INCLUSION AND OBSTACLES IN THE SWEDISH SOCIAL PEDAGOGICAL CONTEXT: AN ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES ON WORKING WITH UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINORS WITH WARTIME EXPERIENCES IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE

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Abstract: The general perspective on social pedagogy and research emphasises the importance of recognising the various identities that are actualised and re-actualised during interpersonal interactions in the various social contexts in which the individual acts or is expected to act. The purpose of the present study was to provide a new understanding of: (1) narratives by staff at institutions regarding the day-to-day work of caring for youths who, having experienced war, fled to Sweden and were taken into care and placed in institutions; and (2) interactive patterns contributing to constructing and reconstructing the inclusion of the clients and the obstacles to inclusion during practical social pedagogy. Analytical findings with the following themes are presented: (1) empathy, collaboration and inclusion; (2) stigma and inclusion; and (3) (in)competence of personnel and inclusion. This study demonstrates that recognition, or the lack thereof, of young peoples’ various identities may affect their opportunities for inclusion in the new society. Both the recognition and loss of identity that occur in various contexts in which young people act or are expected to act contribute to the success of integration and can be an obstacle to it.

Keywords: social pedagogic, social pedagogue, recognition, residential home, care home, stigma, social comparison, identity, collaboration

INTRODUCTION

In the Swedish debate on social pedagogy, immigration issues have received a lot of attention, and social pedagogy has been seen as a relevant analytical framework for educational programmes promoting social integration of immigrants (Eriksson, 2010; Winman & Palmroth, 2010).¹ The practical function of social pedagogy has been defined as dealing with all kinds of social and psychosocial needs in all phases of the life span in all types of educational and care institutions. It applies social-pedagogical know-how to working with people in different, sometimes very difficult, life situations (Hämäläinen & Eriksson, 2016).

¹ Some parts of this text were published earlier in Swedish in the doctoral dissertation in sociology: “When collaboration becomes a struggle. A sociological analysis of a project in the Swedish juvenile care” (Basic, 2012) and in English in the article “Social pedagogical work with unaccompanied young refugees with experiences of war in institutional care in Sweden: an ethnography-inspired analysis of the narratives of young persons and institution personnel” (Basic, 2018c). For valuable comments on this text, I would like to thank Kyriaki Doumas (Linnaeus University, Sweden), Margareta Ekberg (Linnaeus University, Sweden), David Wästerfors (Lund University, Sweden) and the anonymous reviewers.
Since 2015, more than 35,000 children and young people have come to Sweden unaccompanied by a guardian (Swedish Migration Agency, 2018a-c, 2020a-c). Most of these unaccompanied children and young people are boys from war-torn countries, and most have been placed in residential homes for children and young persons called ‘HVB homes’\(^2\). This major influx of unaccompanied children and young people has been a substantial challenge for the Swedish welfare system, which is fundamentally based on the concept of all individuals being included and integrated into the social community. Unaccompanied refugee minors who have fled to Sweden to escape war since 2015 now constitute an established group in Sweden. Considerable numbers have been granted permanent residency, others are waiting for a decision from the Swedish Migration Agency, and many are receiving various forms of social care. Against this background, it is crucial to study the social pedagogy of professionals working for the inclusion and integration of these young people into their new society.

Children and young people who have fled from war may have been involved in social communities, either directly or indirectly, which is likely to affect them for a large part of their lives. Survivors of wars are often influenced by what is known as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, recurring nightmares, emotional blunting and flashbacks to traumatic moments (Sanchez-Cao, Kramer, & Hodes, 2013; Majumder, 2016; Basic 2018c; Björk, Danielsson & Basic 2019). With that background knowledge, we can establish that the professional work of attempting to help and facilitate inclusion and integration of that client category in the Swedish community is not an easy task.

The present study’s aim was to provide new understanding about: (1) narratives by staff at institutions regarding the day-to-day work of caring for youths who, having experienced war, fled to Sweden and were taken into care and placed in institutions; and (2) interactive patterns contributing to constructing and reconstructing the inclusion of the clients and the obstacles to inclusion during practical social pedagogy.

\(^2\) A residential or care home is a form of institution in Sweden that provides treatment, care, support or nurturing. HVB homes can, for example, specialise in substance abuse problems or in unaccompanied children.
relationships between the personnel/staff and the client.

The goal of the mobilisation model is the emancipation of the client. This model reflects a more radical interpretation of social pedagogy. The social pedagogue wants clients to reflect upon their own situation and be aware of the impact of societal structures and processes on their everyday lives.

The democratic model emerges from statements made in the interviews and is based on humanistic democratic thinking. This model reflects the perspective that individuals can reach some type of ‘citizen bildung’ through support and ‘education’ from social pedagogues. This perspective takes a mobilisation approach, but it is less radical than the mobilisation model. A ‘good’ dialogue is central. The belief is that a true dialogue leads to changes in the participants’ understanding (Eriksson, 2014).

The present article focuses more on the adaptive and democratic models than on the mobilisation model. In this study, the processes of empowerment of young people at institutions and how the personnel care and construct a relationship with them are highlighted.

Social pedagogical work methods have been described as multifaceted, although the most prominent are creative methods, community development and community work. Community development is understood as a collective method that strives to mobilise groups of people in need of support to play active parts in their own or their group’s lives (Eriksson, 2014).

