Implementing the DCSF Pilot Programme: The work of the first year

Social Pedagogy Briefing Paper II

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Introduction

In 2007, the government announced a pilot programme to determine the impact of a social pedagogic approach in children's residential care. The pilot began in 2008. This Briefing Paper is the second in an occasional series of papers about social pedagogy. It outlines learning from the first year of the pilot, and other developments around social pedagogy in the UK. The first Briefing Paper, **Pedagogy – a holistic, personal approach to work with children and young people, across services**, is available on the Institute of Education website at: http://eprints.ioe.ac.uk/58/.

Readers may also like to know that in addition to the Pilot Programme, there are other social pedagogy developments taking place in the UK. There is a Social Pedagogy Development Network, which is a grassroots movement for shaping and developing a UK tradition of social pedagogy. Further information on the Network can be found on the website dedicated to social pedagogy developments in the UK: www.SocialPedagogyUK.com. A briefing paper about these and other practice and training initiatives is being prepared by the Centre for Understanding of Social Pedagogies at the Institute of Education University of London (contact Pat Petrie, p.petrie@ioe.ac.uk for further details).

During the last ten years or so, provision for children and young people has been developing rapidly at the level of policy, organisation, training, education, and qualifications. *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2003) and *The Children's Plan* (DCSF 2007) set out a clear policy ambition for children: uniting care and education services as children's services in every local authority; supporting families and intervening to protect children where necessary; integrating workers and services so that they offer more coherent support; and rewarding, valuing and training the workforce. This agenda had much in common with social pedagogic approaches, as outlined in earlier research (see, for example, Petrie et al. 2006) and acknowledged in policy documents (e.g. DfES 2005). Most recently, the 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy (DCSF 2008) committed the government to developing a Youth Professional Status underpinned by a social pedagogic approach. The workforce reform policy documents recognised that the social pedagogue offers a model of a core worker, usually educated to degree level, who is able to integrate theoretical knowledge with professional and practical skills. She or he works principally through developing relationships with individuals and groups, in a social context, and with a goal-oriented approach. Social pedagogues are used to working across disciplinary boundaries, with children and adults, in a variety of settings. Overall, social pedagogy offers what may be termed an educative service to children and young people.

The Design of the Pilot Programme

The Pilot Programme set out to recruit social pedagogues who had been trained in continental Europe to work in children's homes in England alongside staff, managers and young people. The intention was to encourage a discourse within each children's home about the differences, and similarities, between the English and continental approaches and to promote learning about social pedagogy by working with it every day, generating curiosity among managers and staff who had been chosen specifically for their eagerness to engage in mutual learning. In some ways, the design was to stimulate the conditions for a community of practice (Wenger 1998).

In order to assess whether the social pedagogic approach could be introduced widely, the programme set out to recruit children's homes that represented some of the diversity of children's homes in England: from the public, private and voluntary provider sectors, and from two regions of England, representing possibly diverse employment conditions and different purposes and philosophies.

Each children's home fell into one of a possible four models termed Groups for the purposes of the project.

Group 1 was composed of four children's homes where social pedagogues had been employed prior to the start of the programme. The home had not modified the job title, job description or conditions of employment when employing the pedagogue. They were employed as residential child care workers who happened to have trained as social pedagogues in other countries. One way of looking at this is as a low level input or 'dose' of social pedagogy, in that there was little initial commitment on the part of management to develop social pedagogy practice.

Group 2 consisted of eight children's homes, where selected employers recruited social pedagogues to a social pedagogue job description. Their role was to work alongside other staff and with the young people, as social pedagogues. The employers agreed that the social pedagogues should participate in the project support and training activities offered by the TCRU project team. In this model, one might expect identifiable differences in practice between social pedagogic approaches and those already existing in the homes and for these to be the basis for discussion by social pedagogues, staff and/or managers. The 'dose' of social pedagogy, as it were, was increased.

