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Special issue: *Creativity and Social Pedagogy*

Conceptual Critique

## A new framework for creativity in social pedagogy

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### Abstract

One of the challenges facing social pedagogy is to identify how creativity can be incorporated not only into social pedagogic practice but also into a conceptual approach which integrates theories of creativity, inclusion and participation into a wider explanatory framework. This article seeks to build on the insights drawn from Danish and German social pedagogy in a way which articulates a new way of developing theory and practice. It draws on a range of articles in the special issue to critique the meaning of creativity, showing the complexity of a matter which can be utilised by neo-liberal and radical commentators. It rejects the former approach and suggests that our understanding of creativity needs to be informed with radical conceptions drawing on inclusion, participation, imaginative space and creative and political imagination. It seeks to integrate these insights into wider debates around intersectionality, critical race theory, gender and social activism. It concludes by looking at questions social pedagogy should consider as we seek to develop our theory and practice.

**Keywords:** creativity; creative and political imagination; inclusion; co-production; intersectionality; critical race theory; gender; social activism

I am pleased to have been asked to build on the articles in this special issue of the journal. The purpose of the *Creativity and Social Pedagogy* issue is to focus specifically on the ways in which creativity has been utilised within the various forms of social pedagogy and the implications of this for the practice of a wide variety of social professionals.

### **Rationale for this edition**

Social pedagogy is acknowledged to be one of the more creative forms of social professional activity (by this, I mean the activity of social pedagogues, social educators, youth and community workers, social workers, *animateurs*, arts practitioners, carers and users of services) from global and international perspectives. Over the last ten years it has attracted wider attention in the UK because of its focus on providing solutions for social isolation, social inequality and social exclusion, not just at the level of the individual and their community but at broader societal levels. These debates have been framed as a response to the more managerial approaches evidenced in established forms of intervention such as social, community and youth work. A key element of this approach to social pedagogy is creativity and the co-production and co-creation of solutions, recognising that the problems people face have diverse aspects and therefore require unique and equal partnership between workers and users of services to find effective solutions.

To explore these matters in greater detail this special issue of *International Journal of Social Pedagogy* invited submissions from academics, professionals and people who use our services, either in collaboration, or separately. We hoped that this could allow us to draw on a wide range of submissions from across the social professions. Discussion of all forms of creative activity, including theatre/drama, film, poetry, music, dance, simulation and so on were welcomed. The main themes were:

- using creativity to enhance our interventions;
- co-production and creativity;
- co-creation through the ‘common third’;
- creativity, *Haltung*, realising potential and promoting a holistic view of people using our services;
- creativity across the life course – exploration of the way creativity can be used with diverse populations;
- arts and creativity – beyond therapy.

The seven contributions in this special issue have been commissioned because they reflect one or more of these themes. They include discussions across the life course – early years, looked-after/adopted children and older people and the use of social pedagogy in higher education-based programmes in social work and social pedagogy. The articles reflect on the use of social pedagogy in a range of sessions including through a virtual school, a community music project and, in a number of different cases, higher education settings. Noticeably, nearly all of the articles draw on the Danish concept of the ‘common third’ and the German concept of *Haltung*, with emphasis also on the use of Learning Zones and the 3P model.

Key issues which arise across the articles relate to the impact of social pedagogy around personal and individual relationships, the challenging of cultural stereotypes and, in some cases, the development of social justice and social change perspectives (see Table 1).

I have elsewhere identified three key foci for the development of social pedagogy within a model known as the CRISP model (Hatton, 2013, pp. 31–40), which incorporates a number of these issues. These are:

- *Creativity* – the utilisation of innovative approaches to deliver an experience to users of services, people working within them and wider user networks, which is relevant to the dilemmas they face in the current welfare environment and which repositions relationships at the heart of social care practice. This will result in the development of work in partnership with those who use services and adopt an approach which draws on drama, creative writing, performance, poetry, sculpture, music and other creative media.
- *Inclusion* – the active involvement of the staff delivering and the people receiving day/residential, locality- and community-based services (and their carers) in the design, delivery and implementation

of new forms of practice. This, I have suggested, should be at the core of the social pedagogical methodology. The aim would be to ensure that people receiving and using services are involved at all levels.

