



Growing Social Pedagogy in a hostile environment:

*collaborative transgressions
shifting the status quo in the UK*

Robyn Kemp

SPPA UK Ambassador, Founding Member and
former Chair of Trustees



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“I apologize for such a long letter - I didn't have time to write a short one.”

Mark Twain

My plan for our session:

- Exploring “hostile environments”
- UK as a hostile environment – a warning
- Brief history of social pedagogy in the UK and Ireland through the lens of children in public care
- The development journey of the Social Pedagogy Professional Association in the UK & Ireland
- The ‘how’ of enabling environments - sharing experiences and learning

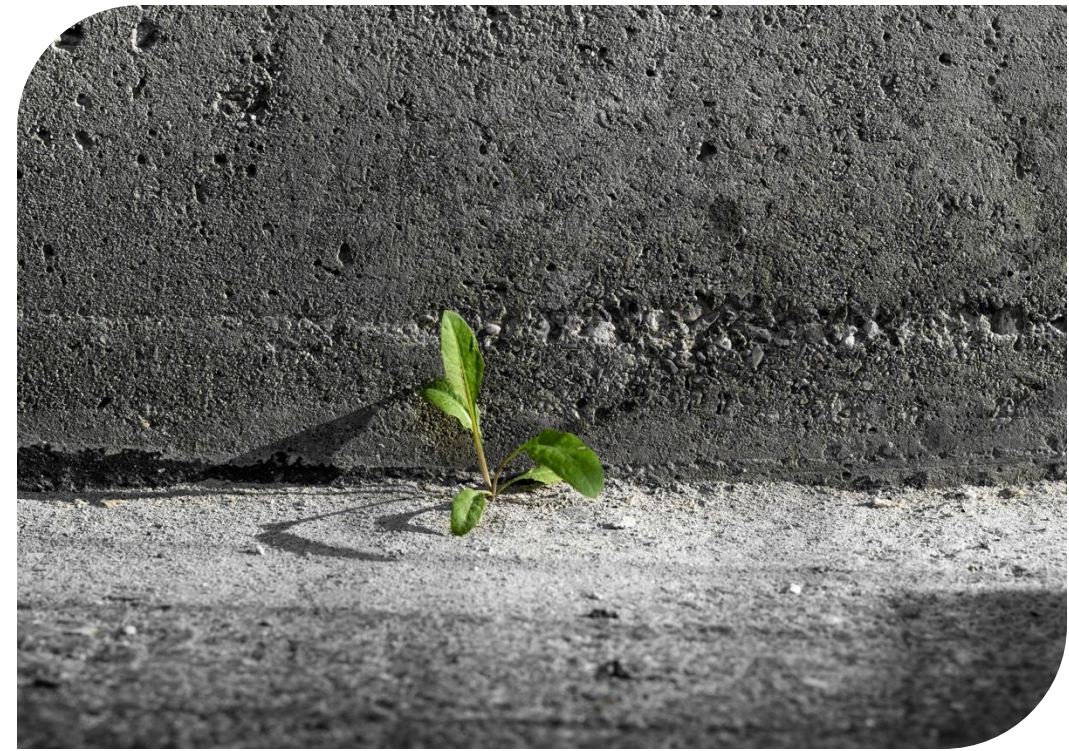


The hostile environment

According to the Oxford English dictionary 'hostile' means

“Of, pertaining to, or characteristic of an enemy; pertaining to or engaged in actual hostilities; unfriendly”. *Transferred and figurative* “Unfriendly in feeling, action, nature, or character; contrary, adverse, antagonistic”.

- Coined by Theresa May in 2012, her idea was to create a hostile environment to make life in the UK as unbearable as possible for undocumented migrants so that they leave – and others think twice about coming – by blocking access to public services and pushing them into extreme poverty.
- Britain is, regrettably, very experienced at creating hostile environments, it's how we pillaged our way through the world over the last few hundred years, dominating our presence and deciding who has the power



