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Research article

The paradoxes of social work in a securitised setting: the example of prevention and radicalisation in German prisons

Maria Jakob,^{1,*} Nadine Jukschat,² Alexander Leistner³

¹ Deutsches Jugendinstitut, Halle (Saale), Germany

² Hochschule Zittau-Görlitz, Görlitz, Germany

³ Universität Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany

* Correspondence: jakob@dji.de

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Abstract

Due to their structural logic, pedagogical activities are characterised by paradoxical tensions that cannot be resolved on a professional level but instead must be handled reflexively. Based on observations and interview data collected in the field of prevention and deradicalisation work, this article reconstructs how the fundamental paradoxes underlying social pedagogical activities are further intensified in an era of securitisation. To carry out this reconstruction, the influence of securitisation on the paradoxical tensions that exist between pedagogical and social work principles, on the one hand, and the logic of prevention and prison, on the other, are examined – as are the tension between

closeness and distance in the organisation of social pedagogical relationships. It becomes clear that pedagogical professionalism in this field likewise depends on handling one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of clients, in a self-reflexive manner.

Keywords paradoxes; pedagogical activities; prevention; deradicalisation; enforcement context; Germany

Introduction

Paradoxical requirements and tensions are fundamental to professional pedagogical practice. On this point, systems theory, interactional theory and structural theory agree in their perspectives on professional activities – despite all the ‘fine’ differences between their theoretical architectures (Helsper et al., 2000). The empirical field of this research, which is radicalisation prevention and deradicalisation work as related to the phenomena of potentially violent Islamism and/or right-wing extremism in an enforcement context in correctional institutions, confronts professional (pedagogical) actors once again with conflicting requirements. In this article, we refer to recent discussions in German sociology and social work studies on the challenges and dilemmas that social work professionals are structurally confronted with, not solely, but especially, within securitised contexts. Famously, these challenges are pointed out in the concept of the ‘dual mandate’ of social work (Schulte, 2009) (quotations from works published in German and extracts from interviews have been translated by the authors). Professionals are expected to act according to the interests and needs of their clients (providing aid) while they are obliged to take into account their mandate from the state and society to tackle social problems (exercising control). After all, law enforcement – and in particular German youth law enforcement – pursues resocialisation as its goal while at the same time maintaining security as its top priority (Bierschwale, 2015).

As a ‘total institution’ (Goffman, 1973), the prison is a world in and of itself where everyday life is essentially cut off from the rest of society and governed according to highly restricted and regulated processes, characterised by heteronomy, hierarchy and control. The question of how social work can adhere to its own standards and principles in prison, owing to the power imbalance between prisoners and personnel and the primacy of security as a concept, has been described as a challenge (Scherr, 2015; Schneider, 2014), but it has not been investigated thoroughly from an empirical standpoint (Kaplan and Schneider, 2016).

Pedagogical services designed to prevent radicalisation or in favour of deradicalisation in prisons are confronted with distinct threat scenarios and expectations of risk (Schuhmacher, 2018; Wehrheim, 2018). These have consequences on professional (pedagogical) activity. Fundamental principles such as voluntariness or the structure of a ‘professional working alliance’ – that is, the necessarily cooperative nature of the relationship between addressees of social work/pedagogy¹ and professionals, which is founded on multiple requirements, making it particularly precarious (Oevermann, 1996) – are under increased pressure in particular here, due to the primacy of (internal) security (see also Figlestahler and Schau, 2020).

Even Fritz Schütze (1996) noted that ‘the exercise of sovereign rule’ was a particularly salient place to investigate ‘the fragility and irritability – and at the same time the resilience and autonomy of professional activity – in a particularly powerful way’ (p. 188). In light of that, this article raises the following questions: How are professional pedagogical activities structured by enforcement, and recently by social tendencies towards securitisation, in the context of ‘total institutions’ (Goffman, 1973)? Which specific relationships of tension become virulent in this context? And how can professionals process and attempt to balance these contradictory demands? Observation and interview data collected in Germany in the field of prevention and deradicalisation work in a prison context form the empirical basis for this research. This is specific to Germany because prevention and deradicalisation in prison are carried out by private civil society organisations that are financed by the government. As external social pedagogical actors, with their own institutional and professional mindset, they work within the sphere of state security institutions, whose activities, in turn, are primarily aligned around security premises. This constellation of civil society actors working within the state institution in particular makes clear that the necessary professional balance between contradictory pedagogical action imperatives is made much more difficult under these

conditions, since those imperatives expect unilateral resolutions of the relationships of tension. The extreme example of social pedagogical deradicalisation work in prisons can be used as a prototype to spell out the way in which increasing securitisation of society is attempting to reshape pedagogical logic and principles.

