Review

In search of a social pedagogical profession in schools. Missions and roles under reconsideration

Mats Anderberg

Linnaeus University; mats.anderberg@lnu.se

Peer review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the journal's standard double blind peer-review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

Open access:

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

Abstract

School is one of the areas where social pedagogy has taken on an increasingly important function. Supported by available literature, the aim of this literature review is to describe and analyse how the work of social pedagogues in schools can be manifested. The literature review shows that social pedagogical work in schools is common in many countries and emerging in others. The study shows a wide variation both between and within countries with regard to the mission and goals, status, role and function, tasks and activities of social pedagogues. The primary mission is inclusion of pupil groups or individuals with various types of psychosocial problems or school-related difficulties, followed by preventive work aimed at all pupils to counteract social exclusion in school, disciplining groups of pupils who are in various ways disrupting or breaking school norms, a consciousness-raising and mobilising mission and a more general teaching mission aimed at citizenship and democratic upbringing. The literature review shows that social pedagogy as a profession enjoys high currency and relevance in schools with a view to preventing the segregation and exclusion of pupils.

Keywords: social pedagogy; social pedagogue; school; education

Introduction

Social pedagogy has experienced a considerable increase in profile all over the world in the last decade. New academic programmes and courses are being designed at the undergraduate and graduate levels, new books and scholarly journals are being published on the theme and academic and professional networks are emerging (Schugurensky, 2016). Interest in the social pedagogical perspective is also rising in countries that have previously lacked such a tradition, such as England (Kyriacou, 2015). School is one of the areas in which social pedagogy as a profession has taken on an increasingly important function. The reasons for the rising interest in social pedagogy in schools may include an increasing number of pupils at risk of marginalisation or suspension or expulsion from school, as well as a countervailing trend seen around the world whereby the education systems of various countries are striving increasingly towards inclusion (Björk, 2016; Swedish Government Official Report, SOU, 2017). Social pedagogues have for example become increasingly important in Norwegian schools in recent years in response to demands for general preventive interventions in the day-to-day school context, and specifically for pupils in socially underprivileged situations and positions (Stephens, 2013). The Swedish Teachers' Union has argued that more social pedagogues should be placed in schools to prevent various types of social problems and to work closely with teachers and pupil welfare staff to improve the psychosocial school milieu, because 'teachers should be allowed to be teachers' and focus on their principal mission. Heightened interest in social pedagogy is apparent in Swedish schools and local authorities seem to be employing more social pedagogues (Cederlund and Berglund, 2017; Swedish Government Official Report, SOU, 2016).

The question is what distinguishes social pedagogical work in the school in terms of professional aspects such as missions, functions, roles and tasks (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 1989). As education systems differ from country to country, it is interesting to study how social pedagogical work may be manifested in schools in different countries and to unpack functions and tasks in countries where social pedagogy is more prominent. Literature reviews based on evidence from several countries within the specific work areas of social pedagogues, such as the school, are to a large extent lacking (Hämäläinen, 2019). This article reports a study of the literature in which scholarly texts on social pedagogical work in schools have been compiled and analysed.

The overall aim of social pedagogy is to prevent social exclusion through learning, promote human integration and participation in communities and encourage active citizenship (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011; Eriksson, 2014; Smith, 2013). One fundamental assumption is that society can be changed with knowledge: 'Historically, social pedagogy is based on the belief that you can decisively influence social circumstances through education. Thus, social pedagogy started with efforts to confront social distress pedagogically in theory and practice' (Hämäläinen, 2003, p. 71). The principal mission of the social pedagogue thus becomes to create the conditions for learning and participation in society (Storø, 2012). The concept of 'pedagogy in its widest sense' was used to promote a holistic perspective on individuals in their various social contexts where care, upbringing, socialisation and learning are inseparable and thus constitute a shared responsibility for parents, schools and society (Coussée et al., 2010; Lorenz, 2008; Petrie et al., 2009; Smith and Whyte, 2008).

Hämäläinen (2013, p. 49) talks about two theoretical directions in social pedagogy, one linked to learning in general and with particular focus on social aspects, and one that encompasses interventions for socially disadvantaged individuals 'by meeting their special educational needs'. The first is aimed at encouraging active social participation and citizenship, while the latter is provided within a specific field with a specific profession to prevent and ameliorate the social disadvantage and exclusion of individuals.

Eriksson (2010, 2014) describes social pedagogical practice by reference to three models: the adaptive, the mobilising and the democratic. The *adaptive model* is based on an individual perspective, is relationship-based and emphasises various types of social interventions aimed at encouraging marginalised individuals to participate in and adjust to society and its norms. The *mobilising model* is more action-oriented and is aimed at achieving social change, emancipation and empowerment through active participation in consciousness-raising education or social pressure groups. The *democratic model* entails broad general education and teaching about humanism, democracy and social justice.

How are these theories and approaches translated into practical social education work? How do social pedagogues prevent pupils' exclusion and how is their inclusion promoted in different countries' schools? When studying specific professions, it is important to describe which tasks the professionals are responsible for and perform (Freidson, 1989). The aim of this literature review is to describe and analyse how the professional work of social pedagogues in primary and secondary education in various countries may be manifested, in relation to missions, pupil groups, roles, functions and central tasks. The article also discusses identified social pedagogical strategies and approaches based on their potential relevance and usefulness to schools.

Method

A narrative method was used in the collection and compilation of texts and in the analysis as the empirical basis for this literature study. The main goal of a narrative review of current knowledge is to create greater understanding of a particular problem area or a particular phenomenon (Bryman, 2012). The original focus of a literature review of this kind is often wider than a systematic review, and thus the literature to be included also spans a wider range. Moreover, a narrative literature review often proceeds from the interests or problems of practitioners. It is based to a higher extent on subjective interpretation and a flexible analysis of texts, compared to a more systematic and rigorous review of current knowledge. Efforts have, however, been made in this study to perform a thorough and rigorous procedure in order to meet standards of reliability, validity and credibility.