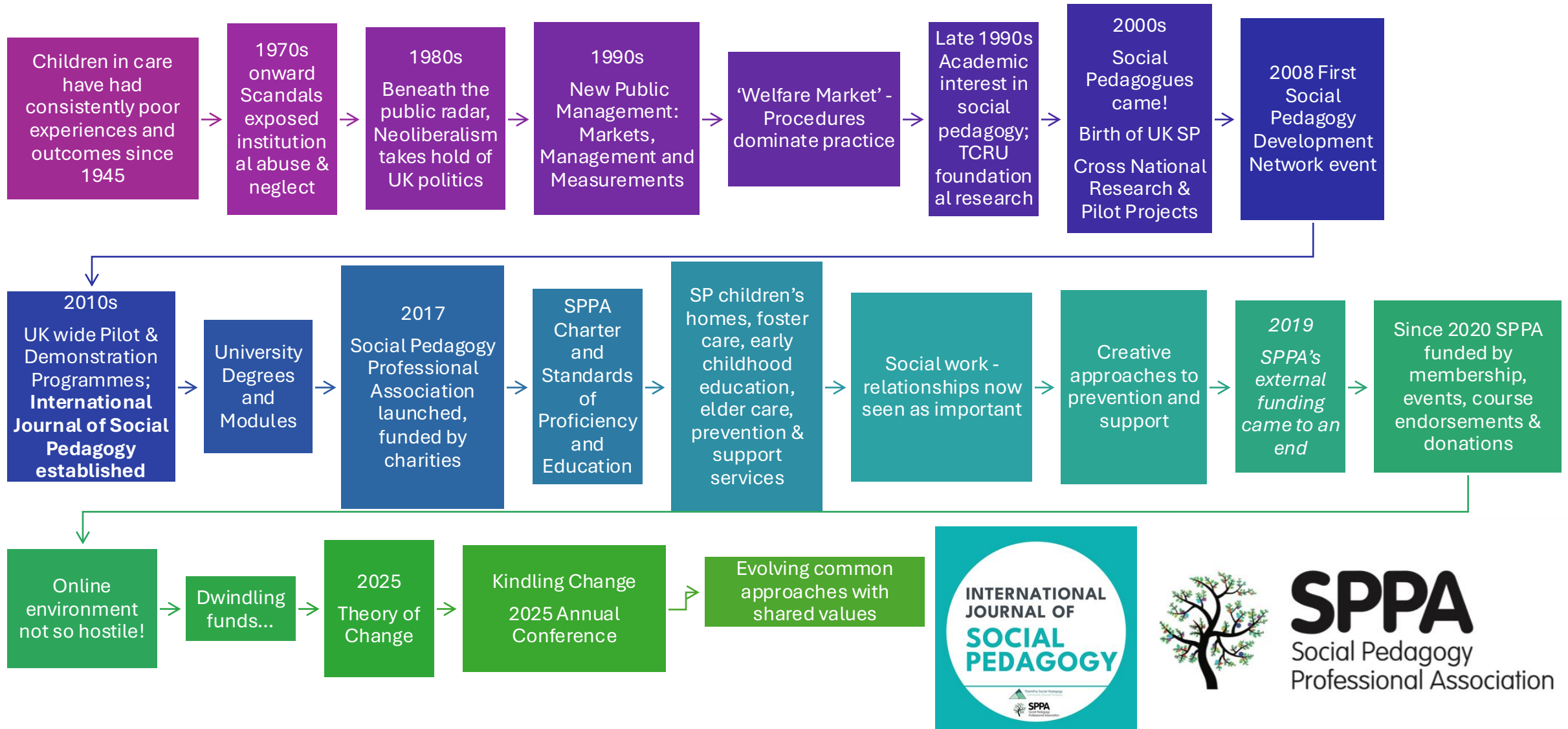
Social pedagogy finds a way...?

If hostile means “Unfriendly in feeling, action, nature, or character; contrary, adverse, antagonistic”, what kinds of hostility do you deal with in your work or living environments ?

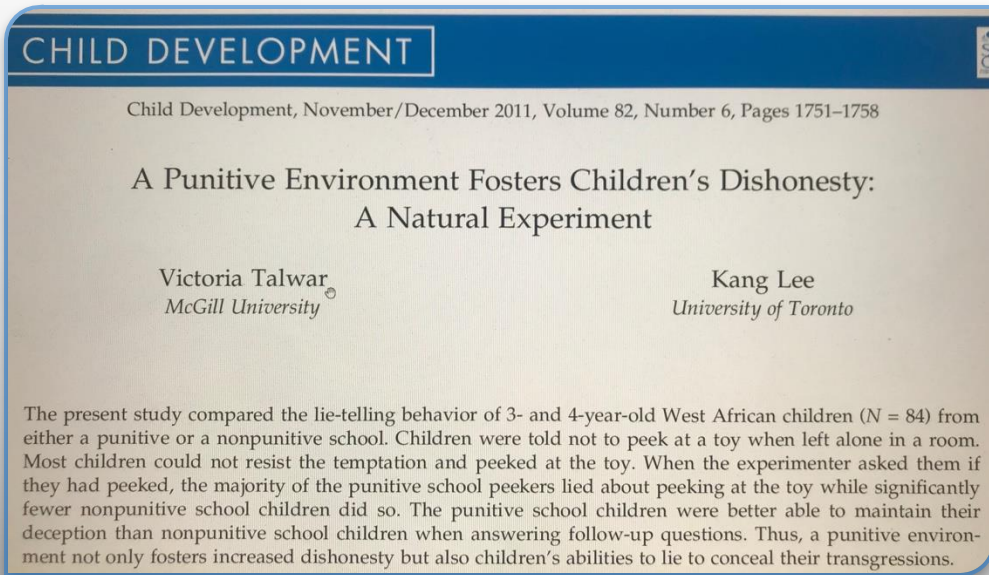
Hvis fjendtlig betyder "uvenlig i følelse, handling, natur eller karakter; modsat, negativ, antagonistisk", hvilken slags fjendtlighed beskæftiger du dig med i dit arbejds- eller levemiljø?