The social pedagogic perspective is one of the perspectives in social sciences that stresses the importance of including the individual in the community (Eriksson & Winman, 2010; Hämäläinen, 2012; Úcar, 2013; Eriksson, 2014; Kornbeck & Úcar, 2015; Hämäläinen & Eriksson, 2016; Basic 2018c; Úcar, Soler-Masó, & Planas-Lladó 2020). Individuals receive confirmation of their identities by participating in the community, and successful interaction between individuals is a fundamental prerequisite for the successful integration of unaccompanied children and young people in Sweden. Hämäläinen and Eriksson (2016) and Eriksson (2014) highlight the importance of interaction between those already established in the community and the individual who is on the margin. One of the most important dimensions from a social pedagogical perspective is to analytically investigate relationships between individuals needing help and the professional participants tasked with helping those individuals as part of their professional role (Basic 2018c).

The writings of Úcar, Soler-Masó, & Planas-Lladó (2020), Hämäläinen and Eriksson (2016), Kornbeck and Úcar (2015), Eriksson (2014), Úcar (2013), Hämäläinen (2012), and Eriksson and Winman (2010) provide insight into some expectations that come into play in the various social contexts of the role of a ‘social pedagogue’. A social pedagogue is portrayed as an expert who works toward a specific and defined goal. The goal is to help or guide the client to overcome obstacles that hamper integration and success in the context. Analysis in Basic (2018c) reveals major variations in what is expected of a social pedagogue working in institutional care in Sweden with unaccompanied young refugees who have experiences of war. A common denominator is that the mission of and context in which the social pedagogue operates appear flexible enough to enable an individual to fulfill his or her role in a variety of ways. Only when the individual social pedagogue adopts an active, assertive, independent, personal and relatively strong posture will there be a chance of being important to other professional categories and to the client. In practice, therefore, only when the individual social pedagogue transcends the expectations of the conventional role will there be a chance to be appreciated by collaborators.

Hämäläinen and Eriksson (2016) and Eriksson (2014) illustrate four important dimensions of the social pedagogical perspective. The first of these focuses on goals in the context to be achieved by means of social pedagogy. In this dimension, the importance of the participants’ socialisation is supported by, among other things, integration and mobilisation of all community forces with the aim of helping the individual on the community margins. The second dimension focuses on the social pedagogic approach, especially in the relationship between the professional participants and the individual who needs help. The professional participants working in accordance with the social peda-
gologic perspective are empathic towards the individual requiring help, as well as aware of the specific expectations of the professional role. The third dimension focuses on appropriate social pedagogic methods in working with the individual who needs help. Methods considered to be appropriate are the dynamic methods based on the individual as part of the group and part of a wider social context (such as environmental therapy). The fourth dimension focuses on social pedagogy as a resource for professional work with the individual on the community margin and in need of help. In this dimension, the emphasis is on the importance of progressing in the relationship with the individual who needs help by means of well-thought-out dialogue (Eriksson, 2014; Hämäläinen & Eriksson, 2016; Basic 2018c).

If we borrow analytical glasses from the researchers above, we can make the following observations about the present study: (1) social pedagogic target groups are represented by personnel at HVB homes who work with young people in care who have experiences of war and who were subsequently placed in HVB homes in Sweden; (2) social pedagogical arenas are represented by various contexts that are brought to the fore in the study’s empirical material (migration context while fleeing to Sweden, migration context during integration into Sweden, institutional context and school context, amongst others); and (3) social pedagogical roles are represented by various roles that are brought to the fore in the study’s empirical material (such as empathic personnel, competent personnel, incompetent personnel).

**THEORY AND METHOD**

The study’s general theoretical points of departure are interactionist, though influenced by an ethno-methodological perspective of how people present their social reality (Blumer, 1969/1986; Goffman, 1959/1990; Goffman, 1959/1990). Beyond this general starting point, the concepts of social comparisons, stigmatisation processes and collaboration are especially relevant components in the specific narratives we have analysed (Simmel 1908/1965; Goffman 1963/1990; Snow and Anderson 1987; Scheler 1992; Merton 1996; Willumsen 2007; Lotia & Hardy 2008; Åkerström & Jacobsson, 2009; Hejsjedal, Hetland, & Iversen 2015; Sundqvist, Ögren, Padyab, & Ghazinour 2016; Oppedal, Guribe, & Kroger 2017; Basic 2018c; Sirriyeh & Raghallagh 2018; Majumder 2019; Ryen, & Reinertsen 2019; see in the section “Narratives of institution personnel”).

The study was conducted based on inspiration from ethnographic tradition (Becker, 1970, 1998; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Gubrium & Holstein, 1999; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 156). During an interview, those involved communicate based on day-to-day knowledge of the social context (riessman, 2008; Silverman, 2015). During the fieldwork in this study, an effort was made to give interviewees space in the discussions so that they could talk about topics of immediate interest that they themselves considered to be important (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The objective was for the interviewer to adopt the role of an interested listener who wanted to find out more about young people who had experienced a war and who had taken refuge in Sweden³, and also about the professional participants who work on a daily basis with these young people in care in Sweden. Conducting interviews in this way created the variation in empirical material required to differentiate – and in the next stage to analyse – those phenomena that are relevant to achieving the study purpose.

