

# Pedagogy – a holistic, personal approach to work with children and young people, across services

European models for practice, training, education and qualification

Pat Petrie, Janet Boddy, Claire Cameron, Ellen Heptinstall, Susan McQuail, Antonia Simon and Valerie Wigfall

Thomas Coram Research Unit,  
Institute of Education, University of  
London

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Today, provision for children and young people is developing rapidly at the level of policy, organisation, training, education, and qualifications. Research in these areas, carried out at the Thomas Coram Research Unit (TCRU), has included cross-national studies on service provision and its quality, the daily practice of staff, their training, education, qualification, recruitment and retention in the workforce. A central interest has been what, in continental Europe, is often called 'social pedagogy', a distinctive way of working with children and the basis for policy development. A Centre for Understanding Social Pedagogy has now been established in the Institute of Education.

References and links to summaries of these studies are provided at the end of the paper.

## Why consider social pedagogy?

Until the end of the last century, in England local and national policy was mostly based on clear boundaries between the fields of education, childcare and social care. These divisions were apparent at many levels: conceptual, professional, organisational, and in relation to training and education. However, over the last decade there has been an administrative reorganisation of responsibility for children's services and a shift in how we envisage provision for children and young people. The following are all of relevance for the subject of social pedagogy:

- Responsibility for childcare (for working parents) and social care (for children in need, including those in need of protection) has moved from the Department of Health to what is now the Department for Children, Schools and Families, with:
  - responsibility for early years education and childcare, out-of-school care, child protection and schooling;
  - a Children's Workforce Unit and a School's Workforce Unit;
  - structural links to other government departments.
- Integrated structures such as Children's Trusts, and local authority Children's Departments, and comprehensive provision – Children's Centres and extended services delivered through schools – have been introduced.
- Parenting and family support has a central role, across government departments. For example, Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003) and the Children's Plan (DCSF, 2008), have emphasised what is called progressive universalism: 'support for all, with more support for those who need it most' (Balls, 2007). Within this conceptual approach, there is a need for child welfare, childcare, parenting and family support, education and health services to work more closely together. The approach also requires the different occupations involved to be more interconnected, with a core training for workers across the children and young people's sector.

Also relevant, although less recent, since the 1989 Children Act and with the UK's becoming a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, there is an increasing emphasis on listening to children and there has been the appointment of a Children's Commissioner.

This is a time when the borders and relations between different types of services are changing, workforce issues are to the fore, and there is a desire to find new approaches. Not least, children are being seen as persons in their own right, rather than as 'problems' to be managed. With these changing directions comes the opportunity to seek fresh options and to identify the best possibilities for realising government's intentions. One model for work in the children's

sector is that of pedagogy, with workers, whatever their job titles, seen primarily as pedagogues.

## What does the term pedagogy include in continental Europe?

In England, we do not often use the term 'pedagogy' except in the context of the classroom and formal education. Our European neighbours often apply it to a much broader set of services, covering, for example, childcare and early years, youth work, parenting and family support services, secure units for young offenders, residential care and play work. A consideration of pedagogic policy and practice in continental Europe could help to clarify the challenges and opportunities inherent in the developing English context.

As used in continental Europe, the word 'pedagogy' can relate to the overall support of children's development. In pedagogy, care and education meet. To put it another way, pedagogy is about bringing up children, it is 'education' in the broadest sense of that word. Indeed, in French and other languages with a Latin base (such as Italian and Spanish) terms like *l'éducation* convey this broader sense, and are interchangeable with expanded notions of pedagogy as used in Germanic and Nordic countries.

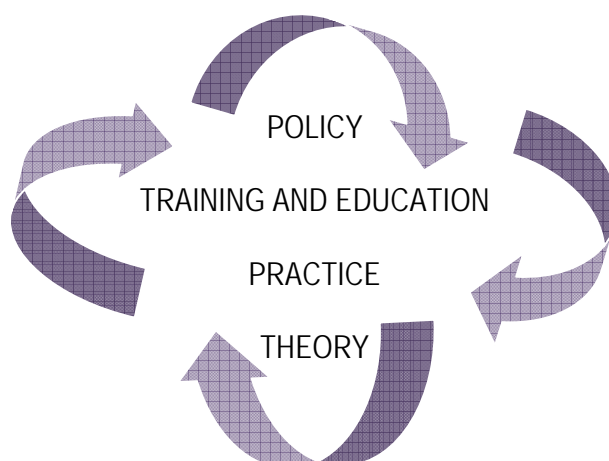
Parents are sometimes referred to as the first pedagogues, but pedagogy is also a foundational concept that informs many sorts of services, providing a distinctive approach to practice, training and policy. In continental Europe, the use of the terms such as *l'éducation* and *Pädagoge* and *Sozialpädagogik* imply work with the *whole* child: body, mind, feelings, spirit and creativity. Crucially, the child is seen as a social being, connected to others and at the same time with their own distinctive experiences and knowledge.