Brief history of UK social pedagogy



The UK as a “hostile environment” for children



In the early 1990s neoliberalism turned public perception, public policy and institutional frameworks toward the notion that children in care need to be under control, that punitive, behaviourist methods work best and that the professionals around them need to fix the worst of them through limited psychological intervention and/or incarceration, without taking any risk and with significantly reduced funding.

Welfare is now a market where children are 'commodities for trade' and eye watering profits are made by the market dominant “big 6” companies, largely funded by private US equity

The “hostile environment” for social pedagogy



New Public Management emphasis on the 3Ms:

- Markets – no aspect of public welfare protected from the free market, profit motive dominates, strong myth of “*profit making organisations do things better*”
- Managers – top-down managerialism, increased bureaucracy, more control, less trust, more anxiety in the system; everyone responsible for ‘*financial burden*’
- Measurements – EBP(s), target-driven policy, systems & practices – “*if it can't be measured it doesn't exist!*”

The “hostile environment” for social pedagogy & children

Since 2010 there has been no central government funding of social pedagogy in the UK and Ireland

Education has become very prescriptive, with increasing numbers of children not fitting the standard mould

Deficit/problem-based construction of people accessing services still dominates, including of children in care. Fear based practice dominant – “first cover your back”

Conflicting priorities (eg. most appropriate vs cheapest, complexity vs simplicity, competition vs collaboration)

Dominance of certain ‘master’ theoretical perspectives, and various understandings of such (e.g. attachment, behaviourism)

Consistent political resistance to adopting social pedagogy as a profession

Children in care consistently let down, not recognized or seen, high rates of mental ill health, homelessness, incarceration coupled with exceptionally low attainment of qualifications and access to education



ISOLATION BOOTHS IN ENGLISH SCHOOLS

Social Pedagogy as a breath of fresh air!

- Relationships and love are not banned words
- Theory can be practical and didn't have to be hard
- Joy and fun were welcome
- Hugging children as practitioners wasn't seen as abuse
- Taking risk was recognized as part of a healthy childhood rather than to be avoided
- Learning can happen everywhere and in lots of different ways



Nurturing the soil

Research clearly showed social pedagogy had something to offer children in care in the UK – the differences between UK and continental European countries were stark

Role Modelling social pedagogues from mainly continental Europe worked in projects and pilot programmes