The following criteria were applied to identify texts for inclusion in the review:

- Focus on social pedagogical approaches/work in the school milieu
- Published (in most cases) during the period 2000–2019
- Published in English or a Nordic language.

A key criterion for inclusion in the results was that the terms 'social pedagogy' or 'social pedagogue' must appear, even though texts linked to social pedagogy fairly commonly do not mention the term. An additional criterion was that returned texts should refer to social pedagogical work in primary/lower secondary school (years 4–9) and/or upper secondary school (*gymnasieskola* in Nordic languages; usually years 10–12). The review thus excludes early childhood education and adult education.

The search terms used were 'social pedagogy' and 'social pedagogue' combined with 'school', 'teacher' and 'education' and the Nordic equivalents. The first step was to run general literature searches, based on the inclusion criteria set out above, in the ERIC, SwePub, Sociological Abstracts and Social Services Abstracts databases, as well as in the Google search engine to find scholarly reports and 'grey papers' on the theme. Some texts returned were upon closer review of the abstracts excluded as irrelevant. The texts that matched the aim of the study were printed out in full and read. This more systematic text search was augmented by a review of many other literary works on the theme of social pedagogy, such as anthologies and textbooks, in English and in Nordic languages, whose reference lists led in several cases to additional relevant texts. In this way, the data collection can be primarily characterised as a 'snowball sample' (Bryman, 2012). Even though social pedagogy is a central concept in Germany, texts in German were excluded – with one exception – due to the author's inadequate language skills. Altogether, the analysis and results were based on 81 different scholarly articles, theses or reports.

Supported by thematic analysis, all texts were read and sections relevant to the question were highlighted, coded and structured based on several general themes, which were named (Bryman, 2012). The empirical material was summarised under each theme and connected to illustrative quotations. The summaries were then used as a basis for reporting the results, which are organised under subheadings on the various themes.

Some texts provide more general descriptions of social pedagogical work in schools and deal more with missions and functions than with concrete activities. Other texts probably reflect more of a wish list for how social pedagogues could or should work in schools. A few of the texts are also relatively old and it is uncertain how well they align with contemporary education. The dearth of texts from Germany,

where social pedagogical work is common in schools, is another limitation of the study. Overall, however, the texts unpack and exemplify how social pedagogical work in schools is or could be manifest.

Results

The following account is a summary of how social pedagogues work in school milieus in various countries: their missions and goals, roles and functions and the tasks they perform.

Social pedagogues are expected presences in primary and secondary schools in several countries, including Austria (Heimgartner and Sting, 2013), Belgium (Kornbeck and Radermaecker, 2011), Croatia (Bouillet, 2016), the Czech Republic (Lorenzova, 2018), Denmark (Madsen, 2013), Finland (Hämäläinen, 2019), France (Kern and Reichhart, 2011), Germany (Kreuzer, 2009), Lithuania (Kraus and Hoferkova, 2016), Norway (Borg et al., 2014), Poland (Kantowicz and Wilinska, 2009), Romania (Ezechil, 2015), Russia (Romm, 2016) and Slovakia (Emmerová, 2016). There is growing or rekindled interest in introducing the concept in schools in other countries, such as England (Black et al., 2017), Estonia (Kraav, 2003), Greece (Mylonakou-Keke, 2015a), Ireland (Hämäläinen, 2015), Scotland (Smith and Whyte, 2008), Spain (Úcar, 2011) and Sweden (Eriksson, 2014). Social pedagogy as a profession is also common in modern early childhood education in various areas of Europe, aimed at developing children's social relationships, supporting parents and preparing children for school by stimulating learning (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011).

Social pedagogues may have particular responsibility for supporting pupils with social problems or difficulties interacting with peers at special educational needs schools or enhanced resource schools. The goal is for the pupils to succeed at their studies and return to their regular schools (Bolin, 2010). They are also used in more vocationally oriented secondary education to increase motivation and prevent exclusion of young people at risk of quitting school (Colley et al., 2007; Hämäläinen, 2012a).

Social pedagogues also commonly work in various types of programme for young people who have quit school, aimed at 'repairing' poor experiences and relationships to school and supporting a return to education (Cameron, 2011; Grace, 2007; Langager, 2009). They also work with adult students at some Swedish folk high schools to provide social and educational support to develop knowledge and abilities while mobilising students to enable their inclusion in society (Eriksson, 2010; Winman and Palmroth, 2010). The overall objective of the folk high schools is to provide general civic education and hold both special and general courses, often in small groups, suitable for adults who have not completed their secondary education.

A tripartite mission

In several texts, social pedagogues are assigned a broad and complex mission. Similar to the traditional aims of the social pedagogy concept, the analysed texts show a clear division into the following missions: one specifically oriented towards socially disadvantaged pupils or those with special educational needs; a preventive effort aimed at all pupils to prevent social exclusion in schools; and an orientation towards general learning aimed at citizenship, democratic upbringing and active social participation (cf. Coussée et al., 2010; Eriksson, 2014; Hämäläinen, 2012a, 2013; Kraav, 2003; López-Blasco, 1998; Madsen, 2005; Stensmo, 1991; Storø, 2013).