In this article, we begin by outlining the tension between pedagogical and social work principles that are already inherently paradoxically structured and the tendencies to increase securitisation in the areas of prevention and deradicalisation, informed by a background of theory. Then, we sketch out the methodological design of our study, before using the empirical material to map out how to address typical paradoxes that pedagogical deradicalisation work in prisons has to face. Finally, we discuss the pedagogical and professional theoretical implications of our findings.²

Paradoxes of social pedagogical work in the context of securitisation

Principles and paradoxes of social pedagogical and social work activities

German sociologist Fritz Schütze (1996, 2000) played an important role in developing and outlining the concept of pedagogical paradoxes. According to Schütze, professional activities are fundamentally characterised by paradoxical sets of problems, caused by an irresolvable conflict of divergent orientations. This Schütze (2000) called 'fundamentally irreconcilable requirements' (p. 60). Similarly, paradoxes have been described as a structural problem in subject-centred pedagogy in an educational context (Finkel and Arney, 1995; Tzuo, 2007): for example, in the tension between the pedagogue's control and the child's freedom; the paradox here being that freedom is created from a relationship of dependency (on pedagogues). What kinds of contradictory orientations and dilemmas exist in social work? Due to the social mandate given to it, social work's self-understanding is oriented towards the interests and needs of clients, with the goal of initiating educational processes as tools to help clients manage their lives (Thole, 2012). One basic dilemma in this respect is the need to act as an example (with the goal of independence), and the danger that doing so may itself cause clients to become more dependent (Schütze, 2000). Therefore, the activities of social work are also founded on the general paradox between irreconcilable orientations, between trust and compulsion (Schütze, 1996), aid and social control (Scherr, 2015) or closeness and distance (Dörr and Müller, 2012; Helsper, 2004)³. Emphasising that such dilemmas are fundamentally irreconcilable, Schütze (2000) argues that the only way to engage in professional activities is to work through the fundamental problems 'on a project by project, case by case, situational and biographically specific basis, through a cautious balancing act' (p. 65) and to act in a reflexive manner.

The chances of success for social pedagogical work are dependent to a fairly significant extent on the success of establishing a working alliance between professionals and clients that is 'voluntary' at least on the basis of 'idea and imputation' (Schütze, 1996, p. 184). However, the voluntary nature of this working alliance and personal motivations for participating in it must be first developed in different contexts in social work practice, as Scherr (2015) noted. For instance, it must be developed in contexts where the affected person does not ask for aid themselves, but where a formal willingness to participate is gained through external interventions – including in conjunction with threats of sanctions. Therefore, the question is how viable and fruitful working relationships can be formed despite being situated in enforcement contexts (Zobrist and Kähler, 2017). The German discussion on social work as a profession, and again referring to the 'dual mandate', therefore places social work in an irreconcilable field of tension between aid and social control (Scherr, 2015, pp. 172–4), in particular because it derives its mandate to enforce societal norms from the public interest while at the same time having a self-understanding that is oriented towards the needs of clients. According to Schütze (1996), attempts to resolve or absolutise pedagogical practice towards one of the two sides of this paradox, or strategies to circumvent the paradox entirely, produce serious problems later on, and can be read as an expression of poor professionalism, as Oevermann (1996) noted.

In addition to the principle of voluntary participation, other central principles of social work include lifeworld orientation, participation, empowerment and a focus on resources. Each of these focal areas comes with its own complex set of challenges. In the penal system, and in the context of deradicalisation work, however, pedagogues carry out their work against the backdrop of professional orientations, yet in

a context and with a societal mandate (prevention) that can undermine these professional orientations, intensifying the existing constitutive paradoxes.

Prevention and deradicalisation work in the context of societal discourses surrounding security

In recent years, the term 'securitisation' has been used to discuss intensive transformational processes in the course of which security is advancing to become a guiding principle of society. In light of these developments, social problems are translated into questions of security and ensuring security, which creates a unique layer of problems. According to Schabdach (2011), the focus of welfare policies is no longer state-guaranteed protection against structural problems, but rather the security of society as protected against individuals who would endanger its general well-being. The interests of those impacted, a consideration of individual needs and predicaments and the complexity and contradictory nature of the matters at hand, along with alternative ways of defining the problems at play, are suppressed (Dollinger, 2017).

Prevention in this context becomes an 'overarching mode of managing the future of modern societies' (Bröckling, 2008, p. 47), and the focus on prevention is becoming much more valorised (Lampe, 2018). The concept of prevention goes hand in hand with a trend towards categorising and identifying risks, in order to intervene early on when there are signs of problems (Dollinger, 2014). All of this has certainly been discussed critically in the context of social work. For instance, the logic of suspicion which is inherent in prevention, its unilateral, normative and deficit-oriented character, as well as the expansion of state monitoring and control of lifestyles, have been problematised (see, for example, Scherr, 2018).