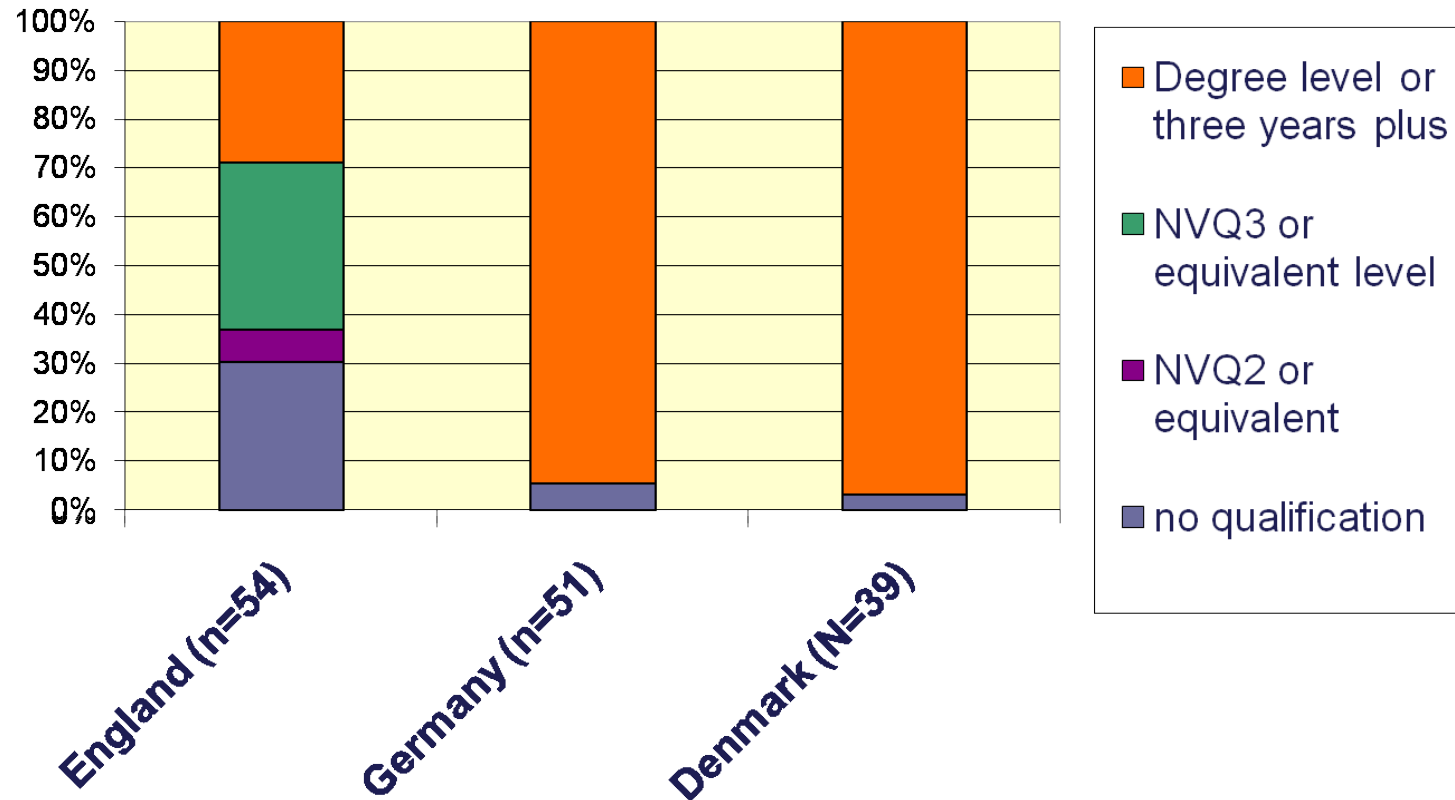


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TCRU Research on Social Pedagogy

Qualifications of Workers (Cameron, 2008)

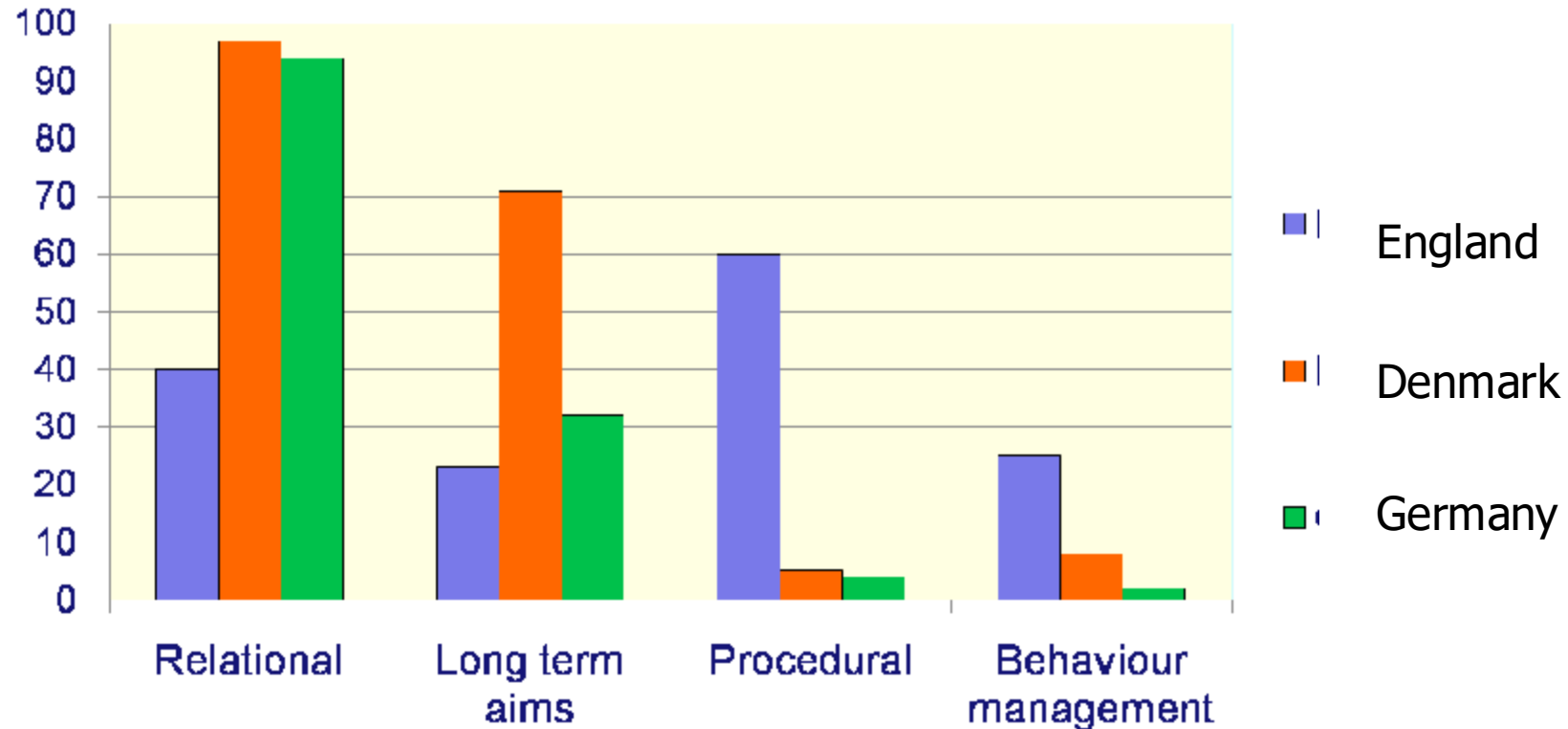
Which of these pillars represents Germany, England and Denmark respectively?