The interview material consisted of qualitatively orientated interviews with nine employees at HVB homes who were working with young people in care who had experiences of war and who were later placed at HVB homes in Sweden. Those interviewed in this study were not trained social pedagogues. Field work revealed that five out of nine informants had been studying or were still studying at university – three as social workers, one as a social psychologist and one as a teacher – while the other four informants had been educated to upper-secondary level. One of these four had undergone a short training course – an Integration Consultant/Pedagogue Diploma (an online distance course arranged by a company in Sweden) – in con-

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³ The interview material of this study consists also of qualitatively orientated interviews with six young people in care (from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria) who had experiences of war and who were later placed at HVB homes in Sweden (Basic, 2018c). This part of the study’s empirical material is not analysed within the framework of this study.
junction with working at a HVB residential care and family home. During field work on the study, the following job designations for staff at HVB homes working with young people with wartime experience were encountered: “housing support officer”, “coach” and “supervisor”. In the Swedish context, there is an expectation that, just like staff working in other contexts intended to assist and facilitate an individual’s inclusion and integration into society, all staff at HVB homes base their work on the presuppositions that characterise a social pedagogical perspective (see Section “General perspective from social pedagogical work and research”). During the interviews, an effort was made to obtain detailed descriptions of professional work with these young people, and to find out whether special ideas and/or working methods had been developed.

The following topics were discussed during interviews with personnel at HVB homes: (1) work with young people with experiences of war; (2) treatment (advantages, expectations, results, drawbacks or difficulties); (3) suggested improvements – resources; (4) cooperation with other authorities/authority personnel; and (5) the young people’s accounts of the contributions of social services, the Swedish Migration Agency, the custodian and the school.

The interviews lasted from about 1 to 2 hours and were recorded with the interviewees’ consent. An interview guide designed around the above analytical interests was used as a basis before and during the interviews. In the course of the interviews, an effort was made to achieve a conversational style, known as ‘active interviewing’ (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), with an emphasis on openness and follow-up questions rather than the question-and-answer model. All interviews were transcribed from speech to text prior to the analysis work (Potter, 1996/2007; Jefferson, 1985).

Most of the interviews were conducted individually, although one was conducted with two interviewees at once. A dictation microphone was used at all interviews. The collected material was not directly transcribed but was transcribed a few weeks or a few months later. Interviews were conducted from June 2016 to May 2018.

The interview material was analysed based on traditions in qualitative methods (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Silverman, 2015). In interviews with institution personnel, the following themes were crystallised: (a) previous chaos in reception centres in Sweden that were now more orderly; (b) young people singled out and stigmatised by society; (c) importance of empathic attitudes and humanity; (d) no treatment was offered or given in the institution; (e) the main task was to help young people integrate in society; (f) there was collaboration with other professional categories, but it was limited (no more than what is essential); (g) young people’s age was a problem; (h) young people were described as greedy (reason for coming to Sweden); (i) maltreatment in institutions; and (j) (in)competence of personnel.

Empirical sequences presented in this study were categorised in the material as: ‘young people singled out and stigmatised by society’, ‘importance of empathic attitudes and humanity’, ‘young people’s age as a problem’, ‘young people were described as greedy (reason for coming to Sweden)’, ‘maltreatment in institutions’, or ‘(in)competence of personnel’. The choice of empirical examples was based on the study’s purpose and the ability of the examples to elucidate the analytical points.

The interviewees were informed of the purpose of the study and were guaranteed confidentiality and the opportunity to withdraw at any time. In publications and presentations of the results of the investigation, names of people and places and other information that could be used to identify the interviewees were changed or omitted. During the work on the empirical material, not only were the names of individuals omitted or changed but also the names of regions, municipalities, institutions and districts, as well as means of transport and anything else that could link individuals (the institution) with various cases. The interest of the study relates to experiences as general social phenomena, so there is no reason to document personal data (Ethical vetting, 2016).

**NARRATIVES OF INSTITUTION PERSONNEL**

*Well, I suppose that you’re meant to supply them with food and a place to live. But I’m thinking integration, bringing them into society so that they have the best possible opportunities ... Meaning that*
they are prepared to live on their own and cope in society once they enter it. That they will be able to manage...it’s about several different things, how to apply for a job, how to find a place to live, that you can manage cooking by yourself, that you can manage to go shopping, that you...if you introduce them into associations and they build their own contact networks, they have better conditions for success... and as previously mentioned there is no treatment, but the idea is for the staff to talk to them during the days they spend with them and that helps. (Interview with Liza, an employee at an HVB home)

With regard to social comparisons, it is generally human, ordinary and perhaps necessary to see oneself in relation to others (Scheler, 1992). Simmel (1908/1965) wrote, for example, about how poverty is not absolute but is seen in relation to others. This relativity is also the case with care and perceptions of care. A more modern concept is Merton’s (1996) ‘reference groups’, which are used in various ways: identity-creating, as an expected member group or as positive and negative reference groups, for example. Such groups or categories may be anticipatory (a group that one expects to belong to in the future), contemporary or historical: ‘that’s what it was like for them before’, or ‘that’s how people in my group used to live’. However, the concept is thought to imply static limits for groups. The present study’s analysis is inspired rather by Snow and Anderson’s (1987) use of social comparisons because this concept is associated with a more flexible and dynamic relationship: the participants are allocated based on active, interpretive work (Åkerström & Jacobsson, 2009; Oppdal, Guribye, & Kroger 2017; Basic 2018c; Ryen, & Reinertsen 2019).

It sometimes said that a ‘good’ dialogue is central for social pedagogical work. Dialogue is understood as going beyond communication; dialogue must be open, without elements of power. Through ‘true’ dialogue, one can gain an understanding of the other’s perspective as well as improved empathic ability. The social pedagogue must be able to ‘put himself in someone else’s shoes’ (Eriksson, 2014).