This is the case not only, but to a particularly impressive extent, in the field of preventing violent Islamism. In light of the perception of an all-encompassing terrorist threat, the government can initiate wide-ranging security measures, research funding programmes (for a critical perspective on this, see Teune and Ullrich, 2018; Wehrheim, 2018) and extensive prevention programmes, both in Germany and abroad (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung [Federal Agency for Civic Education], 2018). The British anti-terrorism strategy Prevent has garnered particular attention on the international stage in this respect as it focuses on Islamist radicalisation in a unique way. Since it was introduced in 2007, and despite further developments, the programme has always been highly controversial, especially because it attributes a central role to the police and security organisations, and obliges all schools, universities and other public institutions, such as health services or social work institutions, to report young people with noted initial tendencies towards radicalisation to the newly introduced Channel project as part of their 'Prevent Duty' (Thomas, 2020). Busher and Jerome state (2020) that 'the UK became the first country in the world to place specific legal responsibility on educational institutions to play an important role within attempts to prevent extremism and terrorism' (pp. 2–3).

In Germany, speaking of 'potential offenders' in the context of preventing violent Islamism and extensive work to develop and implement tools for forecasting risk – called 'risk assessment tools' (King et al., 2018) – is an expression of this security maxim, which has wide-ranging and consequential impacts on the field of pedagogy. In light of these developments, Schuhmacher (2018) described narrowing the concept of prevention from 'pedagogical prevention' (p. 160) focused on integrating and supporting individuals to a securitised concept of prevention, in which social pedagogical practice is put into service of the security policy and measured according to its standards.

Research background and methods

This analysis expands on research led by the Deutsche Jugendinstitut (German Youth Institute), which is part of the programme area 'Prevention and deradicalisation in the penal system and probationary services' in the federal programme 'Demokratie Leben!' (Living Democracy!), financed by the Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (BMFSFJ – Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth). The goal of this programme area is to develop and test new strategies and approaches for preventing radicalisation of violent Islamism and right-wing extremism in the penal system and probationary services. Since 2017 it has funded 16 pilot projects (15 since 2020) by civil society institutions. These projects provide group or individual services in prisons and probationary services. Target groups are imprisoned persons considered at risk of radicalisation (sentenced for

offences including drug trafficking and aggravated bodily injury) as well as persons sentenced for offences related to political violence and terrorism ranging from sedition and use of anti-constitutional symbols to terrorist offences. Further project measures encompass training and consulting for target professionals in prisons and probationary services (see Graebisch and Schorsch, 2019; Herding et al., 2021; Jukschat et al., 2020).

The data underlying this article include in particular narrative, problem-centred expert interviews (Döringer, 2021; Meuser and Nagel, 2009) with participants in all of the 15 respectively 16 pilot projects. These were generally conducted as individual interviews, and in some cases as group interviews. The data also include focused ethnographic observations of individual project measures (Knoblauch, 2005). The collected data were analysed according to grounded theory methodology (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). During the first phase of reconstructive, open coding based on sequential analyses of the interviews and observations (see Maiwald, 2005), we noted that activities of the professional pedagogues were clearly structured around an underlying dilemma. The 'paradox' concept, therefore, was used in the second phase of axial or selective coding to serve as a 'sensitizing concept' (Blumer, 1954), in order to compress and further develop the analysis.

Empirical insights: social pedagogical work in the context of prison, prevention imperatives and securitisation

The pilot projects we investigated are integrated into an organisational context which defies professional action based on pedagogical principles like voluntary participation, openness and subject-orientation due to its strong focus on security. The paradoxes inherent in pedagogical activities are intensified in this context: professional activities are characterised not only by the 'rationality of thought and action' (Schütze, 1996, p. 222) of one's own organisation, but rather confronted with the logic of the justice system and the expectation of having a preventative and deradicalising effect. As external actors, these pilot projects are generally dependent on the willingness of ministries of justice and correctional facilities to participate. This environment of dual compression – in which pedagogical principles are already paradoxical, and in this case they are confronted with added justice-related/security and preventative expectations – serves as a good example for carefully teasing out how paradoxes are intensified in the context of securitisation, and how professional activities become more and more difficult.

Pedagogical principles versus the logic of prevention

Working with imprisoned youths can contradict pedagogical principles of openness, voluntary participation and a transparent logic of targeted prevention of extremism or working through extremism. In the logic of pedagogy, the goal of a service is for a mature subject to lead a self-determined, autonomous life. In light of this, pedagogical processes must be designed to be open, voluntary and transparent processes of education or empowerment. However, the target range for preventative measures with the goal of specific 'effects' on participants is much narrower: anti-democratic, violent attitudes and ideological convictions should be re-assessed, prevented or reduced; (incipient) integration into radical contexts should be prevented; or participants should be encouraged and supported in exiting these contexts (BMFSFJ, 2017). Radicalisation prevention measures are evaluated based on their 'success rate' among the target audience, typically, for instance, based on assessments of attitude, or by investigating recidivism rates in the penal context (see, for example, Oberlader et al., 2018).