TCRU Comparative Research

Residential care workers in three countries were asked what are most important priorities in the work?

Which graph colour belongs to Denmark, Germany and England respectively?



Planting seeds from diverse countries

‘Haltung’ – how strongly do I guide my actions through my beliefs and values?

Theory as practical tools, challenging notions of ‘dusty books in universities’

Relationships as central to quality of life

Learning as everyday opportunity, adaptable

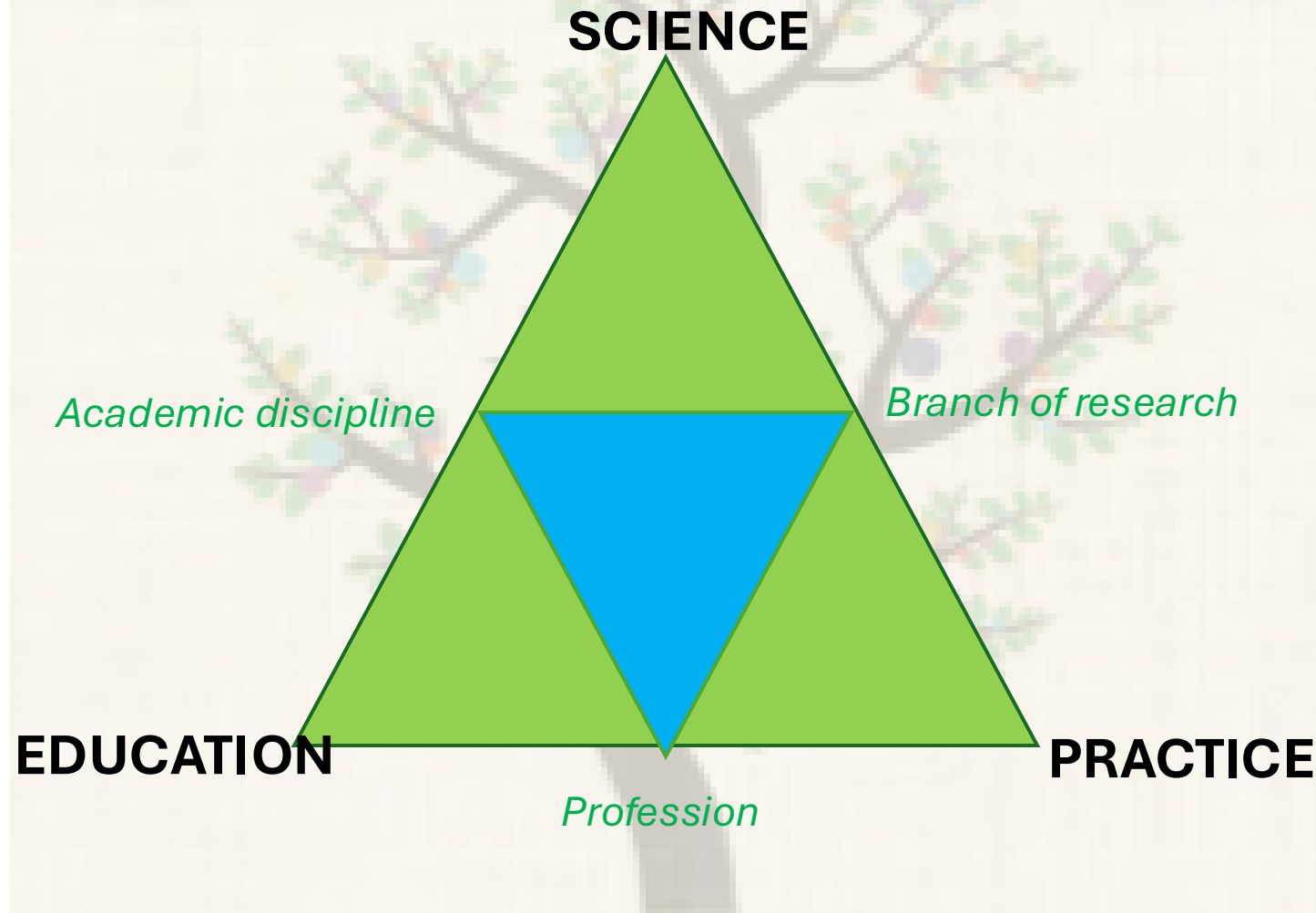
Empowerment and wellbeing as both aims and methods