These seemingly utterly separate missions can, however, be overlapped or blended in order, for example, to avoid stigmatising individual pupils:

> Indeed, the pedagogical approach has the potential to bridge the stigmatizing split between general educational facilities for children and young people and those designed for 'needy children and young people', but this potential can only be revealed through the combination in social pedagogy of its person- and policy-oriented meaning. (Coussée et al., 2010, p. 799; cf. Giesecke, 1998)

Inclusion through interventions

Inclusion of socially underprivileged or marginalised pupils emerges in most of the analysed texts as the principal mission or objective of social pedagogues in schools (Ezechil, 2015; Giesecke, 1998; Heimgartner and Sting, 2013; Kornbeck, 2014; Kraav, 2003; Kraus and Hoferkova, 2016; Langager and

Vonsild, 2007; Lorenzova, 2018; Madsen, 2013; Mylonakou-Keke, 2015b; Romm, 2016; Storø, 2012; Zemancíková, 2010). Here, social pedagogues could then be a natural element of the school's general support system or pupil health team for pupils with special educational needs. This means that several different interventions are applied to develop pupils' 'socialisation capacity' and improve their connection to and integration in school (Kern and Reichhart, 2011; Romm, 2016). The goal of social pedagogical work in schools is to enhance opportunities for social participation for socially underprivileged pupils when, based on their social and cognitive abilities, they practise engaging in the 'normal' life of society that the school is thought to represent (Giesecke, 1998). From a social pedagogical perspective, however, it is not only the individual pupil who is to be included in the community: the social milieu of the school must also be made more tolerant and inviting by taking the various circumstances and talents of pupils into account (Holst, 2017; Madsen, 2013). Madsen argues that social inclusion should consequently be a main mission for all school staff, as well as, to a great extent, a 'general pedagogical concern' (Madsen, 2005, p. 197).

Prevention of school failure and exclusion

Often, social pedagogues in schools have a particular mission and specific competence to work preventively and proactively, in relation not only to specific children but to the entire pupil group: 'This refers to pedagogical efforts aimed at improving all children's conditions for participating in social communities – regardless of their special needs' (Madsen, 2005, p. 25; see also Black et al., 2017; Higham, 2001; Holst, 2017). Accordingly, the mission of the social pedagogue is to create learning opportunities for all children and to eliminate various barriers in order to prevent social exclusion (Holst, 2017; Paterson et al., 2019; Smith, 2012; Vikær Andersen et al., 2017). Petrie (2005a) argues that English schools should adopt a social pedagogical perspective to a greater extent to prevent school failure and reduce pupils' risk of exclusion. Kyriacou (2009) and Mylonakou-Keke (2015a) has, for example, developed a holistic model for preventing violence and victimisation in English and Greek schools:

> The overall aim of this model is to prevent bullying, aggression, violence, exclusion and victimisation in the school community, through the consolidation and utilization of social pedagogic values, principles and beliefs (the social pedagogic ethos). This will be reflected in behaviour patterns and will lead to a systemic transformation of the ethos and general culture of all the involved systems, that is, the school, the family, the wider school environment, the neighborhood and the community. (Kyriacou, 2009, p. 634)

Smith and Whyte (2008) argue that the ideas enshrined in social pedagogy largely align with a venerable Scottish philosophical tradition in which schools, alongside their mission to impart knowledge, should also meet the physical and psychological needs of all children, with close ties to families and the community. In this tradition, social problems are thought to be caused by society and the purpose of schools thus becomes to prevent the exclusion of pupils from mainstream education and the associated risk of stigmatisation. This educational philosophy emphasises a salutogenetic and promotive perspective on the needs of pupils: 'prevention rather than cure, a focus on the needs of the child rather than their misdeeds' (Smith and Whyte, 2008, p. 19; see also Sting, 2007).

Pupils' participation and inclusion in school are also considered necessary prerequisites for their learning and development: 'But the social pedagogue is not a pedagogue in the same way as the teacher in the classroom. The social pedagogue's pedagogical tasks have closer links to upbringing and formation than to school pedagogy' (Storø, 2013, s. 63).

Mobilisation through democratic education

The democratic upbringing provided by schools is emphasised in the education systems of most countries, but social pedagogy as a concept has taken this mission one step further. In addition to preventing or resolving pupils' problems with school, the school can – and, from a social pedagogical perspective, should – also constitute an arena for critical reflection on the role and function of the school in relation to society (Coussée et al., 2010; Lyng Rasmussen, 2017; Madsen, 2013; Sting, 2007). For example,

this involves developing pupils' knowledge about the context in which they live and the selection and exclusion processes that occur in both schools and society, and equipping pupils with tools for handling and overcoming them. Sting (2004) argues that social pedagogues in schools have a significant mission to counteract or limit the consequences of the social inequality that schools often reproduce through selection and exclusion: 'To take these factors into account, a social pedagogisation of teaching is required that reflects the socially changeable educational opportunities and puts the process of broad general education in a greater context' (Sting, 2004, p. 58).

Similar intentions are also found in Swedish schools. Sernhede (2008, 2010) describes a cultural project with social pedagogical overtones in an upper secondary school in a segregated neighbourhood. The project was aimed at increasing pupils' knowledge and understanding of the circumstances of their lives and at motivating and mobilising them to action, in a process wherein both teachers and social pedagogues 'create the conditions in the classroom for the pupils to feel confirmed in the learning process and encourage them to analyse and problematise the realities (the school, the community, the country) of their lives' (Sernhede, 2008, p. 115).

The aim must thus be for pupils to develop a critical perspective on knowledge that by extension can pave the way for acting and changing their living conditions. Sernhede (2010) emphasises that this requires a school system that talks openly about social injustices, xenophobia, discrimination and stigmatisation of segregated neighbourhoods and schools. By doing this, subject knowledge is augmented with an interest in important social issues such as multiculturalism, marginalisation, integration and socialisation (Fielding, 2011; Grace, 2007; Sting, 2007; Winman and Hermansson, 2008).

Smith and Whyte (2008) believe that an increasing rate of school failure must be related to the difficult social and economic circumstances that pupils are often facing due to the neoliberal education policy that has characterised England and Scotland in recent decades. Here, a social pedagogical perspective can be regarded as a key to social change in a school system that emphasises structure, discipline and knowledge outcomes. From a historical perspective, social pedagogy has always been aimed both at teaching children and adolescents to be active citizens in society and at teaching them how to change society (Eriksson, 2014; Kyriacou, 2013).