- *Social pedagogy* – as illustrated in this special issue, this encompasses an approach to delivering services predicated on partnership between the social worker/social pedagogue/social professional and user of services, and has as its base a commitment to relationship building and problem solving. It stands in counter-position to the more risk-averse approach to service delivery found in many forms of social pedagogic and social professional practice.

**Table 1.** Key issues raised in the special issue.

<b>Personal and individual relationships</b>	<b>The challenging of cultural stereotypes</b>	<b>The development of social justice and social change perspectives</b>
Individual empowerment	The recognition of diversity	Engagement in constant struggle to change situation
Emotional attunement	The development of individual and cultural narratives	Positive partnerships
Building attachments	Dealing with trauma	Holistic and person-centred view of service users' place in the world
Communication methods between all participants	Empowering and giving strength to challenge cultural stereotypes	Identifying and tackling social inequality, social isolation and exclusion
Promotion of positive relationships	Listening to and acting upon the service user narrative	Co-producing and co-creating solutions with students, service users/carers and user-led organisations (Powerus)
Positive development of bonds and parental engagement between parents/adoptive parents and children		
Promoting a strengths perspective and valuing people		

This model provides a way of understanding the relationship of social pedagogy, creativity and inclusion – but, as I noted at the time, it needed to incorporate a discussion of power and how power relationships impact on the way professionals, users and organisations (including user-led organisations) interact.

On further reflection it is clear that such an analysis also needs to reframe discussions of creativity, inclusion and social action/activism so that they reflect the contemporary dilemmas we face. This article therefore aims to develop a wider focus on creativity, power, inclusion and processes of social explanation and social action.

### **A wider definition of creativity**

We start from a notion that creativity can be defined as the utilisation of innovative approaches to deliver an experience to participants which is relevant to the dilemmas they face. Such an approach is reflected in the contributions to this volume of the journal. However, it also needs to examine our practice in a way which repositions relationships, agency and power at the heart of social work and professional practice.

### ***Social pedagogy and discourses on power***

This means designing and implementing a curriculum, an understanding of a form of practice, a struggle which leads to change. Perhaps this can be understood more accurately as praxis, suggested by Foucault (1981, p. 159) to involve the resolution through thought and action of the problems of daily life. Such an approach challenges traditional didactic educational approaches by encouraging participants to develop work in partnership with those who use services and their organisations. This suggests an approach which draws on drama, creative writing, performance, poetry, sculpture, music and other creative media (Freire, 1972a; Hatton, 2013).

The author of this conceptual critique has previously identified that the difficulty with the CRISP definition was that it failed to take account of concepts of power. He has pointed out that this concept needs to be underpinned by a broader social constructionist approach to the analysis of social pedagogy theory and practice. Such an approach places the individual and the networks to which they are connected

at the centre of the actions we are analysing (Burr, 2015). Much of the literature can be characterised as suggesting the need for a relatively linear rather than complex understanding of the phenomena we are studying – from the individual to the community to more structural forms of change. The approach we need to adopt is one which recognises, following Foucault, that power is multi-dimensional and that we have the capacity to exercise power ourselves at different times and in different ways.

We have a tendency to portray optimism in our work and then look at the opportunities for change provided by social pedagogy, rather than focus ourselves on the barriers inherent to that change. Such barriers include an acknowledgement that people have faced deep-rooted social inequalities and social disadvantage and that this often leaves them with a sense of lacking self-belief and the capacity to envision positive alternatives for themselves. As pedagogues, we can therefore be in danger of problematising people's behaviour so that we fail to recognise and optimise the potential for change. However, as Gramsci indicated, we need to have a 'pessimism of the intellect', which needs to incorporate more negative perspectives which illustrate how people's ability to change is impacted upon by their inability to resist the processes which cause them to internalise the oppression they face. Gramsci has talked about the need instead to then move towards an 'optimism of the will', which allows us to see both the potential for change and people's capacity to achieve such change. This sense of both optimism and pessimism can then provide an internal and external dialogue (with users and their organisations, colleagues and other organisations) that allows us to see the way forward.