In Group 3, six children's homes were involved. In this case, the managers were asked to recruit social pedagogues, under the same conditions as for Group 2, but for two thirds of their working time, only. The remaining third would be for work with local agencies and organisations with whom the children's home was in contact, in order to raise awareness of the project and of social pedagogy and its different approaches. For this, one third supernumerary time, the project paid a fee to cover the salaries of the social pedagogues. The aim was that time allocated to explicit engagement in communicating about social pedagogic concepts and methods would increase local exposure to social pedagogy, through formal training as well as more informal discursive opportunities, for both existing staff groups and other teams working with looked after children.

In both Group 2 and 3 we asked social pedagogues and employers to commit to a two year period of employment, this being the length of the pilot programme funding, and to enable evaluation of the pilot. Overall the design was concerned to replicate 'ordinary' conditions of recruitment and employment that would apply without the pilot programme being in place, where there is a staff turnover of between 15 – 25 percent. This was to meet the DCSF concern to ascertain whether the social pedagogic approach could be rolled out, as well as to ensure that recruitment procedures stayed within regulatory guidelines.

Group 4 comprised a number of children's homes willing to be comparison homes for the purposes of the evaluation. These were mostly selected from among other children's homes belonging to the same providers as represented in Groups 1 -3.

The design also recognised that pilot programmes, being innovative endeavours, bring their own particular needs. So a further element of the design was the role of the TCRU team, who were there to provide support through two project officers who were social pedagogues, and three experienced cross-national researchers.

 The TCRU team organised an induction week that included a day of introduction to English children's services and four days of refresher language training, prior to the social pedagogues starting work. This was in recognition that moving from one country to another brings inherent practical, linguistic and cultural changes, as well as differences in policy and the organisation of welfare. Following the induction week, the project team visited all the children's homes to conduct initial, and, subsequently, structured review visits, and were available via telephone and email to talk through emerging problems. There were also networking and information days for managers.

The Recruitment Phase

There was no shortage of requests from children's homes to participate in the pilot programme. Through professional networks, such as that run by the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care (NCERCC), over 60 applications were received from employers expressing an interest. An initial sift of applications on the basis of their location, sector, type of children's home, employment conditions, number of vacancies, and, most importantly, evidence of interest in and knowledge about, social pedagogy, led to a shortlist of homes that the TCRU team visited in early 2009. A few children's homes were not successful at this stage, because they did not meet the conditions outlined above, and a few withdrew after the selection visit. This left a group of 18 children's homes, of which 11 were in the public sector, three were privately run and four in the voluntary/charity sector. In relation to the residential sector as a whole, this distribution had more local authority, and fewer private, homes than would have been ideal. However, strenuous attempts to redress this were not successful. The children's homes were fairly evenly divided between the North West, and the South, of England. Such a clustering was intended to facilitate the development of regional networks of social pedagogues, and managers.

Simultaneously, the project team worked with Jacaranda Recruitment (see page 11) to develop a framework for recruiting social pedagogues in Groups 2 and 3. This involved working at the national, local and individual employer level to ensure support for the project. For example, TCRU project members met with Ofsted's social care inspectors to explain the project, and wrote updating newsletters posted on the NCERCC network. At the employer level, TCRU and Jacaranda worked together to establish the employers' needs, and to discuss with them the probable needs of social pedagogues when applying for a job in England. A pilot job description was introduced, to mark out the social pedagogue position as having a distinctive contribution to make in relation to the residential child care workers, sharing everyday life with young people, and working in teams with staff.   Jacaranda took the lead in marketing the opportunities to social pedagogues in Germany. TCRU ran a recruitment

conference in Copenhagen, took part in a meeting held in Copenhagen of the AIEJI (International Association of Social Educators) and generated interest in Denmark through articles and adverts in professional magazine. Danish candidates did not apply for the posts in large numbers but German social pedagogues did so, and there was little difficulty in generating shortlists for each employer. Employers ran their own recruitment and selection days according to their own rules and regulations, with advice from Jacaranda and TCRU about the organisation of the day. CRB checks were initiated on the selection day in order to speed up post-recruitment procedures.