In general, therefore, the question is whether wide-ranging (personal) educational objectives do not tend to (have to) be sacrificed in pedagogical *prevention* measures in order to honour preventative goals, or how to weigh the different objectives on a situational and case-by-case basis. In the following section, we use case studies to discuss how the pedagogical principles of openness, transparency and voluntary participation are handled under conditions where prevention and security are paramount.

Openness

The first aspect of pedagogical *openness* relates to a focus on the client's needs and living environment. Individual casework, in particular, is concerned with the specific client as an individual, and their everyday

life and needs, and is therefore more process-oriented. One challenge of preventative pedagogical work is timing when topics relevant to prevention are brought up.

An employee at a project that helps young people avoid radicalised settings, for instance, explained that providing everyday aid to clients was simply part of the working alliance. However, they were aware that this kind of approach can open up questions under the mantle of 'targeted' deradicalisation work. In their interview, they stated:

Then one may ask oneself, what does this have to do with deradicalisation work, anyway? At our programme, we don't just sit down and say 'Well, tell me what happened there, and now I will try to deradicalise you.' That would be absurd. We certainly don't do that. It also wouldn't be appropriate at all from a pedagogical standpoint. Really, we just meet again and again. And in the course of that, moments come up where the person just needs to talk about these issues with someone.

The defensive way in which the employee puts this clearly shows that employees are confronted with an expectation of rapid, mechanical 'deradicalisation'. They push back against this, on the one hand, by stating the obvious absurdity of this expectation and, on the other hand, by explaining their process: a slow build-up of trust, addressing the everyday needs of clients and creating space for openness. The emphasis they place on openness and the long-term nature of the relationship stands in contrast to both a securitised focus on fast, measurable output and the idea that a simple 'talking cure' would be possible for changing ideological views (Braddock, 2014).

A second aspect of pedagogical openness relates to the counsellor's perspective on their clients. In the context of the penal system and probationary services, it is common to view prisoners as a 'risk' and to systematically assess how dangerous they are (Preusker et al., 2010). Predictions of how dangerous someone is also serve, for instance, as the basis for decisions about letting them out of prison early. Pedagogues are likewise confronted with these issues:

Well, we very clearly said, including in our discussions with the penal institutions, that if we want to have a chance to work with the prisoners on the basis of trust, pedagogically – once it somehow becomes clear that we are working as evaluators or using what we know to complete some kind of assessment of them, then we would totally lose any credibility [laughs].

As in the quotation above, the acerbity with which this statement is formulated shows that pedagogues have to clearly stake out their own position. As pedagogues, they cannot simultaneously serve as 'evaluators', since they would otherwise lose any chance to build trust or credibility. This also makes clear the distinction between them and pedagogical personnel within the penal institutions, who certainly pass on their information and assessments.

In the particular case where other security or judicial authorities come into the triadic relationship between penal institutions, clients and pedagogues, the need for a right to refuse to give evidence for pedagogical advisers becomes clear – similar to the right to refuse to give evidence accorded to psychotherapists, for instance (sec. 53 StPO – Code of Criminal Procedures). Currently, German law does not protect the profession of social work in the same way, meaning that counsellors can be called before the court and may have to provide information on their clients. This regularly places pedagogues in situations in which they need to advise clients not to provide too much detail on their activities. For this reason, working with clients in custody while proceedings are ongoing becomes almost impossible.

Voluntary participation and transparency

In the field of the penal system considered here, any notion of *voluntary participation* is generally precarious. Even if participants can decide for themselves whether to take part in a group course during their free time, for instance, this is often associated with instrumental motivations or motivations resulting from the penal context. It is therefore difficult to speak of any 'true' voluntary participation in this case (Hohnstein and Greuel, 2017). Furthermore, following the prison and the prison personnel's logic of prevention, we only investigated prisoners considered particularly at risk of radicalization and 'selected' to participate in group programming by prison personnel. Dealing with the content at hand in any meaningful way in the context of imprisonment is difficult at best, and counteracts the establishment of a 'pedagogical working alliance' (see Oevermann, 1996, pp. 152–4). The head of a group prevention programme in one prison, for instance, said that their participants were reluctant to participate:

Today, 99 percent of the people sitting there in [youth detention centre] were there because of the certificate, because they have to be there, really. They can't say 'I'm not going to the discussion group', instead, they're there because it is enforced – the institution has said to them 'You have to do this. If you don't go, you won't get paid'. Under compulsion, really ... And during the first meeting in [youth detention centre], when we got there, we told them it was voluntary. And now we're telling them that they have to come.