Large demonstration programme in four nations of UK for foster care, increase in social pedagogical services including children’s homes



Gardening through all weathers & all terrains

- Education & training from short introductions to qualifying degrees
- International Journal of Social Pedagogy
- SPPA Charter
- SPPA Standards of Proficiency co-created
- UK's first Professor of Social Pedagogy: Claire Cameron
- Children in and on the edges of care services; adult & elder care
- SPPA's Theory of Change 2025



A Charter for Social Pedagogy in the UK & Ireland



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February 2022



1. We consider ethics and social justice to be the foundation for practice.



2. We believe in the importance of engaging with others and the world of which we are a part, in ways that are congruent with our values and beliefs (Haltung) and informed by theory.



3. We value the capacity of all to foster compassion, community, love, care, and empathy.



4. We believe in walking alongside others, recognising their uniqueness and, with them, co-creating meaning and purpose.



5. We understand the value of our participation in everyday activities as a basis for creating human connection, enhancing a person's sense of wellbeing and quality of life.



6. We endeavour to develop authentic and reliable relationships.



7. We believe in relationship-centred practice that recognises and engages with the whole person and the networks, systems and communities that impact upon their lives.



8. We value creative and playful approaches to lifelong learning that are theoretically informed, risk sensible and draw on people's potential.



9. We value professional curiosity in our work with every individual, group, and family.



10. We use theory, critical reflection, and self-awareness to inform practice.



11. We value teamwork, mutual aid, and collaboration with others.



12. We strive to bring about positive change for individuals, groups and families and communities, built on an understanding that practice is affected by political, social, and cultural contexts as well as by individual differences.



13. We believe in the social and political agency of individuals and groups to make significant choices about their lives and to contribute to their community.

This is the value base that informs Social Pedagogy practice in the UK & Ireland

www.sppa-uk.org
info@sppa-uk.org

Gathering social pedagogy gardeners

- Annual SPDN free events
- Annual SPPA conference
- SPPA individual and organizational members
- SPPA Endorsed University courses = increased take up
- SPPA report series under way with students and placement supervisors on the unique differences and benefits of social pedagogues and social pedagogy



Transgressions...

Inspired by bell hooks' 1994 book, *Teaching to Transgress*

bell hooks' work was undertaken in loving kindness, emphasising that all critique should be enlightened by love.