*In Sweden, the employment of pedagogues in schools has been central to educational reforms. Educational policy addresses the whole child, rather than the child conceived in narrow cognitive terms. Around one third of school heads have a background in pedagogy, rather than teaching.*

(Cohen, Moss, Petrie and Wallace, 2004)

## The terms pedagogy and social pedagogy

Social pedagogy is sometimes used to mean pedagogy conducted on behalf of society, rather than the more private pedagogy performed by parents. But the term can also denote work with more vulnerable groups in society. Different countries have different emphases and use slightly different terms.



In the countries included in our studies of residential care in different European countries, an organic pedagogic system was identified (e.g., Petrie, 2001, Petrie, 2002, Petrie, et al., 2006). The system's components consist of policy and practice, theory and research, and the training and education of the work force, with each component feeding into, and drawing from, the others.

TCRU research identified the following key principles of pedagogic practice:

- A focus on the child as a whole person, and support for the child's overall development.
- The practitioner seeing herself/himself as a person, in relationship with the child or young person.
- While they are together, children and staff are seen as inhabiting the same life space, not as existing in separate, hierarchical domains.
- As professionals, pedagogues are encouraged to constantly reflect on their practice and to apply both theoretical understandings and self-knowledge to their work and to the sometimes challenging demands with which they are confronted.
- Pedagogues should be both practical and creative; their training prepares them to share in many aspects of children's daily lives, such as preparing meals and snacks, or making music and building kites.
- In group settings, children's associative life is seen as an important resource: workers should foster and make use of the group.
- Pedagogy builds on an understanding of children's rights that is not limited to procedural matters or legislative requirements.
- There is an emphasis on team work and valuing the contributions of others — family members, other professionals and members of the local community — in the task of 'bringing up' children.

*'Pedagogic theory is specially about relationships, child rearing relationships'* (Dutch academic, quoted in Petrie, et al., 2006: 23)

The work of the pedagogue is essentially personal. The students and staff, interviewed for recent TCRU research on the applicability of social pedagogy to work with looked-after children, often spoke of the work of the pedagogue in terms of the human person: head, hands and heart —all three being essential for the work of pedagogy. The personal, relational approach is emphasised in students' training and education, where fostering sound pedagogic values and attitudes is seen as at least as important as the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

*'When you are holding a person in your hand, you are holding a bit of his life in your hand.'* (Principal, Danish training college, *ibid*: 23)

Pedagogic principles derive from a highly developed professional training and education, and relate to social policy that is conceived in terms of pedagogy; for example pedagogic principles can be brought to bear in cases where children are also a concern for youth justice systems.

## Education, training and qualification

Some of those working directly with children have undertaken pedagogic studies in the last years of secondary school or colleges or in further education. In our research, these courses

were not seen as a sufficient qualification for work with children and young people. Many who have taken them go on to degrees in pedagogy, after working in the field.

Would-be pedagogues usually prepare for pedagogic work in universities and colleges, where first degrees take around three or four years. Courses involve the following:

- As an aid to becoming reflective practitioners, students take a range of theoretical subjects in the behavioural and social sciences, including, importantly, group processes.
- Students are introduced to the skills needed for their work such as group work, working with conflict and challenging behaviour, and teamwork (which is much emphasised).
- Students take courses in creative and practical subjects, such as art, drama, woodwork, music or gardening — interests and skills that they will bring to their work as media through which they can relate to children. Arts and practical subjects are also valued for their general therapeutic effect: they can help to children to enjoy life and feel good about themselves.
- There are often optional study modules and practice placements for specific settings, such as work with disabled children or in residential care.
- In some countries pedagogic courses offer specialist options, and qualification, for work with adults (for example in mental health settings).