In the course of this statement, the speaker states three times that participants are present solely due to the context, on an instrumental basis, and therefore they do not attend the session voluntarily: they are part of the programme only to obtain a 'certificate', because the institution tells them to do so in order to be paid.⁴ In addition, the pedagogues – probably unaware of the situation in the institution – initially assured participants that the programme was voluntary. They are then forced to revise this statement, losing the trust of the participants. The interviewee went on to state that they asked a colleague and mentor for advice on how to proceed in this situation. The mentor advised them: 'Actually, the best thing to do would be to cancel' the programme, but to remain in contact and give others the opportunity to 'see it through'. Therefore, carrying out the programme becomes instrumental for the pedagogue as well – the programme is 'seen through' to maintain the relationship with the institution. The triadic relationship once again becomes clear, as the (cooperative) relationship with the institution becomes more important than the quality of the (working) relationship with prisoners.

Many of the projects investigated here, however, also attempt to address the circumstances of the penal context and instrumental motivation of the participants in a productive manner (see also Hohnstein and Greuel, 2017). This is made clear, for example, in an interview where a pedagogue explains how quasi-voluntary participation is possible, as long as the relationship is one of openness and trust:

I just said offhandedly 'Well, what is voluntary in an enforcement context, anyway?' Nevertheless, there is a kind of voluntary capacity in enforcement contexts, since no one is forced to take part in these programmes. But I believe there is a huge amount of interest within the enforcement institution, particularly from inmates, to take part in discussions where you at least know that no more information is going to get out ... In most cases, we have very intense discussions, and then most of the people involved forget that they are sitting in prison, and their participation in these discussions is voluntary.

Self-determined and voluntary participation as a standard ultimately is directly linked to a *need for transparency*: only when the target audience knows what the content and objectives of the specific programme are can they freely decide whether they want to take part in it. They can only take advantage of (participatory) opportunities to exert influence if these are opened up to them. However, if a programme with an approach that aims to prevent radicalisation is 'transparent' as such, this results in further difficulties for pedagogues:

- Pedagogue 2: However, we have also lost prisoners because of the term 'deradicalisation'.
 Pedagogue 1: Exactly.
 Pedagogue 2: Prison staff members do that sometimes, I don't know, to provoke us or to provoke the prisoner a little bit: 'You are radical, these are your radicalisation counsellors'. Then they say 'What are they?' That's happened before
 Pedagogue 3: *[talking at the same time]* And then they also get
 Pedagogue 2: *[talking at the same time]* because then the client comes to us and says 'You're deradicalisation counsellors, you're here because the state thinks I'm radicalised'.
 Pedagogue 3: Or 'Who are you, anyway?' Because, when the official says ...
 Pedagogue 1: Two or three cases have been cancelled because of this.

In this case, the claim to transparency is in conflict with the pedagogical framing of the programme. Because of an unreflected, potentially deliberate, sabotage on the part of a member of prison staff, a client is made to perceive the pedagogues simply as the representatives of a government that is stigmatising them. Trust is gone, and the prisoner is 'lost' for the purpose of counselling. Narrowing the programme down, as illustrated in the extract, to the goal of deradicalisation in this case not only corresponds to the security logic of judicial authorities, but also undermines the consistently open pedagogical approach of the projects. For pedagogues, this demands a complicated balancing act between providing the most open communication possible regarding their work and its context

and avoiding the inherent suspicion or stigmatisation of the prisoner as ‘radicalised’ or ‘in danger of radicalisation’, which is inherent in the concept of prevention.⁵

Challenged working relationships: closeness versus distance

Balancing closeness and distance is a central challenge in social pedagogical fields (Helsper, 2004; Oevermann, 1996). It inevitably necessitates ‘filling formal professional roles competently on the one hand, while on the other engaging in relationships that are personal, emotional, and not fully controllable’ (Dörr and Müller, 2012, p. 9). Therefore, it is hardly surprising that this tension also characterises the work of pilot projects in prevention and deradicalisation work in prisons. Establishing durable working relationships is made more difficult from the outset due to the prison context (Hohnstein and Greuel, 2017; Wigger, 2009). The security context further sharpens and intensifies the balancing act between closeness and distance in a highly specific manner, since in this case it is entangled with the challenge that working with clients demands trust, while also demanding that this trust not be naive or blind. In addition, paradoxical situations are further intensified by the specific constitution of the fairly new field of radicalisation prevention. In addition to formal qualifications (pedagogical training) of employees, informal qualifications (similar living situation due to origin and/or religious background)⁶ have become more important. This results in competing qualifications in the field and – as we will show – intractable interpretations of professional pedagogical work.

