a cause and a consequence of the school engaging vibrantly with their local communities and the diverse lives lived within it. Social pedagogical approaches suggest how we might create such an interdependent community, 'an interconnected whole' (Lowe and Plimmer, 2019, p. 23). But it would be easy for teachers and schools in England to dismiss this and suggest that such an approach is not for them. All one needs to do is perpetuate three persistent myths that dog all schools. The first myth is 'I am a *teacher* – not a social worker'. By reaching for this expression of professional exasperation, we can misuse distinctions between professionals' statutory roles and responsibilities to artificially establish a restricted boundary around our ethic of care (Noddings, 1995). Through this retort, primacy goes to curriculum delivery, not community building.

We can perpetuate the second myth by pretending that children materialise at the school gates in the morning and vaporise again come home time. By reaching for this expression of professional detachment from community, we can misuse the distinction between school site footprint and the public and private spaces beyond to artificially establish an impenetrable bubble, within which we sustain a school's microclimate. This environment is insulated and isolated from the ecology beyond its boundary, and beyond which we can see children's lives only vaguely, and possibly only as vaguely relevant.

The third myth is to dismiss social pedagogy's solidarity with emerging human potential as 'Just good teaching'. Certainly, good teaching and good teachers make powerful and positive contributions to children's development. This is particularly the case when teachers' practice dovetails dynamically with pastoral care practice. But until teacher training recognises the understanding of children's diverse lifeworlds as equal to concerns around curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, 'good teaching' will remain a characteristic of the peculiarly conscientious professional only, rather than a quality standard of whole-school working culture.

While the National Curriculum in England aims to provide children with 'the essential knowledge they need to be educated citizens' (DfE, 2014, para 3.1), social pedagogy steers schools towards providing children with the essential understanding that they are cherished by their community, and that *they* have a responsibility to cherish their community members, too. The values underpinning social pedagogy in schools, just like those in Lowe and Plimmer's (2019) Human Learning Systems, challenge the myth that learning and human relationships are two separate entities. Social pedagogy bursts the bubble of insular school communities and pivots practice away from curriculum delivery to the development of a community's children, through the creation of 'a sense of shared humanity' where teachers 'respond authentically to the needs of other human beings' (Lowe and Plimmer, 2019, p. 13).

## Declarations and conflicts of interest

### Research ethics statement

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### Consent for publication statement

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The authors declare no conflict of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the authors during peer review of this article have been made. The authors declare no further conflicts with this article.

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