**Empathy, collaboration and inclusion**

Interviews with personnel at HVB homes in this study were characterized by a variation of different themes that were discussed during the interview. The reflections provided by staff members were sometimes emotionally charged. There were emotional stories, for example, about personnel at HVB homes who were empathic, who understood and tried to help young people, but also about others who belittled and abused young people and even contributed to the risk of worse mental health in young people. Studies such as Majumder (2016) and Sanchez-Cao, Kramer, and Hodes (2013) construct and reconstruct the image that the surrounding world attributes war experiences a prioritised status to a much too high degree; that the dominating explanations are about posttraumatic experience and such, while competing accounts of the life of the adolescents and personnel have a difficult time being noticed (Basic 2018c). None of the interviewed HVB personnel noted that any form of treatment was performed at HVB homes in relation to the adolescents who had been placed there (treatment efforts that were mentioned during the interviews in this study were normally carried out by Child and Adolescent Psychiatry [BUP] in Sweden). Interviewees emphasised that their work at HVB homes was focused on inclusion and integration of adolescents into the Swedish community. The current analysis focused on the different ways the interviewees felt that their work with inclusion and integration of the adolescents had been treated and interpreted in interactions with other parties in the Swedish community. During an interview with Katarina, she spoke about interactions at school and romantic relationships:

Goran: Do you the young people tell you about their day at school? What happens in school and...

Katarina: I usually ask, actually, kind of like you do with your own adolescents and children, and say “Have a good day at school”. And when they come home, I ask them how school went, if something happened, they say no, everything’s fine. Ehm… sometimes they tell us that some kids are mean to them or that this or that happened. The school will contact us if something major happens …

Goran: What might sometimes happen, are you able to tell me anything?

Katarina: Well, the latest example was a young person who told us that they, guys in his class, that they don’t want to talk to him. None of the guys
talk to him. I said “What? What do you mean not talk to you?” “No.” “Why?” “I don’t know”. But I said “That’s not ok.” “Yeah, I don’t care.” “Of course you should care.” “Hey, why don’t they want to talk to you, let’s call the teacher.” “No! I don’t want to.” And he doesn’t want to, he can’t face it, but one needs to talk to him about it because it can’t just be the case that he doesn’t care. That the whole class doesn’t talk to him. … And I need to like…I can’t phone the school now that he has told me not to. To kind of like get him to realise something so that we can call … But they started speaking to him again. Then there is quite a bit about girls, it’s very interesting because they’ve been…now they’re more used to it and they fell in love and they thought that a girl…she added them on her Facebook, that she was in love with them, is what they thought. And given the culture they come from there was a lot of talk about that, and being older I was able to talk to them about it. For the younger people in the staff it’s a bit…

Goran: Mmm.

Katarina: Yes [inaudibly] she smiles at me and she wants me so much because she talks to me, they immediately think she’s in love and they think, some people think, that she’s their girlfriend right away. Even if they haven’t had any physical contact with them, they sat and talked with them and added them on Facebook and they say that they have a lot of girlfriends. And they are all his girlfriends, the friends he has on Facebook who have talked to him, he thinks they are all his girlfriends, and a lot of things like that. But now they have realised that it’s…that they need…a lot more is required for somebody to be your girlfriend. We had a lot of talks with the guys about this and…

Goran: But they have settled in now, now they know…

Katarina: They have settled in, and in the beginning I think they were very much in love with a lot of blonde girls who were really nice and friendly to them and they sort of could not resist falling madly in love with them. But now they’ve settled in a bit … He told me about his first meeting with a girl. He said that he was walking and a girl said to him, “Hi”. In school, from his class. She said “hi” and he was so, he said, “I was so scared that I dropped my keys and phone on the floor” … He was so scared and embarrassed and that was the first time in my life, he said, that another woman besides my mother and my sister had ever spoken to me. I don’t know if that’s true. … He said “I dropped my keys and everything”, and then he told me that he’s the one who explores and compares cultures and wants to change his religion. … He told me how difficult it was because he was shaking like this when a girl wanted to ask him something. So he’s gotten over that now. He even has a girlfriend with whom he holds hands.

Institution employees at HVB homes acknowledge the significance of the practical work in including and integrating adolescents into the Swedish community. These stories point to inadequacies in the work performed by legal guardians, social services, and the Swedish Migration Board. The professional actors that are identified by HVB employees were described as slow and ambiguous regarding planning for the adolescents, as well as non-empathetic.

During the interview, Nadja talked about her practical work with young people and the difficulties in her cooperation with other professions:

Nadja: I feel that as our job has been explained to us, we are meant to be coaches and our job is to give them the conditions needed, to prepare them for an independent life in society in the future. To make sure that they will become a part of society and be able to function independently when they leave our accommodations. My take on it is that I am literally raising a child who is 15 to 18 years old whom I need to prepare for an independent life in the future /…/.

Goran: What other groups are there at your workplace besides these coaches for integration? What other groups have you encountered in your work? You have met legal guardian, interpreters; you’ve met with social workers. How about staff from the Swedish Migration Board, have you ever met them?

Nadja: No.

Goran: Or is it customary for the young people to go to them for…

Nadja: The young people go to them, we drive them there for talks, and at those times the case
worker comes out and calls the young person in and tells us to wait for an hour and a half, it will be over in that time. And you do see interpreters, but we don’t have any talks with them or exchange any information. …

Nadja: Whatever we document is forwarded to the social worker, and we don’t know anything else.

Goran: Mmm.

Nadja: So we don’t get any feedback.

Goran: You don’t get any feedback.