Anti-colonial writers such as Fanon (1978) and Memmi (1990) have shown how processes of colonisation impinge on the individuality of the person who is colonised. Fanon (1978) suggested that, as a consequence, people experiencing colonisation feel a sense of inferiority (dependency complex), which he suggested is a consequence of relations of power and domination. The work of Freire was profoundly influenced by these discussions. Freire (1994) noted how the process described by Memmi and Fanon occurs where 'the more the oppressed see the oppressors as unbeatable, endowed with an invincible power, the less they believe in themselves' (p. 115). He suggests that instead a progressive education should seek 'by means of a critical understanding of the mechanism of social conflict to further the process in which the weakness of the oppressed turns into a strength capable of converting the oppressor's strength into a weakness' (p. 115). Social pedagogy needs to direct its attention to how these processes can occur.

This starts with an appreciation of how this process of oppression occurs. Foucault (1980) showed how the mechanisms of power are hidden and suggested that it is necessary to analyse how power operates, 'on the basis of daily struggles at grass roots levels, among those whose fight was located in the fine meshes of the web of power' (p. 116). Foucault further pointed out how power is localised and that, as a consequence, people are engaged in acts of resistance and rebellion to change their situation. In Foucault's view, power is not linear but is multi-dimensional and while power can be used to oppress, it also allows space for those facing that oppression to resist and provide alternatives to it – a process that Weedon (1997), following Foucault, referred to as 'reverse discourse'. This is the process through which those facing oppression reclaim the language of that oppression and use it to construct alternative ways of understanding and changing the world. An example would be where neo-liberal governments put forward the idea of social action as a way of improving the world around us. Their meaning is, however, constructed within an understanding which suggests that social action is a way of transferring responsibility from the state to individuals and families and effectively making people responsible for resolving the social inequality they face – a way of pursuing an austerity agenda, in effect. The way of providing a reverse understanding of this process is to see social action as a means by which people organise together in networks and communities and construct alternative ways of resolving problems caused by social inequality. This demonstrates the importance of recognising that we need to engage with both the political imagination (Foucault, 1980) and the creative imagination (Vygotsky, 2004).

### *Developing ideas around creativity*

In the same way that social pedagogy's relationship with power needs to be re-understood, the way we think about creativity also needs to be problematised. This special issue provides good examples of the

way in which social pedagogy utilises ideas of creativity. Particular examples can be seen in the articles by Parker, McCreadie and Gamputsingh.

Creativity is necessarily seen as a good within social pedagogic discourses. Both Danish traditions, such as the ‘common third’, and the German tradition of *Haltung*, emphasise the importance of using creativity in our work to build the self-confidence, self-knowledge and self-awareness of the people with whom we work. The ‘common third’ approach emphasises the importance of breaking down the expert–subject relationship so that the professional and the user of services co-produce and co-create activities and interventions together. *Haltung* emphasises the need to engage with the life-world of the people with whom we engage, and to promote empathy and understanding, a person-centred approach and a holistic understanding of the richness of people’s experience and of how they interact with the world around them (for a fuller discussion see [Hatton, 2013, 2016](#)). This can be seen in the range of approaches social pedagogues adopt in working with a wide variety of individuals, groups and communities. Examples can be seen in the work we do with young people in and out of the care system, older people, people with mental health problems and/or learning disabilities and people who are homeless, misusing substances and so on. This and previous editions of the journal provide numerous examples of the effectiveness of creative approaches in which the principles of the common third and *Haltung* can be clearly seen. They often build on holistic views of the person or communities with which we engage; they develop a social justice approach to the provision of opportunities for the people we work with; they emphasise ideas of co-creating and co-producing solutions; and they try to operate within an alternative discourse to the neo-liberal perspective outlined above.