The dynamic of the closeness–distance dilemma is clearly illustrated in the constellation of individual counselling within and outside prison contexts, which in these projects primarily means relationship work. The following section investigates this dynamic based on the example of a typical approach in the projects we have investigated. This approach is primarily used in programmes that address violent Islamism, and is grounded on the concept of establishing a personal relationship, based on trust, between the counsellor and their clients.⁷ In this context, informal qualifications like ethnic or religious similarity between project employees and clients, for example, are consciously used to generate closeness. Project employees attempt to interact with clients as ‘authentic’ and approachable individuals who also speak about their own personal experiences. The goal is to address clients ‘as equals’. Friendly greetings, handshakes and hugs are strategic tools, as is using language that would be typical in a Muslim/youth culture setting, such as addressing the clients as ‘brother’ or using the Islamic greeting ‘As-Salaam-Alaikum’. The pedagogical relationship with clients tends to not be thought of in terms of distinct roles, but rather as a personal relationship. One interview partner, for instance, identified their relationships with their clients as ‘friendships’. Based on this relationship logic, these counselling relationships do not have any clearly specified end; instead, they end simply in a reduction in frequency of contact, as one of the interviewees pointedly formulated: ‘It only ends when the person is dead, I’d say.’

The risk of blurring boundaries between work and personal life, and placing excessive demands on employees, is inherent in this approach, which is fundamentally based on personal closeness. As the following example shows, the fundamental tension between closeness and distance, however, is particularly relevant and is imbued with a specific dynamic because of the securitised context of the projects.

- Pedagogue 1: Well, we had security problems with one person, but we never said we don’t want to have this case any more – or did we *never* [inaudible]
- Pedagogue 2: No, no, we reported it.
- Pedagogue 1: Exactly, but we also *noted* [inaudible] it.
- Pedagogue 2: [talking at the same time] We told them word for word what he said, and [inaudible] I think three days?
- Pedagogue 1: [talking at the same time] Exactly. Well there was one who ... who said if I don’t get a work permit ...
- Pedagogue 2: [finishing Pedagogue 1’s sentences] ... then I’m going to blow up the immigration authority.
- Pedagogue 1: Exactly, then we stepped in. And, uhh, there could have ... a bomb could have blown up. So we said no. Maybe he was joking, but we have to report it. We told him as much.
- Pedagogue 2: And uhh ... at the time [inaudible], he didn’t even realise how he even got to know us, or who I actually am. He forgot that I am a counsellor, but I’m just his brother ... He

doesn't even realise any more what – ... why I'm interacting with him in the first place. And I called my colleague and said this and this and this. Thank God he was put on a plane four days later! [two-second pause] But it was really just a matter of time for him, when he was going to ... stab or rob someone.

The interviewees are talking about a counselling situation in which the client does not address the counsellor as a professional, but rather as an equal, a 'brother' – quite in line with the approach of the project. The client articulates their rage against the immigration authority, and their fantasy of engaging in an attack. The threat is against the authority, although the counsellor is addressed as an ally; nevertheless, the counsellor is horrified by what is said. The fact that the client addresses them as a like-minded 'brother' in this situation is interpreted negatively, and pathologised as the client losing touch with reality.

The crisis situation described here clearly shows how a counselling approach focused primarily on closeness can clearly reach its limits the moment the client becomes a security risk. The structure of this approach places project employees in a situation where too much is demanded of them because the relationship between pedagogy and security, which is inherently one of tension, tips over as soon as security matters become an acute problem. In this example, excess demands result in the need for a drastic reinforcement of boundaries. In the moment of the crisis, the counsellor withdraws into their institutional role and firmly rejects the more diffuse components of the relationship, which were otherwise emphasised by the project in its work with clients. What is more, when the counsellor involves security authorities, the relationship among equals is denounced and the latent structural asymmetry within the relationship becomes starkly clear. The client is declared to be a security threat, with reference to the security paradigm in prison and associated procedures ('we have to report it'), which apparently can no longer be handled through pedagogical means. Whether the client is deported as a result of the report from the project is unclear; in any case, the project employee describes the deportation as a happy coincidence that relieves them from having to draw their own boundaries *within* the pedagogical relationship with the client. This reaction ultimately shows their own emotional entanglement in the relationship, and the lack of professional, reflexive distancing. The drastic reinforcement of boundaries at the moment of crisis is associated with a (retrospective) reduction of the client to a notorious criminal ('But it was really just a matter of time for him, when he was going to ... stab or rob someone'). The interpretation of the statement, which remained open during the interaction with the client has narrowed to an approach of criminalisation. Stigmatising the client in this way as a 'hopeless case' relieves the counsellor of having to question or reflect critically on his own behaviour.⁸ This example shows how the paradox between closeness and distance, which is inherent in social work, is intensified in a security context, and the (relationship) dynamics that can unfold if reflections on this context are not sufficiently professional.

The issue of security comes into play in another way as the interview continues, when an interviewee expresses their concern that their work is influencing their private life and, worst, that their family members 'could be harmed'. The experience of a diffuse, yet ever-present threat is made visible, despite being kept latent through an affirmation of project employees, which they repeat as a kind of mantra, to 'not let yourself be intimidated' by this. In the interviewees' logic, what is important is keeping one's own fears in check, in order to be able to work. There is a tendency in this approach to treat the issue of security as taboo within the field. This does have consequences for the counsellor–client relationship, and in some situations can break through in an uncontrolled manner, as the following sequence makes clear:

Pedagogue 1: Well, I'm not afraid ... Otherwise I wouldn't do this work.