Nadja: No. We provide other people with information, people who are involved in it.

Goran: What is your view on the cooperation between the different authority organisations that exist, concerning these children, I mean? How do they cooperate in your opinion?

Nadja: Poorly. … I mean, how do you…how is anything supposed to change…maybe we are lucky, yes, I told you in the beginning that we are lucky enough to have calm children, unproblematic, and they all attend school and there are no major problems. If they had had problems, they would have most likely seen a social worker more often.

Goran: More often...

Nadja: But since there are no problems there is no need for it.

Goran: Mmm.

Nadja: But it is our job as coaches to have a plan of action, sorry…I mean an implementation plan for young people. You need to create that in cooperation with the young person and their fiduciary. An implementation plan with a goal and a time frame.

Goran: Mmm.

Nadja: It most often involves health, education, social...

Goran: Social skills.

Nadja: Yes, and identity.

Goran: School perhaps?

Nadja: In order for us to create an implementation plan, we first need to receive a care plan from the social worker, what the social worker has established as a care plan for a young person in order for you to establish an implementation plan by following this person’s care plan.

Goran: Mmm.

Nadja: We have young people who have already been with us for a year and two months, some have arrived later and we have a few who have only been here for six to seven months, and we have young people who have been here for over a year. It’s not until now that we have received the care plan from the social worker. One month ago.

Goran: Mmm.

Nadja: So how am I going to be able to do anything unless I’ve received this from him? And also, when you get the care plan it’s all “copy/paste” from one young person to another. It’s the same text for all young people.

Goran: Hahaha.

Nadja: Under “Health”, under “Education” it says: “Provide the adolescent…um…like basic knowledge about the Swedish language”. It says the same thing for all of them. Under “Health” it says “provide an opportunity to maintain control over his/her health status”, the same for everyone, “copy/paste”, one and the same plan for 20 boys. All the same. The same goal for everyone. And also, the social worker hasn’t even met these adolescents but has still developed a care plan, how do you know what his needs are if you have never met him? Lutby Municipality has four social workers on the payroll and 700 kids.

Goran: Whoa!

Nadja: Now, please tell me how these four people can find the time to deal with these 700 children? To talk to them and understand this boy’s needs? This person’s?

Goran: Yes, yes, yes.

Nadja: And then you’re supposed to implement this as a coach. Really what we do is, as they say about fire rescue, we put out fires, you hope that the pipes will hold out after the plumber has left. Prevent them from going nuts, prevent them from completely losing it, and then we will see what happens.

The production of inter-organisational collaboration identities is a prerequisite for the building
of successful cooperation (Lotia and Hardy 2008; Hesjedal, Hetland, & Iversen 2015; Sundqvist, Ögren, Padyab, & Ghazinour 2016). Willumsen (2007) maintains the importance of young people’s participation for successful collaboration. In previous empirical studies, Basic (2018b, 2019) showed that when three professional actors involved in adolescent care understand one another’s goals, the collaboration can be successful; he also showed that the voices of adolescents often end up in the shadow when they meet professional actors.

Nadja’s narrative highlights the officials’ organisational professional identities on an individual and collective basis (“I feel”, “I mean”, “we are meant to”, “we drive them”, “we document”). Basic (2012, 2019) demonstrated that it is very common that members from the same professional category portray themselves as being open for cooperation in contrast to members of other categories. Other professional categories often get pointed out as being responsible for making the cooperation difficult. Nadja’s professional identity is created both through distinctions from the others and through interaction with the others. Basic (2012, 2019) concluded that professional actors distance themselves from categories upon which they depend and to which they are linked in different ways.

Katarina’s and Nadja’s accounts in the above quotations can be analysed as representations of collaborative groups from which various categories of actors emerge. These categories of actors can be divided as follows: professional occupational groups (‘teacher’, ‘social worker’) and non-professional categories (‘girls’, ‘girlfriend’, ‘children’). In their accounts, Katarina and Nadja distanced themselves from other actors in collaborative contexts in which there was an expectation that various categories (particularly the professional occupational categories) should work together to help integrate newly arrived unaccompanied refugee minors into Swedish society. The interactive dynamics of the collaborative context presupposes that Katarina and Nadja are associated with a more flexible relationship and that active, interpretive work is required from them regarding both collaboration and the everyday (and ongoing) elaboration of different identities. Comparing yourself with other social categories is common and often necessary in order to be able to see yourself in relation to others. This analysis shows indications that Katarina and Nadja compared themselves to others, reviewed and evaluated how they themselves were doing, how they perceived their existence, and how they constructed themselves in contrast to others. On the one hand, these contrasts created a sense of distance from the others; on the other hand, Katarina and Nadja defined themselves when they emphasised what they were not.

Stigma and inclusion

The adolescents were portrayed as generally stigmatised and singled out in the Swedish community, which in turn hampered the inclusion and integration job assigned to personnel at HVB homes. During the interview when we were discussing media reports on young people at HVB homes, Mati said:

Mati: I can tell you that I myself have worked as a division manager at several homes and I have contacted the media myself several times to write about things that I think should be written about, and they are not at all interested in writing about those things. I think they are far too positive for the angle they have chosen. But when negative things happen, when unaccompanied refugee children do stupid stuff so to speak, they are there and they phone and write about things. But when you inform them about funny, inspiring, awesome things that young people do, who have done positive things, they don’t want to write about it. I don’t think it fits in with their angle. …

Goran: Mmm, but how is the work performed by staff at HVB homes affected by media reports, by the social climate surrounding that category?

