Reflections on the Journey towards relationship based practice

Looking at changes in practice in my time in the UK and whether social pedagogy offers more opportunities to frontline practitioners than the more bureaucratic UK structures

Bianka Lang
May 2004 – all packed for England
2004

- Enthusiastic, excited new worker/ new country
- Concerned about the view of the public about social workers
- Anxious living in the same area of work
- Unsure where to live
- High case loads, new system – a lot to learn!
- 3 P’s versus 1 P

What helped:
- Jacaranda
- Good team and colleagues
- Management
- Very good training offer
Historical Context

• 2008 – 2010 ECC Children & Families SW rated as inadequate for safeguarding in JAR (Joint Area Review); then by Ofsted

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

System shock

Whole-scale system and culture shift

• 2010 – 2014 GETTING TO GOOD (Helen Lincoln 2011)
2013/ 2014

TM in 2013
Ofsted arrived
January 2014

Ofsted rating Good in 2014
Relationship based practice getting fully embedded
Maintaining Good

2014  Ofsted SIF (Single Inspection Framework):
      Good overall, except LSCB (Requires Improvement)

2015  DfE Intervention Adviser Contract:
      Working alongside Somerset, Birmingham Norfolk

2017  Inside Out Project funded by CS Innovation Fund

2017  Ofsted ILACS Pilot (Inspecting LA Children Services)
      Good overall, Outstanding for impact of leadership

2018  BASW Accredited CPD Provider

2018  Ofsted Inspection ILAC
10 Conditions for Success

A relentless focus on the recruitment, development and retention of social workers and social work managers in frontline practice with children and families

A whole systems approach to strategic planning and service delivery for children

Articulating values and vision

A unifying use of theoretical models of evidence-based social work practice

Social workers with a manageable workload which is regularly reviewed

Social care teams small enough to allow team managers to know both staff and families well

An operational culture of dialogue, reflective thinking, feedback, learning and support

Appropriate practical support

An aspirant and system-wide approach to improvement and performance

Service design which minimises the number of changes to key worker/transfers between teams and also respects the need for some specialism across children social work teams
TOWARDS POSITIONS OF SAFE UNCERTAINTY BARRY MASON (2008)

SAFE

Alternate care
Supervised contact
Evidence-based intervention
Working agreement

Multiple hypothesis
Multiple points of intervention
Context, belief, behaviour
Both/and – risk/protective

CERTAINTY

Performance indicators
Written agreements
No further police reports
Passive compliance

UNCERTAINTY

Unallocated cases
Avoidance and inconsistent engagement
Not engaging
Missed visits

UNSAFE
Helping Children Affected by Parental Substance Abuse

How Are You Feeling Today Baby Bear?
Exploring Big Feelings After Living in a Stormy Home

Jane Evans illustrated by Laurence Jackson
Philosophical Influences on Social Pedagogic Thought

John Amos Comenius (1592—1670):

– The pedagogue as a gardener as opposed to a sculptor

“The proper education of the young does not consist in stuffing their heads with a mass of words, sentences, and ideas dragged together out of various authors, but in opening up their understanding to the outer world, so that a living stream may flow from their own minds, just as leaves, flowers, and fruit spring from the bud on a tree.”
SPPA – Social Pedagogy Professional Association

First Patron

Conferences in London and Edinburgh, Parliamentary Reception

Professional home for social pedagogy in the UK


Overall aim is to improve the support of children, young people and adults, many of whom live in disadvantaged circumstances or are vulnerable.

SPPA endorses and supports qualifications in social pedagogy. Diploma in Social Pedagogy at Levels 3 and 5, and an MA in Social Pedagogy at the University of Salford.
What impact has been seen in Social Pedagogy long term programmes and projects?

- At staff and team levels
- At practice level
Impact on staff and teams

- Lower staff sickness and more buoyant staff
- Staff groups sustained through difficult times
- Staff are energised with a renewed sense of purpose
- Improvement of organisational dynamics

Comments such as ‘teamwork in action’ and a ‘renewed sense of purpose’ were voiced, and enabled staff who were ‘stuck in their ways to take the decision to move on’ (Cameron 2016, p. 211)
Impact on Practice

- Development of a common language
- Talking theory
- Learning/refreshing skills
- Learning to reflect critically
- Doing more practical and creative activities
- Increased confidence
- Less reactive and more reflective approach in dealing with difficult situations
- Team members value reflective approach in supervision and peer discussions
- Young people and families feel valued and understood
Improved confidence helped foster carers to ‘try new things with their children and work more closely with other members of the team around the child.’

Diamond Model
3 P’s
Learning Zone Model
Head, Heart, Hands
Common Third
Reflection – 4 Fs
Greenaway (1992)

Facts: objective description of what happened
x is the first born child of her White-British mother and on 09/06/2018 X had her 17th birthday. At the Team Around the Child [TAC] meeting held on 23/05/2018 I heard that X was not living at home but was living with her boyfriend and his family at an address in Y. This was not a long term solution as X had to leave. X’s self-harm was evident on meeting her for the first time as the scars over her arms and thighs were visible to all because X was wearing shorts and a vest top. X’s self-harm has resulted in attending the local hospital’s emergency department as cuts and burns have required dressing. At his meeting X needed the interventions of professionals to make an appointment with the GP. X explained that she had been ‘kicked out’ by her family and had no access to money to meet day to day expenses. Without the provision of services, X was at risk of being street homeless and living with unmanaged mental ill-health.

Feelings: How did I feel?
X’s vulnerability touched me on meeting her for the first time. She said very little and hid her face from view by looking downwards meaning her hair and the hoodie she was wearing obscured her expressions. X had wanted her boyfriend to be at the meeting and I felt he struggled with the enormity of what he was hearing. Through contacting X’s family, I understood that risks of accepting a single story. Whereas I had been told by X that she had been ‘kicked out’ and was without support, this was not accurate. I did however feel that X did not fit well within family life because she was non-compliant and the continuation of the self-harm disturbed them. I was curious as to why I was unable to visit X at her boyfriend’s home address but my sense was that a social worker would not be welcome even though my focus was on X’s welfare.
Findings: analysis of the situation and the above
The assessment indicated that X wanted to be at home with her mother and step-father. Her half-siblings were important to her. X rejected the notion of s.20 accomodation and supported accomodation was not what she wanted either.
X has not attended all the appointments with EWMHS and has now been discharged from the service although would be able to access the service in future.
The family are no longer wanting to continue with D-BIT interventions designed to strengthen family relationships. X is working although her mother would have preferred her to attend college.
Communications with X have been difficult. Her preferred method of communication has been text messages but in recent weeks this has not elicited a response. X was not at home at the last home visit and arrangements to see her on 18/10/2018 have been unsuccessful as X has changed her working pattern.

Futures: what are we going to do differently in the future?
I will repeat the same smooth transition of attending a Team Around the Child Meeting as part of the a case stepping up from Level 3 to Level 4 services.
I am puzzled as to why communictions with the family have been problematic in this case. My phone calls and emails have not always been responded to and I am curious as to why the family did not attend the Review CIN meeting in Sep-2018 as this date had been agreed beforehand. For future, I will make a determined effort to contact the family the week before any meetings that are planned.
The use of cultural genograms, systemic practice, restorative practice, signs of safety, strength based approach – SP could be the base of these approaches, as it encompasses the holistic work of relationship based practice