Interviews for social pedagogues to fill existing vacancies began in April 2009 and continued through the year until February 2010. The initial intention was to recruit a minimum of two and up to six social pedagogues to any one children's home. In the event, the pattern of vacancies meant that most children's homes filled two posts with social pedagogues, although one recruited four and one three. In one Group 3 home, the employer recruited only one social pedagogue who was totally supernumerary, so although attached to a children's home, his work was to promote awareness of, and training in, social pedagogy in children's services as a whole.

The anticipated total number of social pedagogues, based on the employers' requests, was eight social pedagogues in Group 1 homes, 19 in Group 2 and 12 in Group 3, a total of 39.   This was less than had been originally hoped for in Group 2 homes. Additional measures to support social pedagogues were adopted from January 2010 including TCRU project staff facilitating support meetings for social pedagogues, attending staff meetings in the children's homes to discuss social pedagogy and running day courses in localities near the pilot children's homes. The detail of these activities will be reported in a later briefing paper.

The successfully recruited social pedagogues began work in June 2009, and start dates continued throughout the year. The last start dates were in June 2010.

Emerging lessons from the social pedagogues' experience so far

The learning identified in this paper comes from informal discussions, information exchange at networking events and from formal reviews with social pedagogues and managers held between October 2009 and January 2010. It reflects an initial picture because mostly the social pedagogues had been in post for only a few months.

Overseas recruitment

When planning the recruitment of social pedagogues from abroad, the practical issues are not unique but have much in common with other forms of overseas recruitment, especially when using an agency to compile a shortlist. We found that time taken at the initial planning and preparation stage, meeting with the employers to rehearse the process in detail was very important in ensuring a successful recruitment day. The potential difficulties for social pedagogues on arrival in a new country, with a new job and as part of a new (for them) professional system were discussed with managers during initial visits and at support and networking events, in preparation for the social pedagogues' arrival. After the

social pedagogues had arrived, the process of acclimatising to the new environment, for both them and the staff and young people, could go on for some time, especially at the level of potential confusion about accents, language and professional terminology.

Support from the employer

As mentioned above, the participating employers, who were generally service managers or managers external to the children's home itself, were very enthusiastic about the pilot programme. In some cases, the managers had ambitious expectations of the social pedagogues. For example, that the social pedagogues could help them turn around unsatisfactory situations or steer the children's home in a new direction. In other cases, the managers did not want the social pedagogues to change anything, but to fit in with the established system and method.

Part of the initial work of the TCRU team was to ensure, in so far as possible, that all the managers, external and internal, supported the pilot project's aims and intentions: to challenge existing practice where necessary and to provide ideas and methods that would help staff to develop an analytic approach to their work. All the social pedagogues had an appropriate qualification and experience that, if not directly of residential care, was very appropriate. Those working in Group 3 had some additional experience of delivering training, of awareness raising and of developing projects. They were not, on the whole, appointed to team leader or senior posts, although the potential for promotion was acknowledged.

From the point of view of the TCRU implementation team, it was not appropriate to view the contribution of social pedagogues as either to steer structural change, as some managers wanted, or, on the other hand, to make no change and just fit in, as other managers seemed to want. One very clear task, early on, was for managers, together with TCRU project workers and the social pedagogues, to establish role expectations for the social pedagogues that suited their qualifications and expertise and that were not overly ambitious in requiring a great deal of structural change.

It proved very important to ensure that the home manager, team leaders and staff had an understanding of the purpose of the project and the roles of the social pedagogues that was similar to that of the external manager. These are the people with whom the social pedagogues work every day and their engagement with the project is clearly vital. On the whole, staff groups have been welcoming of the social pedagogues, although the extent to which they actively want to change their practice varies. Staff in the pilot homes often found pedagogical methods, such as 'reflecting on practice', to be a new area of practice.