Pupil groups in the border zone between normality and deviance

The principal missions of the social pedagogical profession in schools are closely related to the pupil groups identified in the texts. This primarily involves pupils who are socially underprivileged in various ways, but also pupils who are not facing difficulties:

All pupils can benefit from social pedagogy; however, the professional practice of social pedagogy is primarily resourced to focus on individuals in settings where particular needs are evident, such as with children facing acute personal problems, looked after children in residential care and foster homes, those with disabilities, and those who have become marginalised from the mainstream of society and social activities. (Kyriacou, 2015, p. 431; see also Madsen, 2005; Storø, 2013)

Several of the children and adolescents who are the targets of social pedagogical interventions in the analysed texts thus belong to various risk groups, such as pupils with high absence rates, various physical or mental disabilities, difficulties concentrating, problems of aggression, difficulties cooperating, dyslexia, learning disabilities, family problems or drug problems, as well as recently arrived immigrants and unaccompanied minor refugee youth, stressed or low-performing pupils and looked-after children and adolescents, as well as pupils who are being bullied or discriminated against due to other ethnicity, gender or social class (Borg et al., 2014; Emmerová, 2016; Erlandsen and Langager, 2013; Heimgartner and Sting, 2013; Kornbeck, 2014; Kraus and Hoferkova, 2016; Kraav, 2003, 2015; Langager and Vonsild, 2007; Lorenzova, 2018; Madsen, 2013; Romm, 2016; Storø, 2012; Vikær Andersen et al., 2017; Zemancíková, 2010). Overall, this involves pupils at risk of school failure, social exclusion at school, quitting school on their own initiative or being suspended or expelled.

Social pedagogy, however, presumes that pupils are in difficult circumstances and life situations, instead of ascribing the problems to the pupils themselves (Kyriacou, 2013). Madsen (2005, p. 184) argues

that there is an obvious risk that a chaotic work environment at school will be redefined on vague grounds as an individual problem, which is seldom questioned: 'The social problem is individualised when the teacher puts a name to the disruption. An individual child is pointed out as the cause of problems in the classroom'. There is thus imminent risk that alternative courses of action that might involve improvements to the classroom climate will never be considered.

The varying roles and functions of social pedagogues in schools

The work of social pedagogues in schools can often encompass several different roles, as social pedagogues have a holistic approach and method and these roles may overlap or vary over time. Objectives are vague in some cases and the role of the social pedagogue is thus tacitly understood or even contradictory. Confusion or complications may arise related to the roles, missions and functions of social pedagogues in relation to teachers and other school staff because they belong partly to another professional culture and are often ascribed a lower position in the school hierarchy based on ignorance of or skepticism about their skills (Borg et al., 2014; Giesecke, 1998; Heimgartner and Sting, 2013; Hvid Thingstrup et al., 2017; Kornbeck and Radermaecker, 2011; Zemancíková, 2010). The recognition and status of Russian social pedagogues in relation to teachers is usually described as low and their tasks are defined to a great extent by head teachers (principals), which contributes to a lack of clarity about their role and to limiting their scope of action (Romm, 2016).

As teachers are being asked to an increasing extent to focus on improving pupils' target attainment and performance, they can find it difficult to understand the relevance of many of the activities of social pedagogues. Some social pedagogues adjust to this logic by creating activities based on set learning targets and legitimating them 'by inscribing them in dominating understandings of education as attainment and academic learning' (Hvid Thingstrup et al., 2017, p. 7). It has also been shown that social pedagogues have themselves been able to define their role and status in schools based on personal characteristics and skills, such as the ability to create good relationships with pupils and teachers, commitment and creativity (Borg et al., 2014; Lorenzova, 2018).

The social pedagogue as a specialist

In several countries, the social pedagogue has an explicit expert or specialist role which in some cases may be governed by the education laws of the specific country, as in the Czech Republic (Lorenzova, 2018), Croatia (Bouillet, 2016; Zizak, 2014), Lithuania (Kraus and Hoferkova, 2016), Slovakia (Emmerová, 2016; Mátel and Preissova Krejcí, 2016), and French-speaking Belgium (Kornbeck and Radermaecker, 2011). Social pedagogues in Swedish enhanced resource schools are often ascribed an unquestioned expert role in close cooperation with teachers, special education teachers, parents and social services (Bolin, 2010). They often have a specific professional competence in supporting and motivating pupils towards improving their social, emotional and cognitive skills and attaining their knowledge targets, while they are fully familiar with the school's organisation and day-to-day routines (Borg et al., 2014; Heimgartner and Sting, 2013). They also commonly act as advisers to teachers on various matters related to pupils' psychosocial situations and specific problems (Borg et al., 2014; Ezechil, 2015; Langager and Vonsild, 2007). Although the social pedagogue may have a specialist role, their mission differs from that of the psychologist or therapist, even if their work can obviously have a 'therapeutic' effect (Petrie, 2015c).

The social pedagogue as link and mediator

Social pedagogues are also often seen in the role of link between different school professionals, facilitating cooperation that promotes pupils' educational and social development (Bolin, 2010; Heimgartner and Sting, 2013; Kornbeck and Radermaecker, 2011; Kraus and Hoferkova, 2016; Lorenzova, 2018; Wejfalk, 2011). The social pedagogue could, for example, connect teachers and pupil health staff:

> The presence of trained, professional pedagogues acting on behalf of individual children and of the school and local community, working as members of classroom and school teams in support of children's overall development, might furnish a necessary counterbalance to the 'delivery model' of education. (Petrie, 2005b, p. 295)

They often form a natural part of a multidisciplinary team and may also represent pupils vis-à-vis third parties, or fill a mediating function in, for example, conflicts with teachers or other professionals (Kyriacou, 2013).