It is therefore necessary for us to reconsider how we think about creativity. Is it always a good thing? If we were to reframe our thoughts about creativity in this way, we would need to see the concept of creativity as potentially problematic. When we do this, we can see that there are at least four potential ways of understanding creativity which take us beyond the mere act of creativity itself and which locate the discourses around creativity in a way that exposes some of the contradictions within the concept itself. These are:

- Creative actions to displace responsibility for the provision of resources from the public sphere (such as the state and civil society) to the individual and community. This builds on the earlier reflection around how power can be used to oppress and is exemplified in neo-liberal discourses that see creativity and imagination as ways in which profit is maximised, social inequality increased and our experience individualised. Examples abound in the so-called creative arts where acts of individual creativity are monetised and commercialised in a form of cultural appropriation – see the way musicians, artists and writers receive token recompense for original contributions ([Teer, 2020](#)).
- Creativity as an imaginative space. [Vygotsky \(2004\)](#) argued that an essential element of helping people achieve a sense of change is to get them to imagine life as different from how it has been experienced. He referred to this as ‘the creative imagination’. He showed how it is important to link together our internal and external worlds. He argued that ‘the basis of all creative activity . . . an important component of all aspects of cultural life, enabling artistic, scientific and technical creation alike . . . (occurs) . . . whenever a person imagines, combines, alters and creates something new’ ([Vygotsky, 2004](#), pp. 9–11). Clearly that creativity can sometimes be negative, but it also has the opportunity, and potential, to be transformative. A similar point is made by [Csikszentmihalyi \(1996\)](#), who noted that creativity and the use of the creative imagination is not an internal process but one that involves an interaction between personal thoughts and the wider social environment. This is evidenced in a number of articles in this edition which focus on the need for people to engage in a constant struggle for change, the building of positive partnerships, holistic and person-centred analysis of service-users’ place in the world, the need to tackle social injustice and the importance of co-producing and co-creating new alternatives (see [Table 1](#)). For Freire, this meant that when we are presented with a dilemma or face a decision which raises questions, we have a responsibility to ‘take a position, to rupture, to opt’ for a transformative alternative ([Freire, 2016](#), p. 9). Freire wrote elsewhere that cultural action for freedom is characterised by dialogue and is about inviting ‘the people to grasp with their minds the truth of their reality’ ([Freire, 1972b](#), p. 76).



- Creativity as political imagination (Foucault, 1980, 1981). Foucault has suggested that, as above, people do not just receive power as a negative force but can also engage in acts of resistance as a way of counteracting the oppressive way in which power operates. To do this, he has suggested, we need to look beyond the present and imagine a different future, one in which we envisage the opportunity to achieve political and social change.
- This leads us to appreciating an approach which can be said to be itself a form of reverse discourse. This is where we see creativity as an alternative to individualism. In this sense we are talking about creativity as a means to actively transfer wealth from those currently accumulating it through a process of engagement with ‘a radical creativity (such as protest, activism, solidarity networks and so on) that destabilises those . . . (on the) . . . margins so that they resist co-option and are allowed to create more just and equitable horizons of possibility. Creativity is, indeed *must* be, political’ (Mould, 2018, p. 114).

### ***Inclusion***

Given this re-evaluation of how we build our understanding of social pedagogy, we also need to reframe our understanding of inclusion. Clearly, inclusion is more than just giving legitimacy to our actions by ‘listening’ to what people say to us. It needs to envelop an understanding of power which sees it as a process in which people have the agency to create forms of change for themselves. Although both the common third and *Haltung* talk about the need to be engaged with people so that we co-create and co-produce solutions to problems they face, is this enough? (Hatton, 2015, pp. 93–117). I would suggest that such a notion of inclusion needs to be widened to include an understanding of the way in which people can, at the very least, become partners in the service with which they engage. More importantly, perhaps, those using and engaging with services need to expand their expectations, and we as social professionals need to do the same, so that we explore effectively ways in which those using our services can exercise control over them. This clearly suggests the importance of developing the more transformative creative options outlined above. It means that inclusion is not just about developing new participatory structures, but should also be about utilising people’s imaginative spaces to develop new forms of inclusive practice such as non-hierarchical, collective and participatory organisational structures.

There are some other identifiable gaps in the way we reframe our current discourses around social pedagogy and acts of creative action. There is a danger that we homogenise our approach so that we can end up essentialising our understandings and our interventions. Quite clearly, we need to recognise more fully than perhaps we do the importance of dealing with issues of diversity and difference.

