



Editorial

Into the future: growing understandings of social pedagogy

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Open access

International Journal of Social Pedagogy is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

In 2022 the *International Journal of Social Pedagogy* (*IJSP*) attained an important milestone: ten years of publishing articles that reflect both the discipline and the diversity of social pedagogical thinking, practice and research. As co-editors we are very proud of the tradition of English-language publishing on social pedagogy that *IJSP* has shepherded into existence. True to its international scope, *IJSP* has reached readers in more than 160 countries (82 per cent of the world's countries!). At the time of writing (November 2023), readers in more than 10 countries have downloaded articles over 1,000 times each. Since being adopted by UCL Press in 2016, our academic profile has improved and our production cycle has benefited from the infrastructure available and kept all articles fully open access, without any charge to authors or readers. In 2017 we became linked with the Social Pedagogy Professional Association (SPPA), the professional home of social pedagogy in the UK and Ireland. *IJSP* helps sponsor the SPPA annual conference and promotes the SPPA (n.d.) Charter of values and beliefs.

The purpose of *IJSP* is to provide space and opportunity for a wide range of scholars, practitioners and students to share their work on theory, policy, professional practice and ways forward for social pedagogical scholarship. Our mentoring scheme supports publication by student and practitioner authors. The journal is an integral part of building a professional and scholarly infrastructure to support the discipline of social pedagogy, to point out its disciplinary alliances and to extend its remit.

The journal is concerned with interrogating policy, practice and philosophies relevant to working with people of all ages and in a range of settings, with an ethical, relational and educative foundation. We recognise that social pedagogy has developed in different ways in different countries, and the linkages with other professions vary. To explore these dimensions of difference and find connections, we regularly run themed special issues, most recently on schools and social pedagogy (2023), social pedagogy and anti-extremism (2023) and refugee and migrant young people (2021), sometimes in partnership with another journal, such as the issue on 'Love in professional practice' (Smith, 2016) with the *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care*. We are always keen to hear from potential special issue editors and ideas for special issue topics.

IJSP has been an important component in supporting innovative domestic and international collaborations that generate new insights. Through our global editorial board, drawn from 19 countries, and interchange with networks such as SPPA, the Social Pedagogy Development Network in the UK and Ireland, and the Global Alliance for Social Pedagogy and Social Education, as well as collaboration with social pedagogy journals based in other countries (UCL Press, n.d.a), *IJSP* editors are spreading the word about the relevance of social pedagogy for relationship-centred work with people of all ages, in both universal settings and targeted support.

The inauguration of *IJSP* followed a decade or more of research, scoping and pilot projects, policy interest and evaluations carried out at University College London and elsewhere, stimulating interest among employers about improving outcomes in public services for children, young people, families and adults with disabilities or older people.

IJSP offers an opportunity to share insights and learning about applying a social pedagogical perspective in social care. For example, *IJSP* has helped substantiate the policy case for social pedagogy in the UK, through contributions such as 'Towards a social pedagogic approach for social care' by Cameron et al. (2021).

Publications to date have both shaped the academic discourse and provided deeper insights into what social pedagogical policy, education and practice look like across different countries and in different contexts – and what they could look like. Many publications explore the boundaries between social pedagogy and other disciplines, make the case for how a social pedagogical perspective could enrich other professions and vice versa, and articulate how educational and social policy could incorporate social pedagogy as an integrative and holistic framework. In an early article, 'Social pedagogical eyes in the midst of diverse understandings, conceptualisations and activities', Juha Hämäläinen (2012) sets the scene by outlining social pedagogy not as a fixed or unified concept, but rather as a dynamic and contested one that reflects different philosophical, political and practical perspectives to help us explore matters of social inclusion, democracy and active citizenship through social pedagogical eyes. Central to this, Hämäläinen (2012) argues, is an awareness of the togetherness of 'two aspects of human existence, *homo educandus* and *homo socialis*' (p. 13). The role that social pedagogy could play among the social professions is also central in 'Constructing questions for the social professions of today: The case of social pedagogy' by Xavier Úcar (2021). Exploring the uncertainty and complexity of social justice issues and contemporary crises in societies, the article raises some key questions designed to facilitate a more critical, creative and transformative approach to social pedagogy and the social professions in the future.

While these seminal papers make the case for social pedagogy as an important perspective for the social professions, other *IJSP* articles have sought to provide critical pointers on how, as social pedagogues, we can remain true to our ethical purpose and committed to creating more equitable societies. In 'Inequality as a social pedagogical question', Rynnänen and Nivala (2019) develop an analytical framework to counter the mechanisms that produce and reproduce social inequality, thus encouraging a more critical and transformative approach towards social justice. How these big issues play out in everyday practice is brilliantly conveyed in 'It really does depend: Towards an epistemology (and ontology) for everyday social pedagogical practice' by Mark Smith (2020). Smith (2020) argues that social pedagogy requires us as professionals to 'practice within its wider moral purpose and foregrounds the virtues and dispositions of practitioners rather than a set of rules' (p. 1), drawing on practice wisdom along with other forms of knowledge to respond meaningfully in the everyday of the people and communities we support. Along with many other papers, Smith's article makes clear that social pedagogical practice is far more than just good care or common sense and is able to weave together various knowledge bases to respond to the complexity encountered in practice.

Complexity requires curiosity, creativity and an interest in learning, thus raising important questions about how to prepare the workforce to navigate confidently and competently uncertainty and ethical

dilemmas that inevitably form part of social pedagogical practice. *IJSP* papers discussing creativity in learning and being creative at work, such as 'Creative mentoring: A creative response to promote learning and wellbeing with children in care' by Claire Parker (2020) and 'Using creativity, co-production and the common third in a communication skills module to identify and mend gaps between the stakeholders of social work education' by Emma Reith-Hall (2020), exemplify this tradition in the journal.

As *IJSP* looks to the future, we have refreshed our aims and scope (UCL Press, n.d.b) to drive interdisciplinary consideration of *IJSP* as a journal of choice. We are eager to inspire authors from related fields to publish with us in order to further disciplinary interconnections, conceptual innovations and policy interrogations to transform societies. We are interested in articles that show readers how social pedagogy can contribute to or redirect thinking in a wide range of domains. We often find social pedagogy hiding in plain sight, particularly in settings focused on relational practice, empowerment and social justice. Please feel warmly invited to contact us or submit your paper to help bring about this vision of true open-access publishing.

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