The social pedagogue as an adult friend

In classroom situations, the social pedagogue can have a clearly socially oriented and pedagogically fostering role alongside the teacher's more teaching-oriented function (Black et al., 2017; Ezechil, 2015; Heimgartner and Sting, 2013; Giesecke, 1998; Kornbeck, 2014; Kornbeck and Radermaecker, 2011; Kyriacou, 2009, 2013, 2015; Madsen, 2005; Petrie, 2005a, 2005b; Rosendal Jensen, 2016; Storø, 2013). The social pedagogue is consequently thought to constitute a stable, caring and reliable adult person to whom pupils can turn when they need advice and support. They then develop a relationship to the pupil that is horizontal rather than hierarchical and controlling (Kyriacou, 2013; Smith, 2013; Stephens, 2013). 'Their "neutrality" in the school system seems to give them a special position of trust, which the pupils sometimes rank more highly than their trust in parents or friends' (Heimgartner and Sting, 2013, p. 125).

The social pedagogue as a security guard

Social pedagogues may sometimes get assigned tasks that teachers do not want or feel they do not have time for, such as managing behaviour or conflicts in the classroom (Borg et al., 2014, 2015; Emmerová, 2016; Kraus and Hoferkova, 2016; Madsen, 2005). There has been a tendency among teachers in German schools to turn over unpopular tasks, which have nothing to do with teaching, to social pedagogues, who are expected to remove disruptive pupils from the classroom as needed. In urgent situations, they are given what can almost be termed the role of 'psychosocial fire brigade' (Giesecke, 1998; Sting, 2007). In a Swedish study of cooperation between a social pedagogical resource team and school staff aimed at including pupils at risk of exclusion, discussions and conflicts arose on the objective of the resource team in that some teachers considered them assistants who should remove pupils from the classroom as needed (Thornberg, 2009). As primary and lower secondary school is often very traditional and is compulsory, social pedagogues may, alongside filling a supportive role for the pupils, also take on a controlling and repressive function in support of teachers and the school (Kornbeck and Radermaecker, 2011).

Tasks in the zone between support and control

The central tasks described for social pedagogues in schools show breadth and depth and there is a wealth of variation in the texts with regard to both the content and performance of the work. The texts sometimes report activities at a more general level and list possible tasks, while more concrete descriptions are provided in other cases.

Kyriacou (2009) shows the role's potential breadth and argues that social pedagogical work in schools could involve five general missions that may overlap: these are care and welfare, inclusion, socialisation, academic support and social education, with specific tasks linked to each mission. *Care and welfare* refers to interventions that ensure pupils' safety and protection as well as their physical and psychological wellbeing. *Inclusion* involves making disadvantaged pupils into participants in teaching and other social contexts at school. The third mission, *socialisation*, involves helping pupils develop an understanding of how to behave in concert with desired expectations, norms and values and to resist group pressure and participation in antisocial activities. The *academic support* mission includes creating the conditions for learning and developing social and cognitive skills in pupils at risk of school failure. The fifth mission refers to *social education*, including health-promoting pedagogical interventions aimed at encouraging the personal and social development of all pupils in relation to citizenship and democratic upbringing, ethics and morals, gender and sexuality, physical and mental health, alcohol and drugs, etc.

The main tasks of social pedagogues were identified at a few schools in Malmö, Sweden in a research circle (Wejfalk, 2011). They were responsible, for example, for engaging in individual counselling with pupils at the request of the pupil health team based on action plans; interacting with parents and cooperating with social services and child psychiatric services; engaging in preventive efforts against bullying; and acting as discussion leaders in groups of girls or boys.

The work of social pedagogues shows considerable variability in French schools as well. In France, they correspond to the titles *éducateur* or *éducation specialisée* (Kornbeck, 2012; Smith, 2012), but social pedagogues are also found in the French school system in positions designated *survelliants*, who perform various social pedagogical tasks in close cooperation with teachers: 'Survelliants organise the social lives of school classes and have concrete tasks related to parental cooperation, free time and absence from school' (Madsen, 2005, p. 15).

In French-speaking Belgium, social pedagogues can also function as a complement to teachers for pupils facing various types of difficulties or who are at risk of quitting school (Kornbeck and Radermaecker, 2011). Individual head teachers are responsible for these positions and their content, which means the content may vary widely: 'Some schools may entrust their pedagogues with truly educational tasks, while others will only ask them to do the classic "surveillance" tasks' (Kornbeck and Radermaecker, 2011, p. 208). They may thus function as counsellors tasked with reinforcing both pedagogical and social learning processes and with special skills in observing, analysing and assessing here-and-now needs in school situations and group dynamics in the classroom, but may also be assigned a normative behaviour management function in connection with breaks and mealtimes, as well as behaviour management during lessons. They also participate, as needed, in progress meetings with pupils and in staff meetings, manage contacts with parents and participate in documentation processes at the school (Kornbeck and Radermaecker, 2011).

Individual supportive interventions

It emerges in the majority of the analysed texts that the orientation of social pedagogical work in schools in several countries is mainly person-to-person, where the social pedagogue's primary task is to help individual pupils manage difficult or risky situations at school to help support learning and prevent exclusion (Borg et al., 2014; Emmerová, 2016; Heimgartner and Sting, 2013; Kornbeck, 2014; Kraus and Hoferkova, 2016; Kraav, 2003; Langager and Vonsild, 2007; Lorenzova, 2018; Madsen, 2005; Mátel and Preissova Krejcí, 2016; Sting, 2007; Storø, 2012; Zemancíková, 2010).