Mati: It has an enormous effect. An enormous effect. They work, they are…they are extremely proud of the work they do and they are proud of their young people and their achievements, but the only thing that young people get to read are often negative things. The only thing the staff gets to read about their own work is that they are basically working in a very dangerous environment where they run the risk of being murdered, gang-raped…mugged, and I don’t know what the hell else. So sure it affects you. … it almost counteracts, if I may
say so, and I’m not exaggerating things, we are trying to convey an image of Sweden, we’re trying to convey an image of, about how society…how we want the young people to view it and absorb it. But then when they start to read enough Swedish and they start to read news they see another image, one where there is a whole lot of debate about their being or not being here, where everyone is always questioning them. People call them all grown men and say that they’re not children and those kinds of things, and of course they’re affected by it. They’re here for a reason, most of them, so it affects them a lot. Yeah, of course it makes our work with integration more difficult.

In research into care recipients, stigma has been the subject of particular attention. The concept is derived from Goffman’s (1963/1990) analysis of stigmatisation. Goffman believes that a person becomes stigmatised when not fully recognised in a desirable social identity. According to Goffman, it is possible to distinguish amongst three different models of how to live with one’s stigma: being born with it and learning to live with it ‘from the beginning’, not being stigmatised until later in life, or being forced into a new, stigmatising context (see also Basic, 2012, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018a; Wästerfors, 2012, 2014; Foster 2012; Wästerfors & Åkerström, 2016; Sirriyeh & Raghallaigh 2018; Majumder 2019; Björk, Danielsson & Basic 2019). Loss of identity in time of war and after war, comparison with other young people in Swedish society, and placement in an institution without one’s parents and siblings create and reinforce a stigmatised context for young people in care – a context that was described in interviews in the course of the present study.

Negative media reports about the adolescents, politicians’ populist appearances aimed at the adolescents and the public officials’ (for example, the police’s) negatively charged opinions about the adolescents were noted as a contributing dimension to the stigmatisation and debasement of the entire group. These factors in turn make the inclusion and integration job assigned to personnel at HVB homes more difficult. The attention spent on informants at HVB homes regarding the contribution from the media, politicians and the police when it comes to stigmatising and debasing the entire group is in line with information dissemination on the Internet (see, for example, Aftonbladet, 2016, 2018; Nyheter 24, 2017; Sveriges Television, 2016, 2017a, b; 2016; Upsala nya tidning, 2016; Expressen, 2018).

Inadequacies in the cooperation between HVB personnel and other professional actors are widely discussed, which creates the image of HVB personnel as cooperative in contrast to other professional actors, who are construed as less involved when it comes to cooperation. The adolescents at HVB homes are portrayed as victims of inadequate cooperation, as people stigmatised by the community, as victims in need of protection – protection that most people interviewed in the study argued for, implemented and were happy to provide.

In the above account, Mati portrayed and presented the professional identity of a divisional manager at an HVB home by distancing (distinguishing) himself from the other actors associated with ‘media’ and ‘media reports’ about newly arrived unaccompanied refugee minors. Previous research draws attention to several ways of distancing yourself in order to conduct your identity work (Goffman 1963/1990; Basic, 2012, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018a; Wästerfors, 2012, 2014; Foster 2012; Wästerfors & Åkerström, 2016; Sirriyeh & Raghallaigh 2018; Björk, Danielsson & Basic 2019; Majumder 2019). One way is to distance yourself from a category and show that you do not belong to it (for example, through your job), or by distancing yourself from roles, institutions and media representations. Mati engaged in a similar kind of distancing in the above quotations. First, he distanced himself from the category of reporter; he did not belong to this category and distanced himself from media reporting that helps to stigmatise newly arrived unaccompanied refugee minors in Sweden. Second, Mati distanced himself from the stigmatising context as a whole, the context that renders identity creation and re-creation harder, as well as the recognition and the integration of newly arrived refugees into society.

**(In)competence of personnel and inclusion**

Institution employees’ stories of adolescents in HVB homes were characterised by the attention spent on the fact that certain adolescents at HVB homes were older than they had stated when arriv-
ing in Sweden. Two interviewees in that part of the study were intensely critical of the adolescents they had met in their work. The adolescents were portrayed as greedy, and the goal of their arrival in Sweden was described as a planned effort to use (‘rob’) the Swedish community. These two stories were permeated by criticism against the adolescents and the resistance that these adolescents were described as displaying in relation to inclusion and integration into the Swedish community. Nick and Dana said during their joint interview:

Nick: The small one, he’s from Afghanistan, but first of all he lies – he says that he is 15, 16, he’s…
Dana: He’s 25.
Nick: No, he might be 25.
Dana: He is.
Nick: 22, 23.
Dana: They all lie about their age to begin with…
Dana: It is about… Goran… I’m deeply suspicious, I don’t believe any of them are minors.
Nick: Not all of them…
Dana: It’s 100 percent, and it’s a shame, erm, no, no, I mean the ones from Afghanistan, not the others. It’s a shame that they don’t check it.
Nick: Now they’ll have to check.
Dana: It’s a shame, because it makes fools of us all. They’re not children. …
Dana: They just come here for one reason: to steal from society.
Nick: Look, how can I describe it…
Dana: It’s sad, but true. Me personally, my personal opinion about Afghanistan, I always felt sorry for them, until I got to know them.
Nick: Afghanistan, Pakistan – it’s raping and killing…
Dana: Now I know 100 percent that, that those people aren’t at war for no reason. It’s in their genes.