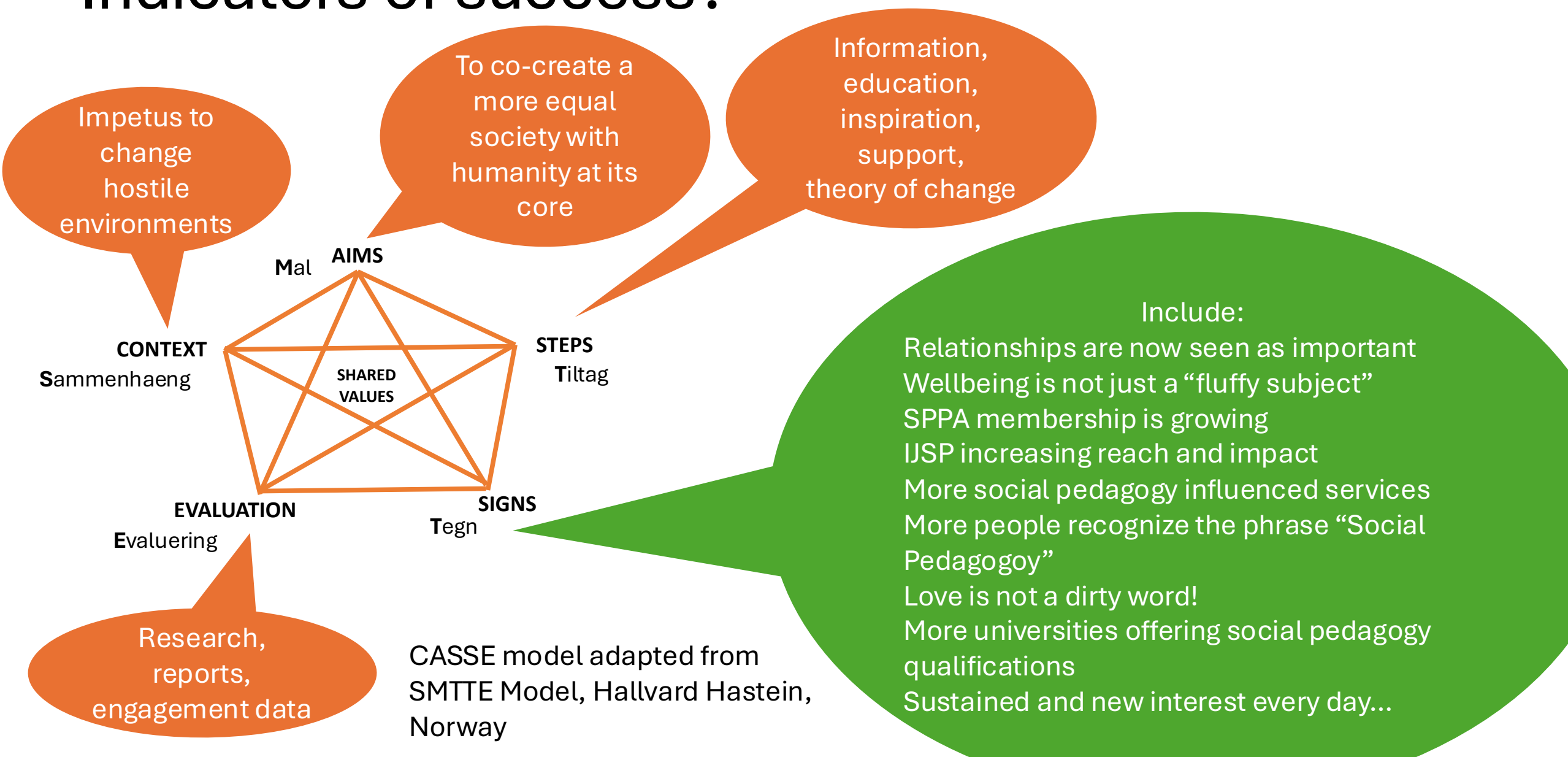
- Our transgressions include
 - Solidarity with those we work alongside
 - The 3Ps, not only 2!
 - Using learning from *outside* the UK and USA
 - Questioning & challenging the status quo
 - Using language purposefully
 - Bringing joy and love into practice and learning
 - Using the evidence base responsibly
 - Working with nuance and uncertainty
 - Not following 'manualised' interventions/models at the expense of our values and ethics
 - Calling people in, rather than calling them out – dialogue!

American anti-racist feminist author,
theorist, educator, and social critic 1952–

2021

Key thinker for UK social Pedagogy

Indicators of success?



UK Social Pedagogy?

Still in our infancy...

- Eclectic mix of theories & theorists from all over the world, inc UK & Ireland
- SPPA Charter sets out the value base
- SPPA Standards of Proficiency guiding practice
- Key thinkers (worldwide)
- **Opportunities for meaning making and dialogue**

Not currently but soon we hope...