This will include looking at:

- *Socially engaged art (SEA)* – Given social pedagogy’s place in discourses around social education and the social professions, and its commitment to radical education (Mayo, 1999), there is a surprising absence of material from the arts community within current social pedagogic discussions. This is notwithstanding that we draw on examples from the way that art is known to be a key factor in promoting the inclusion of people in diverse situations. These include using art with people with mental health problems, those experiencing homelessness and in therapeutic and other interventions with children. Writers from the inclusive arts education community have focused on how, in arts education, ‘criticality encourages engagement between social identity and creative identity’ (Hatton, 2015, p. 4). The writings in this collection draw on critical race theory, disability studies and postcolonialism to show how arts can deepen our understanding of social inequality and help people to construct alternative ways of seeing, doing and thinking about how we can create new forms of practice.

This approach is demonstrated in the writings around socially engaged art. This can be characterised as depending on ‘social intercourse as a factor of its (socially engaged art) existence’ (Helguera, 2011, p. 2). Helguera (2011) has pointed to how socially engaged art grew out of the social movements of the 1960s. He has noted that they often aim to ‘democratise viewers, making them partners, participants or collaborators in the construction of the work’ (Helguera, 2011, p. 78). Such a focus on democratic participation fits clearly within a social pedagogic paradigm.

- *Critical race theory* – I am not suggesting that social pedagogy has ignored issues of race and ethnicity. Clearly, there is evidence to the contrary. In France the social pedagogic tradition is not so well developed, but social professionals adopt social educational and animation (*animateur*) to work with marginalised and excluded youth, particularly in the *banlieues* (Ott, 2011). Hurstel (2012) said, in any integration project, for interventions with young people to be successful they need to link together the social and cultural. As part of *Banlieues d'Europe*, he suggests the need to utilise cultural activities to animate young people to promote social change. This is particularly important at a time when racist discourses are being mainstreamed in to contemporary politics and is apposite in the light of earlier discussions about the importance of creativity to any new forms of practice.

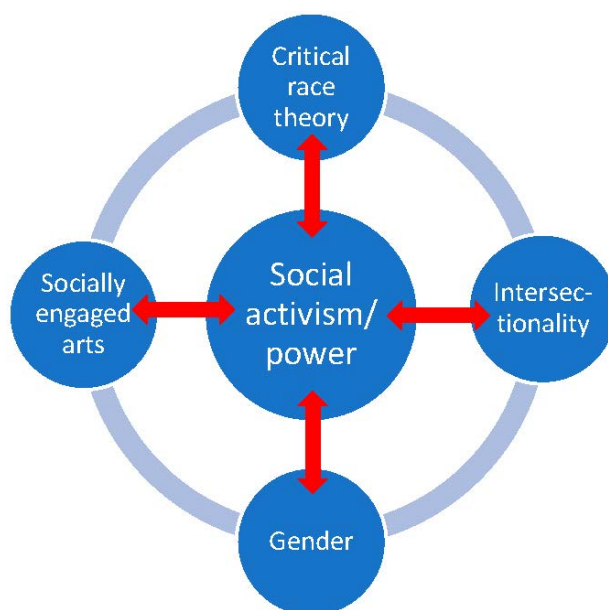
However, critical race theory goes further than just suggesting that race and ethnicity are important. It recognises that racism is a fact of everyday life – not an aberration. Further, it emphasises that racism creates a material connection between white elites and the white population more generally. It shows how racism is socially constructed and that it can often move its focus of attention from one disadvantaged group to another, for example from the Irish community in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the Islamic community today. It can finally be distinguished by the idea that people of colour have a voice which is different from those of other populations and is distinctive to their own experience (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017, pp. 8–11). Our challenge is to hear that differential ‘voice’ and apply it to our theory and practice.