The educational qualifications required for residential care work are quite different in England compared to Germany and other European countries using a social pedagogic approach. In England, there is no requirement to hold a BA degree. Rather, since 2005, there has been a minimum entry requirement of a Level 3 qualification, which is broadly equivalent to A levels. In September 2010 a new Level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young People's Workforce will be launched with a specific pathway for children's social care practitioners and suitable for residential care practitioners. The Children's

6

Workforce Development Council are also developing 'continuing professional practice standards' in recognition of the continuing educational needs of residential care staff beyond Level 3. However, in Germany, and elsewhere, such as Denmark, most residential care workers hold a three year or degree level educational qualification, usually in social pedagogy or a variant of social pedagogy (Petrie et al 2006). In some cases, pilot programme social pedagogues have found that the difference in knowledge base, as expressed in their higher levels of qualification (degree level) and other staff (Level 3 or below), is a source of frustration. The existing staff did not necessarily share the social pedagogue's theoretical knowledge or the motivation to find solutions to problems but preferred to use established procedures.

There is also an issue about the role of the employer in countering any subtle or overt staff resistance to the social pedagogues. In at least one case, there was active rejection of overseas recruitment per se, which required managers' intervention to resolve. More usually, resistance, if it appeared, was more subtle, such as not voicing concerns on the proposal to recruit social pedagogues in advance of their arrival, but showing speaking about this once the social pedagogues were in post.

Support from the employer also extended to ensuring adequate supervision for the social pedagogues. For the most part, the social pedagogues were content with the established system of supervision but in a few cases they reported that the supervision they received was focused more on accountability and less about an opportunity to reflect on and analyse practice in an open way, than they were used to.

Employment conditions

Because the social pedagogues were educated to degree level they expected a salary commensurate with that level of expertise. Pilot project employers often found that their salary scales did not value knowledge over experience. In other words, deciding where to position a newly recruited social pedagogue on the salary scale required taking into account the length of their work experience rather than their theoretical and professional knowledge. This could lead to a mismatch of expectations around pay. If the pilot project is rolled out, employers will need to rethink their salary structures. These will need to reward education as well as experience, and to do so for professionally qualified staff working 'on the floor', as well as those with organisational responsibilities such as those of a team leader. However, in comparison to other countries, staffing ratios are high in England. Following this pattern could, hypothetically, mean that the shift to a highly qualified staff team would be accompanied by a reduction in the total number of staff needed, so minimising any increase in costs arising from higher salaries.

Organisational issues

Staff teams in continental Europe are usually organised in less hierarchical ways, with a more diverse range of responsibilities, than staff teams in the pilot residential homes. This reflects one of the principles of a social pedagogic approach - a democratic and citizenship-based ethos is embedded in the organisational structure. Overly hierarchical organisations, especially when combined with a limited role can lead to difficulties for social pedagogues. For example, social pedagogues working in residential care

in Denmark or Germany are used to democratic debate, where challenge is the norm and not seen as a threat to the authority of a senior or themselves.

In some instances in the pilot programme, however, social pedagogues have disagreed with the practice they have observed, but outlets for discussion of such disagreement were limited or incurred disapproval. This can lead to frustration or confrontation. However, in other cases, social pedagogues have been able to talk through the frustration with the TCRU team and other colleagues and found ways to continue the discussions with managers.

Lack of time for discussion and reflection is another organisational issue to which the social pedagogues have drawn attention. A central tenet of the social pedagogic approach is to be able to reflect on and analyse the situation of the young people in a considered way, applying theory and discussing this with colleagues, so as to plan more effective ways of working. When working in teams that 'handover' every day or twice a day, the handover represents the main means of exchange between teams. In some cases the time allocated for handover was too short, and too procedurally orientated, to allow for the proper reflective debate that is central to social pedagogy, and social pedagogues have had to work to find other opportunities in the working week to engage in reflection.

Whole staff meetings are such an opportunity, but again these need to be structured so as to encourage debate about young people, and not just about the mechanics of running the children's home. A social pedagogic approach would require rethinking the organisation of the working week to include more time for discussion, across teams, of young people's contexts and conditions.