Two other interviewees in that part of the study were intensely critical of co-workers at HVB homes whom they have met in their work. They told the story of one adolescent who was physically abused by an employee at a HVB home, and other employ-
ees at HVB homes were portrayed as incompetent in relation to their work. Those employees were portrayed as criminals, a danger to the rule of the law and not oriented to the community themselves, and all of them were characterised as unsuitable for working with adolescents. Nina and Klara reported during their individual interviews:

Nina: There was one young person who, a staff member throttled him. So this young person collapsed and the staff member got him into a room and locked the door. This young person claimed the staff member threatened him: “If you report this, I’ll kill you” – something like that. He was really scared and didn’t dare tell anyone. Fortunately some other young people saw it. They were able to get the story out of the young person afterwards. He was really ill after this and had an epilepsy-type attack afterwards, he was really, really ill, so he [pause]. Yeah. So the staff member was transferred and the young person has been moved [from this HVB home] with the panic attacks continuing. So it was a bit like, it was really obvious that this young person was not at all well as a result of what had happened.

Goran: [pause] You mean the staff member throttled him?
Nina: Yes.
Goran: What’s the problem with the personnel?
Klara: Well, the biggest problem is that they don’t have training. They don’t know what they are and are not entitled to do. It can be a matter of [pause]. On one specific occasion, the staff didn’t know how to deal with matters, and that’s fine, but when you have someone who can, who knows the procedure, then it’s important to support each other. But here, people fight among themselves. And they accuse each other and claim “she didn’t ask us”, “we’re not involved”, “don’t come to us with it”. They don’t know what their duties are.

Goran: [pause] Could you try to give an example of this?
Klara: Well, we had one case, it was an incident between a staff member and a young person. It was really chaotic because the young person was really ill. And some information came up that was really serious, and I knew what they were supposed to do.
It was a weekend, so the managers were not in. So you ring the manager for emergency advice and they have the final word. Erm, and then she gave me certain instructions. When I tried to implement these instructions, it didn’t work out. I was met with resistance from the staff on floor XXX.

Goran: Ok.

Klara: And things did not go as smoothly as they should have. Erm..

Goran: But what happened and what did the on-call manager say?

Klara: Well. What happened was that a young person claimed that he had been hit by a staff member … And when the young person came back from the hospital we were told that all the male staff members on floor XXX had to leave the home.

By portraying other employees at HVB homes, legal guardians, social services, and employees at the Swedish Migration Board as less competent, interviewees in the study portrayed themselves as competent actors. Acknowledging and emphasising another person’s incompetence creates the conditions needed to assert and display the narrator’s own competence. In the interactive process, an image is created and re-created of competent and incompetent social pedagogues. The competent social pedagogue provides practical assistance, understands, structures everyday activities and can gain and affect interactions. The incompetent pedagogue is uninvolved, ignorant, forced, creates stress, and is controlling, argumentative and socially awkward.

In their accounts, Nina and Klara created a picture of the morally correct reality – i.e. in the course of the interview, they presented a picture of what could not be done in a residential home that carries out procedurally competent and administratively correct work regarding the integration of newly arrived unaccompanied refugee minors into Swedish society. Nina and Klara explicitly distanced themselves from the actions of employees at the same HVB home where they work, and they also implicitly distanced themselves from the overall negative picture that is usually presented by the media regarding newly arrived unaccompanied refugee minors in Sweden; this negative picture is in line with the representation provided during the interview with Nick and Dana.

Basic (2012, 2015) argues that conflicts are more intense in small groups; the greater the number of ties between people, the greater the number of intense conflicts. The professional actors in the present study often knew one another (or at least knew about one another), and this knowledge can give rise to more intense contradictions than if they had been strangers. In the material for this study, there were few complimentary accounts of the other professional actors. When complimentary accounts did appear in the material, the praise was directed at the person providing the account. Voices critical of the other professionals were dominant. It is interesting to note that complimentary accounts dominated in interviews with young people about the professional actors they encountered on a daily basis (see analysis in Basic 2018c, p. 18 concerning ‘HVB personnel’ and ‘the teachers at the school’).

The satisfaction of newly arrived unaccompanied refugee minors with the actions of the professional actors they encounter in daily interactions is likely to be an important dimension for the successful integration of these young people into society. In their new country, the absence of their biological parents can cause uncertainty and low self-esteem among newly arrived refugees. The activities in HVB homes can be seen as just one of numerous platforms on which young people can regain a positive view of themselves. In this context, they have the potential to become a protective dimension. The possibility of recognising an individual’s identity is embedded in a number of dimensions (Goffman 1963/1990; Foster 2012; Sirriyeh & Raghallaigh 2018; Björk, Danielsson & Basic 2019). The positive and good relationships amongst young people, HVB personnel and the teachers at the school constitute an important dimension, in which the recognition of young people’s identities may be crucial to their integration into the new society.

INCLUSION AND OBSTACLES IN THE SOCIAL PEDAGOGICAL CONTEXT

The purpose of the present study was to provide a new understanding of (1) narratives by staff at
institutions regarding the day-to-day work of caring for youths who, having experienced war, fled to Sweden and were taken into care and placed in institutions; and (2) interactive patterns contributing to constructing and reconstructing the inclusion of the clients and the obstacles to inclusion during practical social pedagogy.