- *Intersectionality* – At the same time as critical race theory has become foregrounded as an analytic tool and mode of practice, attention has been directed to the concept of intersectionality, particularly in the context within which we work, of neo-liberal governments pursuing goals of social and global inequality (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016). It emphasises that inequality does not fall equally on everyone but demonstrates that this is more than just exploitation by social class. In a similar way to social construction, it ‘highlights the significance of social institutions in shaping and solving social problems’ (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016, p. 16). It shows how people’s experiences are mediated by their social identities and how different identities around race, disability, sexuality, gender, religion and class interact. Similarly, it shares with critical race theory a commitment to people engaging in social action to change their circumstances and draws attention to how indigenous people’s communities in Latin and South America and the nations of Africa are impacted upon by inequality, deprivation and disadvantage.
- *Gender* – Women have a central role in the development of discourses around social pedagogy and some of its more all-encompassing approaches to what I have previously termed ‘structural social pedagogy’ (Marynowicz-Hetka, 2007; Eriksson, 2011). However, gender is not always a central element of social pedagogy and practice. The experience of women as part of some of the more excluded and disadvantaged groups is largely essentialised and the vast diversity of women’s experience is overlooked. bell hooks (2000) has suggested that the development of feminist discourse has been prevented from impacting more forcefully because of a lack of attention to ‘feminist consciousness-raising for males’ (p. 11). McRobbie (2020) has suggested that this has been compounded by a lack of attention to what she called ‘feminine incarceration’ in poverty and social disadvantage, where the possibility of mobility out of this situation is severely limited. She has talked about the spiral of poverty that prevents women assuming the degrees of political control to which they are entitled. In terms of the above analysis this means that an outcome of our commitment to intersectional politics has to be creating processes of social change for women in the same way that critical race discourse talks about change for black and minority ethnic communities.
- *Social activism* – The above suggests we need to develop a framework which suggests that the outcome of creative inventions is more than just supporting individuals or even communities to reach their own individual creative potential. Indeed, given the above critique of creativity and the danger that individual creativity leads to the commercialisation of the very activity we are engaging in, it is arguable that this should not be the outcome of the creative process. Instead, we should be seeking to engage in discourses which transform but also provide a liberatory pedagogy which not only

engages with current practice but also seeks to develop new prefigurative forms of practice (Freire, 1972a). The question in the immediate sense is then about how we transform social pedagogic practice and how we can ensure that the voice of the currently excluded is heard in a meaningful way. Hill Collins and Bilge have suggested that the use of an intersectional analysis can suggest ‘unexplored commonalities among social protests that appear to be particularist, uncoordinated, scattered and local’ (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016, p. 138). While social pedagogy is widely practised in Europe (perhaps more so outside than in the UK), and in Central and Latin America and New World countries, and while the journal has a clear internationalist agenda, our practice can sometimes fail to recognise these commonalities and particularities. The development of a wider perspective based on social activism may allow such developments to occur.

## Conclusion

Critical race theory, intersectionality and gender, as suggested in Figure 1, can all gain from integration with a socially engaged arts perspective which is based on social engagement and a social change and social action perspective. To this end, social activism and an understanding of the dynamics of power and the way to produce alternative discourses and perspectives are central. Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) have suggested that an understanding of the interrelationship of power relations, social inequality and social justice is essential for understanding how we can achieve social change. Such a perspective can lead to a broadened understanding of the theory and practice of social pedagogy.



**Figure 1.** A potential framework for understanding the importance of creativity for social pedagogy (Author, 2020).

In the case of practice this means focusing a critical eye on the structures we currently work within and the way we deliver social pedagogic activities. This will involve asking:

- Do we need to deliver the services we do in the way that we do? Are there other forms of practice, informed by the above perspectives, which we can develop?
- Why do we accept hierarchical forms of organisation as the only legitimate organisational form? There is evidence from within and without social pedagogy that collectives, cooperatives and user-led, democratic organisations provide viable alternatives.
- How do we make ourselves and the organisations that we work with more accountable to the people who use the services we provide? We need to develop our understanding of participation and inclusion so that it is not just about hearing people’s voices but acting on, creating and co-producing alternatives (Laloux, 2014).



- How do we ensure that the ‘voice’ of people who are currently excluded is heard and acted upon? There is still a tendency for us to involve people tokenistically in our work. We need to open ourselves and our organisations in a way in which we either enter into partnership with the people with whom we engage or, even better, pass control to those people with the ‘lived experience’.

These are significant questions which have emerged from reviewing the articles submitted and wider debates within social pedagogy and other social professions. They suggest the need to develop a wider framework for discussing the way forward and hopefully a potential agenda for the future.

### Declarations and conflict of interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work.

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