Financial considerations

All children's homes were working under financial constraints. However, in some cases, social pedagogues found that the financial constraints appeared to be influencing practice decisions in ways that made practice more difficult and generated uncertainty about their job security. In one case, the children's home was under threat of closure. The managers were preoccupied with justifying its existence and not focused on supporting the social pedagogues' early months in post. In another case, admissions to a newly established home appeared to be at odds with the stated aims of the home. Young people with widely differing needs were admitted, although in the view of the social pedagogues, the team was ill-equipped to deal with this. The result was a sense of crisis among the team and less focus on the possible contribution of social pedagogy. In other cases, social pedagogues reported that very few young people were living in the home (as few as one or two in some cases). This reduced opportunities for group work or for developing key work. The professional 'gaze' or focus on the one or two resident young people, by a comparatively large staff group, became very intense in these conditions. In one case, the residential home staff were required to 'sleep in' even when there were no children in residence, over several weeks. However, in other cases the permanent staff group was reduced in the face of dwindling numbers of young people, so limiting the work that could be done to explain social pedagogy with the team.

Practice issues

Overall, social pedagogues have found that their approach to practice has been welcomed. According to their managers, they have been very good at establishing relations with young people, and skilled at dealing with potential difficulties, such as 'being different' because of where they come from, their accent or merely being male in an all female staff group. They have developed practical and creative activities with young people, have taken them to sporting and cultural events and have engaged in energetic play, when appropriate.. In some cases, they have developed a new ethos of a 'cosy time' at the end of the day, including bedtime stories, that is appreciated by some young people, In one case, the young people have become sufficiently interested in the social pedagogues to request a group trip to Germany to find out more about where the social pedagogues come from. Often, social pedagogues are reported have 'dived in' to such relational and practical work and not been content to sit in staff rooms or on the sidelines. Some project social pedagogues have been described by managers as 'role models' for the other staff.

This initial investment in developing relationships with young people and staff before taking on particular responsibilities, such as key working with a young person, or specific projects, was seen by most social pedagogues as an essential step towards integration in the team. Where there were barriers to relationship building, such as interpersonal difficulties between staff, or simply a lack of young people to develop relations with, this delayed the social pedagogues' integration and the potential for their contribution to be recognised.

In their work so far, social pedagogues have sometimes challenged established 'truths' about young people. One example concerns a young man who was described, in passing, as 'autistic', and difficult to communicate with, by his social worker. The social pedagogue took the time to ask the child questions, and find out his interests, in a gentle and persistent way, until he began to talk with her. The staff were astonished, and questioned why the social pedagogue took this approach, when they would have made far less effort. She responded in terms of the interest that the young person stimulated for her, how his brain worked, the way he linked events together. Through this approach she established a relationship of trust with him and subsequently discovered ways she could help him understand the situation he was facing. This showed the deep potential of the social pedagogues' integration of theory and practice to produce a positive effect for a young person. In addition, the social pedagogue's approach showed the important role of relationship building in making assessments of the young person's needs that bring unique knowledge based on shared everyday life in the residential setting.

In the UK context, social pedagogues have faced a difficulty in the scope of this 'relational' work when acting as key workers. They have found that, in contrast with practice in other countries, there are many specialists who have responsibilities for children in care. There is the Looked After Children Nurse, the Designated Teacher and so on, each with different areas of responsibility for the young person and a specified role. This means there is reduced space for action and contribution from the residential worker than, for example, in Germany. The generic training and holistic contribution of the social pedagogue is diminished in the face of all the specialists. Not only can this frustrate the social pedagogue, whose

knowledge of the young person is potentially deep and drawn from everyday interactions, but it can also create a barrier in their relationship with the young people. Such a barrier occurs because the particular remit and responsibility of the key worker is not clear. Nor are they recognised as having designated responsibility for the young person's well being in relationship to health and education services.

Awareness raising/training role of Group 3 social pedagogues

The twelve social pedagogues in Group 3 had one third of their time allocated to reaching an audience wider than that of the children's home, and to spread knowledge of social pedagogy. Principally, this audience would include social workers, the virtual school head and other education staff in contact with the residents, looked after children nurses and representatives of the police. It was agreed that this work would not begin until about three months after appointment, to enable the social pedagogues to settle in their teams. At initial meetings the TCRU team tried to identify, with the managers and the social pedagogues, the relevant agencies. The scope of the work would in each case differ according to the local context.