This usually means that an introductory analysis of the pupil's current needs is made, based on observations and discussions with others, which is followed by various types of individualised solutions that may include academic, emotional and social support (Romm, 2016). Petrie (2005a) argues that social pedagogues generally have good theoretical understanding of the difficulties pupils are facing on various levels and applicable knowledge about how pupils' problems can be resolved with relevant interventions. These are often made up of advisory, supportive and motivating dialogues about specific problematic situations, such as conflicts with peers or teachers. The discussions are aimed at strengthening these pupils' relationships with peers and developing their skills at managing and mastering day-to-day life at school. With the help of social pedagogues, pupils may also practise and develop their interpersonal skills by participating in various group activities and then gradually assuming greater personal responsibility for their schooling (Heimgartner and Sting, 2013; Kraav, 2003; Madsen, 2005).

In Denmark, social pedagogues sometimes fill a special function as 'mentors' for individual pupils whose connection to school is weak (Erlandsen and Langager, 2013; Langager and Vonsild, 2007; Rosendal Jensen, 2016). The mentor's task is to prevent pupils from quitting school by creating good relationships with them, acting as role models and motivating pupils to engage in learning and stay in schoolThese tasks may be performed by either social pedagogues or teachers with a particular interest in the social aspects of teaching (Langager and Vonsild, 2007). The idea behind mentors is that they could promote socially accepted attitudes and actions and provide emotional and practical support for pupils' social, cognitive, communicative and emotional development, which is in turn meant to reinforce pupils' self-esteem and ability to take control of their situations and manage the problems and challenges they encounter in their lives (Kyriacou, 2013).

Social pedagogues usually work with individuals in their entire contexts, which may involve cross-boundary efforts in which other milieus are involved, such as pupils' homes, recreational settings and neighbourhoods (Higham, 2001; Paterson et al., 2019; Severinsson, 2010). Tasks may include giving advice, guidance and support to parents, guardians and other key people involved in pupils' lives, but

also cooperation with pupil health services, social services and other actors (Bolin, 2010; Heimgartner and Sting, 2013; Kraus and Hoferkova, 2016; Mylonakou-Keke, 2015b). They could also bring attention to the need to change pupils' social conditions or difficult family circumstances (Kyriacou et al., 2016). They may provide support to specific pupils as they make the transition between school years or from one school to another (Kraav, 2003; Kyriacou, 2015). For children and adolescents in various forms of social care, social pedagogues can provide special support in their school careers by motivating them and helping with homework (Zeller and Köngeter, 2012).

Preventive and group-related tasks

Although their primary task is to support individual pupils, social pedagogues often have wider responsibility and tasks that affect a larger group or an entire class. They may, for example, act to prevent undesirable behaviour by helping pupils to practise communicative skills and develop their social competence in creating relationships and resisting group pressure (Black et al., 2017; Borg et al., 2014; Emmerová, 2016; Kraus and Hoferkova, 2016; Romm, 2016; Storø, 2012; Zemancíková, 2010). Social learning takes place in ordinary school situations where values and attitudes are discussed and jointly reflected upon. They may also work to improve cohesion in classes where group dynamics are problematic (Heimgartner and Sting, 2013).

Specific social pedagogical interventions are applied in Danish schools under the acronym BRW (behaviour, relationships, wellbeing), which involves:

> implementing initiatives for improved wellbeing in the school, providing guidance and supervision in relation to social interactions in the class and assisting colleagues in differentiating teaching for pupils in the class who have difficulties in relation to behaviour, relationships and wellbeing. (Langager and Vonsild, 2007, p. 3)

With regard to pupils who are excluded from the pupil group or have been the victims of bullying, social pedagogical work is aimed at directing attention to changing the context rather than focusing on the roles of the bullies and the bullied (Kyriacou et al., 2016). Accordingly, they work to practise and reinforce prosocial thinking and empathy for victims of bullying in all pupils and to include pupils who are harassed or excluded from the school community (Heimgartner and Sting, 2013; Stephens, 2013). Social pedagogical programmes have also been used in Greece to prevent and intervene against bullying at school and on social media (Gogoni et al., 2015; Mylonakou-Keke, 2015a, see also Kyriacou and Zuin, 2016).

In a project in Trinidad and Barbados, 12 student teachers used a social pedagogical inclusive methodology during their two school-placement terms to create greater participation and learning among low-performing pupils. The project resulted in improved performance for all pupils, but particularly for pupils who had previously underperformed. There were significant changes in pupils' attitudes towards group work and towards school overall (Kutnick et al., 2006).

It is also not unusual for social pedagogues to carry out other preventive activities, such as organising social activities or specific groups for girls or boys or arranging teaching on the subject of alcohol, drugs, doping and tobacco (Lorenzova, 2018; Kraav, 2003; Wejfalk, 2011). A social pedagogical violence-prevention programme was developed in Germany that includes supportive interventions for specific at-risk pupils, skills development for teachers on violence prevention measures, cooperation between parents and teachers and joint drafting of rules and sanctions for breaking the rules (Kreuzer, 2009).

Commonly, social pedagogues are also tasked with contributing to greater safety and order in the classroom, during breaks and on other premises, as well as managing conflicts and other problematic situations that arise (Borg et al., 2014; Giesecke, 1998; Kraus and Hoferkova, 2016; Kornbeck and Radermaecker, 2011; Madsen, 2005; Sting, 2007; Thornberg, 2009).

Discussion

Social pedagogical work between support and control

The literature review shows that social pedagogical work in schools is common in many countries and growing in others. The trend is probably related to the increasing numbers of young people at risk

of marginalisation and exclusion from school and the community. A more proactive social pedagogical perspective and a rising interest in the idea of inclusion, where the problem is shifted from individuals to their surroundings, have probably also had an impact on this development (Erlandsen and Langager, 2013). The return of the concept to the field of education has thus also involved a 'reversion' to the original, general pedagogical roots (see Hämäläinen, 2015; Jarning, 1997). Kristensen (2013) argues that social pedagogy has probably taken on increasing importance in schools because it represents a more modern form of pedagogy that also makes the division between general education, special needs education and social pedagogy outdated.