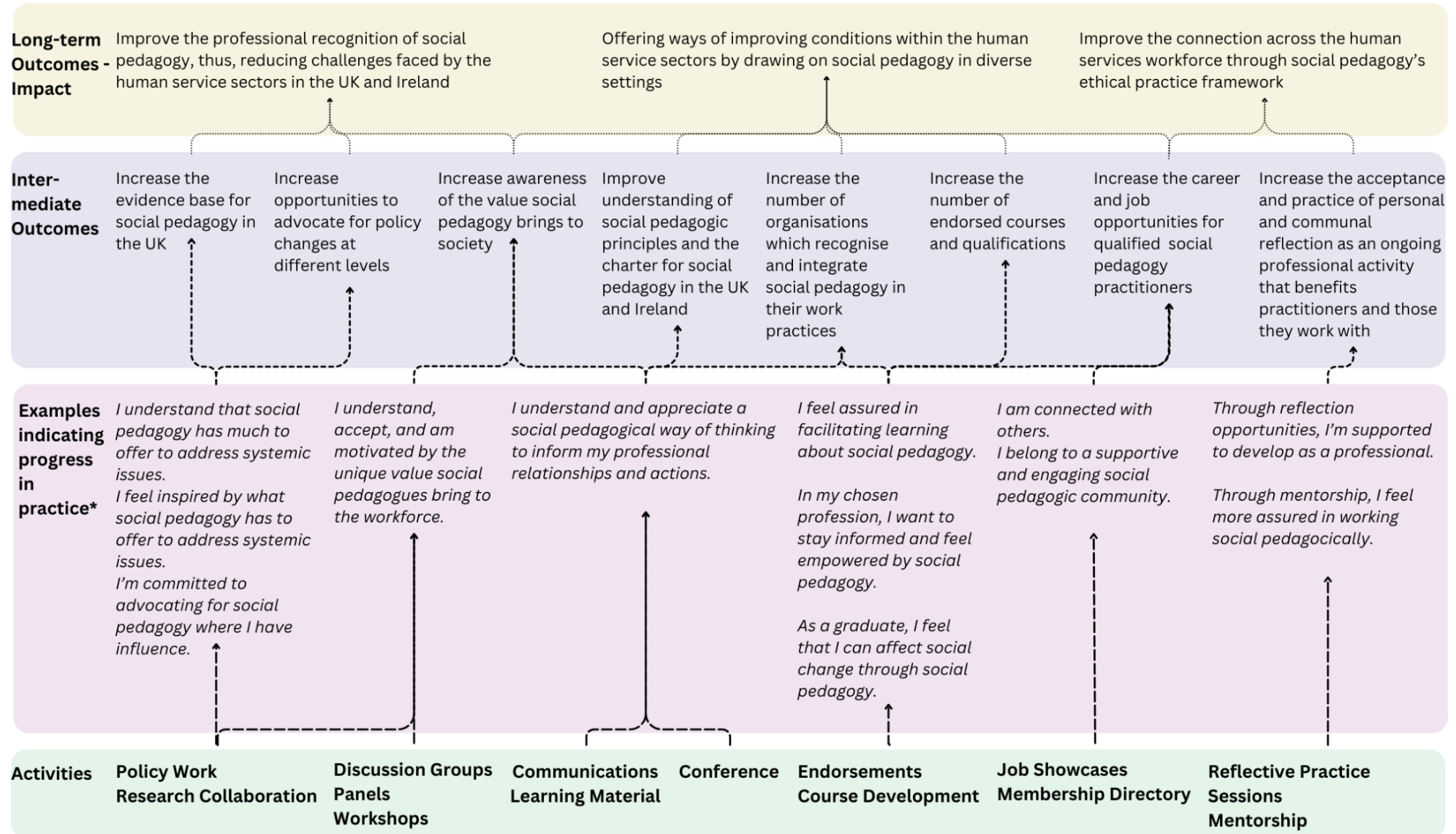
- Lobbying central governments
- Undertaking funded research for SPPA



SOCIAL PEDAGOGY - A WAY TOWARDS A MORE EQUAL SOCIETY, WITH HUMANITY AT ITS CORE.



Social pedagogy becomes ingrained in the training of human services in the UK and Ireland



*These are usually called mechanisms of change. For SPPA, these are our aspirations for those working in human services and, through thought, feeling and action, provide evidence of positive change.

CECILE REMY
CHAIR



YVALIA FEBER
TREASURER



SPPA TEAM

Social Pedagogy
Professional Association



EMMA LAURENCE



LEONI HAGMAN



JENNY STARZETZ
PROJECT MANAGER

KELLY GITTENS



PAT PETRIE



JUDITH FELIX



CLAIRE CAMERON
PATRON

SPPA's complex social garden

- We are a very small and slowly growing professional association, welcoming fresh perspectives
- We are spread thinly across 5 nations
- The majority of work is undertaken by trustee volunteers
- Our most useful 'tool' in the often 'hostile environments' we garden in is **collaboration**.
- **HOW DO YOU ENABLE SOCIAL PEDAGOGY TO GROW WHERE YOU ARE, what can we learn from each other?**





Call for abstracts

SCAN ME

*SPPA 2025 Conference – a gathering
11th & 12th September, Witney, Oxfordshire, England*
**Social pedagogy across the lifecourse:
kindling change**

info@sppa-uk.org

robyn.kemp@sppa-uk.org

robyn@kempconsultancy.co.uk

www.sppa-uk.org

Thank you!



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