Pedagogue 3: Yes, I think if you're afraid, you can't do this kind of work at all.

Pedagogue 1: Exactly. Today, for example ... not today ... yesterday, I was with a prisoner in the detention cell; I wanted to go in there myself for a minute to look around. And he was behind me, just for a moment, and honestly I was afraid for a second because I thought 'What does he want with me right now?' and I turned around right away. He can see that, of course. Of course he notices it. He's not dumb, he sees, of course, that I was afraid. But sometimes I do have this fear. Otherwise, however, I've never felt, for instance, that this guy is sitting in front of me and he could attack me right now. Although one time [laughs] ...

Pedagogue 2: One time there was a situation.

Pedagogue 1: But otherwise, of course, I'm not afraid.
 Pedagogue 2: I really was afraid.

In this extract, the interviewees generally agree that fear would make their work impossible, and deal with different situations of fear in several anecdotes. Pedagogue 1's experience in the cell, which is cited in detail, then elicits further implied situations experienced by his colleagues, and Pedagogue 2 has described earlier the most convincing story of experiencing fear in their work as counsellor. The examples presented by these counsellors clearly show that professionals working in a security-relevant context must develop a pedagogical approach for handling security questions, and face the challenge of differentiating their own irrational fears, based primarily on the demonisation of criminals in the media in general, and radicals/terrorists in particular (Hestermann, 2016) from situations that are actually dangerous. When Pedagogue 2 visits a friend's food stand with a client who is on parole and goes into the kitchen, the client follows them. From the corner of their eye, they see the client pick up a knife lying on the counter, which they interpret as a dangerous situation. Both situations are told using a similar structure: in the form of a confession: 'honestly', 'that really was scary', and as extraordinary situations. However, the logic of curiosity seems to make fears even more taboo, instead of resulting in any constructive examination of those fears.

In each of the stories described here, the fear grows from an unexpected situation where a counsellor suddenly turns their back to a client, and perceives the client as threatening. They experience a momentary loss of control. In this case, the client goes from being an 'equal' counterpart to an incalculable security risk. It is notable that the descriptions of both Pedagogue 1 and Pedagogue 2 are less analytical of how the dangerous situation comes about, and more concerned with the fact that the client will recognise and problematise their own fear. Pedagogue 2 reports their spontaneous reaction as a successful resolution of a threat situation: 'If you said to him "Oh, what are you doing there?" he would know that I was afraid. So somehow I had to, I said "Hey, give me that, I have to cut something." I had to deflect him somehow. It worked too, nothing happened.' Being a buddy with the client in the situation and not letting on to one's own fear is judged a success. It is not the actual danger that is problematised in this case, but rather how the counsellor handles their own experience of being threatened. This taboo against fear, which dominates the whole depiction, seems to be linked closely to how the acting pedagogues perceive their relationships. Fear cannot be a part of their work, but if it does exist in certain situations, it cannot be admitted to clients, since this would expose the 'friendly relationship' between the counsellor and client as staged. Likewise, systematically addressing security risks would create distance from the client, which would thwart the relationship. Accordingly, these crisis experiences have no consequence for the ongoing work, neither they nor the counsellor's own role is systematically examined and the reflection remains on the level of an entertaining horror story – after all, 'nothing happened'.

Discussion and implications for practice

In this article, we have shown how the specific German structure, in which civil society actors are responsible for prevention and deradicalisation work within state security institutions, results in specific paradoxes and dilemmas for pedagogical work. Based on the diverse ways that this specific positioning influences pedagogical work, we have singled out two examples for empirical analysis which address the underlying structure of pedagogical work and explore closeness and distance in the pedagogical relationship.

This analysis makes clear the fundamental, added challenges to pedagogical principles: openness in the sense of addressing the needs and contexts of clients, in the sense of a dedicated pedagogical role. An open-ended process must be clearly conceptualised in the context of preventative work, and often enforced in the face of resistance. Voluntary participation and transparency are often thoroughly undermined in an enforcement context, and in light of stigmatising attributions.

This German configuration of a 'public-private partnership' might seem to be an exceptional case at first. In addition, we have drawn our findings from pilot projects whose conceptual backing is still in development, and that are still in their infancy in terms of working in a penal context. Therefore, these projects do not rely on established routines and problem-solving strategies. However, we argue that this highly specific constellation – the clash between contradictory professional and institutional logics, as well as the timing of a newly launched cooperation – represents a kind of 'perspicuous setting'

(Garfinkel, 2002, p. 141), which can be analysed to make fundamental problems and logics that generally characterise work in the radicalisation prevention field clearly visible.