The review shows wide variation as regards the missions and goals, status, roles and functions, tasks and activities of the social pedagogue in schools. This variation seems to exist both within and between countries. The greater the detail in which the social pedagogical work is described, the more other assignments besides those first identified appear (cf. Freidson, 1989). The primary mission in most countries is inclusion of pupil groups or individuals with various types of psychosocial problems or academic difficulties. Another frequently occurring mission is preventive work aimed at all pupils, to counteract social exclusion in school and prevent bullying, violence and drug use. A consciousness-raising and mobilising mission intended to create social change for pupils is stated in some texts, but seems to be relatively unusual. This also applies to the orientation towards more general teaching aimed at citizenship, democratic upbringing and active social participation. In Sweden, teachers are normally responsible for the latter mission, while in other countries this is assigned to social pedagogues. Overall, the missions align relatively well with the three social pedagogical models presented by Eriksson, although an explicitly preventive mission can be said to constitute a fourth (Eriksson, 2014).

The identified differences in mission may be rooted in the various interpretations or structures of social pedagogical practice that have arisen from the historical, political, economic and cultural conditions of different countries, but also in how this practice is related to national welfare and education systems (Cameron, 2011; Eriksson, 2014; Hämäläinen, 2012b, 2015; Lorenz, 2008; Úcar, 2011, 2013). Even though the title is the same, social pedagogues' educational foundations and job content can differ widely from one country to the next. Thus, there is not a clearly defined profession (Abbott, 1988; cf. Hämäläinen, 2019). Regardless of the varied designs of their missions, however, there is a common social pedagogical objective to promote the inclusion of individuals and groups in various kinds of communities, supported by socially oriented pedagogical strategies, and to create opportunities for learning and development (Holst, 2017; Janer and Úcar, 2017; Smith, 2012).

There may be some overlap in the focus and roles of teachers and social pedagogues, but there are also significant differences. Some teachers probably work more like social pedagogues and base their teaching and their perspective on learning as being relationally created, while others more clearly emphasise the knowledge mission and prefer not to concern themselves with social aspects (Stephens, 2013). Teachers may not have the time, willingness or ability to develop good relationships with pupils or manage conflicts. Handing over tasks perceived as demanding to social pedagogues is in partial conflict with a Nordic teaching tradition wherein knowledge-related goals and the social mission have been regarded to a great extent as difficult to separate (Borg et al., 2014; cf. Aspelin, 2014). The relational aspect has also been emphasised as a particularly meaningful factor in all teaching (Biesta, 2015; Hattie, 2009).

The literature review also shows wide variability in the pupil groups with which social pedagogues work, ranging from all pupils to especially problematic pupils. Social pedagogues often have specific knowledge about and skills related to meeting individual pupils with various types of difficulties and needs in a constructive manner by creating good relationships with them and identifying relevant solutions. A social pedagogical mission does not, however, need to stop with individual interventions aimed at 'problem' pupils. It could augment individual-centred and 'defensive' work by also directing attention to children's inequitable childhood conditions and to schools that have an exclusionary effect (cf. Giesecke, 1998).

As shown by the results, social pedagogues are found in the field of tension between normality and deviance and between work with individuals or groups of pupils in schools. The diagram below describes

how various social pedagogical positions and examples of tasks or interventions may relate to both of these conceptual dichotomies.
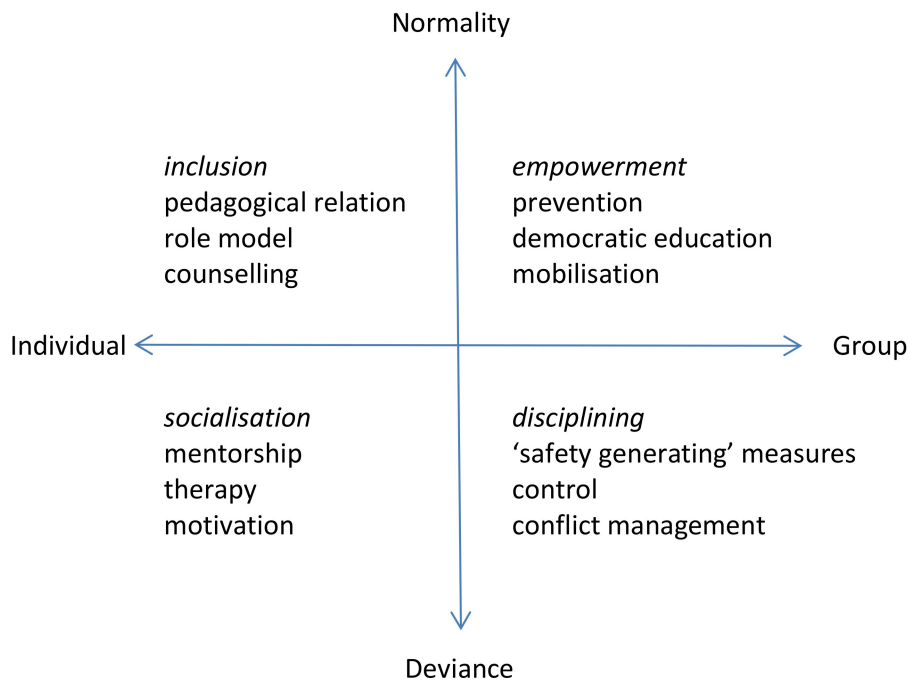

Figure 1. Social pedagogical positions with examples of tasks.