The social pedagogues differed in their approach to this task. Some took a very pragmatic approach, and started by visiting social workers and introducing themselves and explaining the project. In one case they worked out with managers which aspects of social pedagogy could usefully be developed with staff teams. They then organised an away-day for the staff team, structured around a paper they had written about social pedagogic approaches to young people's self esteem. This was intensive work, and was followed up in subsequent team meetings to identify the learning staff had taken away from the day. In the same children's home, the social pedagogues and the external manager jointly presented the pilot project the meaning of social pedagogy and its contribution to working with children, to a meeting of the local multi-agency liaison group, including the newly appointed Assistant Director of Children's Services.

At the time of writing, the social pedagogues in this same home had decided to try a different approach for three months or so, and to each develop a project with a member of staff and a representative of an outside agency. The projects identified were: i) working to engage residents with local youth clubs; ii) working to improve relations between young people and their families; and iii) developing the use of arts and music within the children's home. The social pedagogues in this home have written about their work in the provider's company newsletter and are keen to promote a social pedagogy forum to take their ideas to a wider audience. One of the social pedagogues was invited to join the local social work taskforce, which offered a further opportunity to share her experience and ideas.

In other children's homes, the awareness raising role has been harder to establish. In some cases there have been difficulties with the rota and securing enough time away to establish Group 3 work, even to the extent of visiting other local agencies. In others, the social pedagogues, perhaps over anxious, have done considerable detailed research but little actual practical training or awareness-raising. In two Group 3 children's homes, one of the social pedagogues has left due to difficulties with sickness record and/or their performance. In both cases, re-recruitment is in hand.

In one particular children's homes, exceptional work is taking place. The Group 3 social pedagogue is totally supernumerary and the work is being developed at the level of both the children's home and with wider agencies and student groups. For example, the social pedagogy has contributed to a 'Foundation to Health Studies' course at the University of Liverpool from a social pedagogical perspective. The social pedagogue says that his main method in the home is 'positive role modelling' as he believes that practice has a greater effect when showing young people how things can be done instead of focusing on their negative behaviour or telling young people what to do. One example of practice developments at this home is the 'social pedagogy tree project'. The social pedagogue is taking the lead on creating a garden sculpture that is a visible representation of participation, creativity and team work. Instead of having fixed days or times for the activity, resources are constantly available, to encourage participation at moments when the young people want to get involved. During a recent review, the home manager said that the tree project will give everyone involved an opportunity to understand social pedagogic approaches through the very visible and physical experience of the tree sculpture.

Summary

In the first year, the social pedagogy pilot programme has covered a lot of ground. The social pedagogues in post have faced enormous cultural and organisational challenges in moving to England and starting work in unfamiliar environments. The expectations on them have similarly been significant: they have been expected to demonstrate their training and methods as 'different' from the roles and understandings held in the children's homes they are working in, whilst at the same time as having enough relevant experience and training to make ready links with the existing practice. At this stage, it seems that the social pedagogues working in homes where there has been a continuous home and external manager, who have provided ongoing support for both the social pedagogues and the project of introducing social pedagogy, seem to be most confident that they can demonstrate their different or fresh perspective on practice.

However, it is in the coming year that the work of the social pedagogues will potentially begin to show the impact of a social pedagogic approach. It is already clear that the impact will not just be on what practitioners do, but also on the ethos for practice and the organisational conditions for residential care services.

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About Thomas Coram Research Unit

Founded in 1973 by Professor Jack Tizard, the Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education University of London is a multidisciplinary research unit and conducts policy-relevant research within a changing world. Its main focus is on children and young people both within and outside families and

including care, education, health and social service settings. The Unit receives funding from national and international agencies including the Department of Health, the Department for Children Schools and Families, the Economic and Social Research Council, the European Union, the World Health Organisation, health and local authorities, charitable foundations and voluntary organisations.

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