Basic (2018c) and Björk, Danielsson, & Basic (2019, p. 18) conclude that the predominant standard explanations of the category “young people with wartime experiences” appear to concern psychiatric or medical needs; for example, the diagnosis post-traumatic stress disorder is commonly used (Majumder, 2016; Sanchez-Cao, Kramer, & Hodes, 2013), while competing explanations appear to have been afforded relatively less attention. These include: (1) established inequalities in society, residential homes, schools and other institutions; (2) material and institutional difficulties in societal, residential-home and school contexts; (3) bureaucratic hurdles in residential homes, schools and society as a whole; (4) ethnic monitoring and social control (Basic 2015) in society, residential homes and schools; (5) the humiliated identity of the actors in a societal, residential-home and school context; (6) victimisation by the majority group; (7) demeaning ethnic categorisations in society, residential homes and schools; and (8) discrimination in the residential-home context, school context and an overall societal context (Björk, Danielsson, & Basic 2019; Basic 2018c). Further competing explanations that also appear to have been relatively diagnostically underemphasised are the interpretations offered by the young people who have experienced war and civil unrest in their homeland, such as: (1) “I have unique experiences that I can benefit from in the new country”, (2) “I have learned to cope with difficulties “, and (3) “I am stronger now”. There are many interactive pathways to recognition in the social pedagogical context (Eriksson & Winman, 2010; Hämäläinen, 2012; Úcar, 2013; Eriksson, 2014; Kornbeck & Úcar, 2015; Hämäläinen & Eriksson, 2016; Basic 2018c; Úcar, Soler-Masó, & Planas-Ildó 2020). There is no single formula that can always or generally be applied. Cultural recognition in a social pedagogical context, as well as recognition of the actors in successful cooperation, is created and recreated through a series of interactions in which actors are first involved in various forms of identification founded on identities and, second, make use of or suffer from their own identification streams or those of others in such interactions at residential homes, schools or in society at large.

The general perspective from social pedagogy and research emphasises the importance of recognising the various identities that are actualised and re-actualised during interpersonal interactions in the various social contexts in which the individual acts or is expected to act. According to Eriksson (2010), historically, the principal use of social pedagogy in Sweden was as a method and attitude for personnel working with children and young people in various institutions.

The present study demonstrates that recognition, or the lack thereof, of young peoples’ various identities may impact on their opportunities for inclusion in Swedish society. The recognition and loss of identity that occurs in various contexts in which young people act or are expected to act is crucial to integration into the new society (“I have contacted the media myself several times to write about things … I think they are far too positive for the angle they have chosen”).

The present study shows that success in the inclusion dynamic can be achieved with a ‘good’ dialogue between young people and staff (something that in previous research was highlighted as being central to social pedagogy). In this context, a ‘good’ dialogue is one characterised by intimacy, an interest in the other person’s perspective, openness and downplaying the power dynamic between the participants in the dialogue (“I usually ask, actually, kind of like you do with your own adolescents and children, and say ‘Have a good day at school’ “). It appears that a ‘good’ dialogue improves the staff member’s empathy and lays the foundations for success in the collaboration with other stakeholders, which is an important point of departure for facilitating the inclusion of these young people in their new society.

The present study also shows that success in the inclusionary dynamic is not easy to achieve. Stigmatisation and the exclusionary dynamic at a personal, organisational and societal level, as
well as the incompetence of staff, have a negative impact on the young peoples’ self-image that in the next stage may risk crushing their self-esteem (“There was one young person who” was throttled by a member of staff, “it was an incident between a staff member and a young person. It was really chaotic because the young person was really ill”, “when they start to read enough Swedish and they start to read news they see another image, one where there is a whole lot of debate about their being or not being here, where everyone is always questioning them”). The young peoples’ wartime experiences and sometimes precarious situations in the new society may lead to a lack of self-esteem. When there is a failure to facilitate mutual interaction amongst young people, staff and the community, and the young people lose social recognition from others, this can undoubtedly present an obstacle to self-fulfilment, a stable identity and integration into the new society.

The young people with whom the staff work in the studied social pedagogical context do not have the possibility of obtaining the care and consideration that a family should ideally provide. In such a situation, the significance of staff in a social pedagogical context has a more prominent place (“like you do with your own adolescents and children”). It is in such a context that a branching of interpersonal interactions should be implemented that, in the next stage, could contribute to both the inclusion and learning of the young people in the new society.

Opportunities for and obstacles to identity recognition lie embedded in many different dimensions. One important dimension is formed when staff succeed in creating good relationships (amongst other things, through ‘good’ dialogue) with young people, in which identity recognition is balanced with trust, mutuality and consideration. An inclusive social pedagogical approach can be crucial to the ability to include the young people. Such an approach places demands on how institutions organise this type of work, as well as on how much latitude, support and training staff are given about the social climate, policies, norms, guidelines and governance documents on which their work is based.

One question that has been actualised during the study is how a staff member can help by initiating and strengthening interactions that will include and integrate clients into the community. How can staff use the previous experience of young people in their work to include them in the new society? Wartime experiences can be cause for sympathy and the construction of a distinct typification (“war child”, “traumatised”); however, they are also associated with a certain status: these young people have first-hand knowledge that others lack. There is possibility to build a dynamism of society by making use of these young people’s experience. It is also important to follow and examine the process of their action in the society from the perspectives of “democratic” and “mobilising”, which are characteristics of social pedagogy. In our opinion, in conducting further research on the theme it is not only important to distinguish the content that forms the young person’s identity and staff’s recognition and stigmatisation in relation to the creation and recreation of that identity – it is also important to investigate how identities are used, managed, reinforced and questioned in interpersonal interactions.
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