There are several conclusions that can be drawn for social work practice in this field from our analyses, which make it possible to handle the paradoxes in a professional manner. In light of the tensions between pedagogy and prevention, and between closeness and distance, social pedagogical work under the conditions of securitisation is not just about finding a balance between the identified content-related, temporal and emotional needs of clients and the personnel, organisational and economic resources available to the projects. Professionals also have to navigate between adhering to their professional role and the necessity to engage personally with the client: this fundamental dilemma in pedagogy has been conceptualised as the 'contradictory unity of diffusion and specificity' (Oevermann, 1996, p. 155) in the working relationship. The work the projects do to help individuals distance themselves from or leave radical contexts (which is based on theory and experience) is understood as relationship work, and creating openness, voluntary participation and closeness also requires overcoming environmental resistance. The security context, at the same time, does inescapably influence the work. Counsellors therefore are tasked with providing a self-reflexive relationship that recognises the security context and potential dangers, without taking on the security logic itself.

The paradox between closeness and distance, which is difficult for social work to balance in any case, therefore also becomes entangled with the tension between trust versus mistrust under the conditions of securitisation. The leap of faith needed for relationship work is in conflict with the need for healthy mistrust towards clients – Schütze (1996) has described this as a core paradox of professional social work. Whenever security questions and dangers are not reflected on, fear can grow and undermine a constructive, authentic and trusting working relationship.

The examples of crisis interactions analysed in this article have shown how the security context in which the pedagogues act can influence the work of project employees and create situations in which excessive demands are placed on them unwillingly through diffuse feelings of being threatened and latent fears, especially when security questions and dangers are taboo or it remains unclear whether a client is in fact prone to violence or is merely labelled as 'radical'. This reveals the fact that their work includes 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7), excluding negative feelings or emotional dissonance, suppressing feelings or – in other situations – using them in a targeted way (Haugstvedt and Gunnarsdottir, 2021; Herland, 2021; Moesby-Jensen and Nielsen, 2015). The basis for this could be a conscious and targeted engagement with one's own emotions, as well as the emotional dynamics within the relationship to and communication with the clients.

The existence of interlocking, specific paradoxes and the relevance of emotional labour indicate the eminent importance of pedagogical and social work professionalism in this field, since poorly trained or inexperienced project employees are entirely unable to handle these paradoxical demands in a considered and confident manner (Schütze, 1996, p. 253). Therefore, structures of self-reflection, such as peer group supervision and cross-project and cross-institutional networking between social workers in this field,⁹ are essential in order to focus on the paradoxes and dilemmas involved in the work itself, and facilitate a reflexive, conscious (and not simply intuitive) way of handling them.

Finally, self-reflexivity and 'constructive emotion work' (Haugstvedt and Gunnarsdottir, 2021, p. 15) can aid in attaining clarity in professional roles. However, in light of the impact of the paradigm of securitisation, the question remains of where the 'red line' is – whether or at what point pedagogical work is made essentially impossible in this field from a structural standpoint.

Notes

¹Despite historical, theoretical and conceptual differences between the concepts 'social pedagogy' and 'social work' we use both terms almost interchangeably in this article. One main reason for this is that the empirical data of our study derive from projects in the field of prevention and deradicalisation work rooting in both traditions. Our focus was on the common challenges professionals in social work as well as social pedagogy face in securitised fields. However, it might be fruitful for further study to analyse whether projects in either of these two traditions result in different ways of coping with processes of securitisation.

²An earlier version of this article has been published in German as Jakob et al. (2020).

³The paradoxical character of professional activities has already been empirically reconstructed and theorised for various areas of activity – including pedagogy (Helsper, 1996; Oevermann, 1996; Schütze et al., 1996), social work (Nölke, 1996; Schütze, 1996) and pastoral counselling (Bätz, 1999).

⁴To avoid a loss of earnings due to participating in programmes, the participants often receive an hourly wage similar to what they get for their other work in prison.

⁵Whereby the sensitivity of prison staff varies in some cases between stigmatisation (Islamism) and normalisation (right-wing extremism) (Jakob et al., 2019).

⁶On the definition and importance of informal qualifications, see Brand et al. (2021).

⁷In this article, we restrict ourselves to a thorough description of one typical way of handling the pedagogical paradoxes presented here. Other, alternative strategies for handling these paradoxes are outlined in Jakob et al. (2019) and Jukschat et al. (2020).

⁸Schütze (1996) described stigmatisation as a strategy engaged in by professionals to neutralise their own systematic errors in handling the paradoxes.

⁹Examples of this in Germany would be networking structures and umbrella organisations like the federal working groups BAG RelEx and Ausstieg zum Einstieg (Exit to Enter), as well as the AG Strafvollzug und Bewährungshilfe (Working Group on the Penal System and Probationary Services) in the area of prevention in prisons, within which cross-institutional exchange and lobbying take place.

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Research ethics statement

The authors conducted the research reported in this article in accordance with Ethik-Kodex of the German Sociological Association: <https://soziologie.de/dgs/ethik/ethik-kodexstandards>.

Consent for publication statement

The authors declare that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication.

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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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