Creating pedagogical and trusting relationships with individual pupils by being a positive adult role model, so that pupils are included in the school community, complies with the social pedagogical ideal. Another pronounced objective is that social pedagogues should prevent or remove various types of barriers to learning, contribute to pupils' democratic upbringing and support them in working with others to take control or take back control over their lives. It seems common for social pedagogues to be positioned in the lower left part of the diagram and to work primarily with various types of initiatives aimed at pupils with individual difficulties so that they will be socialised into school and the community. To some extent they also monitor and intervene in relation to groups of pupils who are in various ways disrupting or breaking school norms, by using various forms of disciplinary measures.

Implications for education policy and practice

This literature review shows that a social pedagogical perspective is or could be highly current and relevant both in schools and for society as a whole. It is paradoxical that schools, whose primary objective is to guarantee lifelong social inclusion, are exacerbating segregation, differentiation and exclusion to such a great extent. These processes have in turn resulted in the reproduction of inequalities to a higher degree, with pupils increasingly being deselected or eliminating themselves from education (Kearney, 2011).

> When exclusion and inclusion are processes that play out based on calm/disruption as the dominant criteria for inclusion, numerous disadvantaged positions are created for specific pupils: the restless ones who disrupt the teacher's lessons and the learning of others in the class. Here, a social pedagogical perspective can offer a participation perspective on learning, where social positions in the classroom setting can be analysed based on a specific social context for participation. (Madsen, 2013, p. 130)

Social pedagogical problems arise to a great extent as a consequence of social structures and changes in schools, and cannot be ascribed solely to the individual pupil (Madsen, 2013; Beach et al., 2013). Excluding children and adolescents from participation in the normal life of society that school, for

example, is presumed to represent, even as increasing demands are being imposed on citizens' active participation in society, is contradictory. The school should to a greater extent consider itself a significant actor and protective factor in preventing social and pedagogical problems among children and adolescents (Carter et al., 2008). Several different professions, including social pedagogues, could work together to attain these objectives.

The philosophy and theory of social pedagogy can contribute to a deeper understanding of problems that characterise modern schools, such as bullying, high absenteeism, exclusion and the severe consequences they can bring in terms of unemployment, mental illness, drug problems and crime. It offers an overall solution to several of them, and there is potential in rekindling the interest in more socially oriented educational traditions that have been pushed back under the dominant educational perspective of recent decades which focuses on pupil performance and future employability (Kyriacou et al., 2009; Schugurensky and Silver, 2013). Social pedagogy supports an alternative way of thinking about pupils' difficulties in school with strategies and activities that can balance out this overarching paradigm that more closely corresponds to 'education in its narrowest sense' (Cameron and Moss, 2011, p. 199; cf. Hämäläinen, 2013; Moss and Petrie, 2019; Murphy and Joseph, 2019; Rosendal Jensen, 2016).

Improved academic performance can hardly be the saving grace and ultimate goal of a humanist and modern democratic society. In an era of increased segregation and xenophobia, the content of education could, alongside knowledge targets, focus to a much greater extent on democratic upbringing and active social participation. Schools can take greater responsibility for a socially sustainable society in which people trust each other and participate in social development on equal terms. They should then embrace all types of pupils, regardless of their social backgrounds, ethnic origins or current academic difficulties (Counsell and Boody, 2013; Giesecke, 1998). The knowledge of individuals and social development are interdependent, and well-educated, critical and involved citizens are therefore essential (Schugurensky, 2014):

> If learning democracy is situated in the lives of young people, then citizenship education should also facilitate a critical examination of the actual conditions of young people's citizenship, even though it may lead them to the conclusion that their own citizenship is limited and restricted. Such an approach would provide the basis for a deep understanding of democratic citizenship. (Biesta and Lawy, 2006, p. 76; cf. Fielding, 2011; Grace, 2007; Sernhede, 2008)

Even if social pedagogues help 'solve' the problems of individual pupils, the structural and institutional conditions that continue to create marginalisation remain. There is obvious risk that only the symptoms will be 'treated' and the root cause of the problems left unaddressed (cf. Rosendal Jensen, 2013). Establishing general education policy strategies and concrete activities aimed at preventing and dealing effectively with individual pupils' risk of exclusion is, however, an important first step.

The literature indicates that the skills of social pedagogues are not always put to good use, either due to school management's lack of knowledge regarding pedagogues' competence and skills or because their status is lower than that of other professional groups. There is then a risk that other professional groups will define the professional role of social pedagogues and that they will be assigned tasks primarily to relieve teachers or act as 'monitors' to maintain order and control. Studies show that it is important that social pedagogues in schools have a strong and independent position and are not used only in connection with conflicts and crises (Heimgartner and Sting, 2013). There is thus an organisational challenge as regards the division of responsibility and roles for social pedagogues. In order to avoid role conflicts with teachers, pupil welfare officers, school nurses and psychologists, school management needs to define social pedagogues' role, mission, mandate and tasks. Clarifying the missions and focus of the various professions in schools facilitates more constructive cooperation and better outcomes for social and pedagogical interventions (Borg et al., 2014; Sting, 2007; Winman and Hermansson, 2008).

Future research

The review also identified several knowledge gaps. On the general scholarly level, the social pedagogical orientation with particular focus on the significance of schools' marginalisation and exclusion

processes for specific pupil groups may have palpable validity within pedagogical research. Future empirical studies could concentrate on how and why these processes arise and their effects, as well as the actors and factors that constrain or promote inclusion. Another possible implication to be researched would take the form of ethnographically inspired studies that investigate and analyse how social pedagogues in schools work in relation to the core values and components of social pedagogy and in relation to teachers and other professional categories. Studies of what 'effects' and significance that social pedagogical work may have for pupils, teachers and schools would also constitute an interesting research theme (cf. Kirkwood et al., 2017).

Declarations and conflict of interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work.

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