*'It is a job where every day you must ask questions about yourself and your practice right to the end of your professional life.'* (French pedagogue working in a residential home, *ibid*: 28.)

In Germany, the Netherlands and Flanders, some students take an initial five-year course in pedagogic theory, which includes placements in various agencies and services, resulting in the equivalent of an English Masters degree. This prepares students for further academic work, for research and development posts in government and voluntary organisations, for management jobs, and consultancy and advisory positions in a range of provision. But some of those qualified in this way choose to work directly with children.

Once in employment, people with a background in pedagogy/social pedagogy can have a variety of job titles relating to the work they undertake. Since 1992, Danish pedagogues training for work in, for example, nurseries, out- of-school services, adult services, and children's residential homes have a common training, with optional specialisms. In other countries there may be a more differentiated initial training and work roles. But whatever the setting, educational, health, youth services, social services or nurseries, pedagogues usually work alongside other professionals and share the general aims of the establishment, but they bring their own distinctive principles, understandings and skills to bear.

## What could adopting a pedagogic approach offer for England?

The possible benefits of a taking a pedagogic approach cross the realms of policy development, training and workforce issues. This is acknowledged in recent government statements, and the commitment to explore effectiveness of social pedagogy in residential care in England (DfES 2007):

Pedagogues are generalists. Their uniquely broad training with its theoretical, personal and practical content ideally fits them for outcome-focused work with children, including those with significant developmental need (*DfES 2005 Children's Workforce Consultation Paper*).

A new framework of skills and qualifications incorporating the principles of social pedagogy... would offer a competency based approach available to all foster carers and staff and managers in residential homes (*DfES 2006 Care Matters*).

Also, in its move to establish a framework for professional development, the government is exploring how social pedagogy could be applied and promises more detail in the Children's Workforce Action Plan (Children's Plan, 2008). A pilot project, by which social pedagogues are being employed in English children's residential care homes, is currently being implemented at TCRU.

1. *What has social pedagogy to offer social policy?*

- a. Pedagogy is an overarching concept that could bring greater coherence to children's services, as expressed in, e.g., *Every Child Matters* and the *Children's Plan*.
- b. Pedagogy could also provide a framework for discussing aims for children and young people in society as a whole. Social pedagogy also has potential for developing the family support network, for example in relation to Parent Support Advisers in school.
- c. Many recent service developments sit well in a pedagogic framework. Schools delivering extended services and Children's Centres are pedagogic provision in that they aim to support children's over-all development. Both are sites in which pedagogues could bring their own expertise and values to bear, alongside the work of other professionals, such as nurses and teacher.

2. *What has social pedagogy to offer training, education and the children's workforce?*

- a. Pedagogy degrees and careers are highly popular in the European countries studied, even though pedagogues are not especially well paid. Establishing pedagogy courses in this country could produce a well-equipped, flexible and stable workforce.
- b. The breadth of pedagogic training qualifies staff for direct work with children and young people across a wide range of childcare, educational and welfare services. Whether in established or developing services, the key pedagogic principles would hold true, with workers sharing common values, theoretic understandings, skills and practice principles.
- c. As well as their broader training, pedagogues can take specialist options such as those which would further many government objectives, for example, for a professional workforce, trained in the skills and understandings required for residential settings. Pedagogical approaches may also have something to offer in the training and support of foster parents.

- d. Positioning work in the children's sector as pedagogy can provide a framework for rationalising existing qualifications and allowing for career development within the sector.
- e. European Community legislation allows the freedom to work throughout EC member states. Adopting a pedagogic approach would allow for a greater harmonisation of professional training and practice with that of other European countries.

### 3. *What has pedagogy to offer children and parents*

The TCRU research found that pedagogy, as practiced in the countries studied, had the potential to serve several aspects of government policy towards children and parents.

- a. Pedagogy has the potential for an inclusive approach. The main focus of pedagogy is on children as children, but allowing for some children, at some times, to have additional needs. This normalising approach fits well with government's aims for looked-after children and for disabled children and other children with special needs, (see for example the amended Disability Discrimination Act, 1995).
- b. While child protection issues are treated with all due seriousness, pedagogic approaches tend to be child-focused, rather than procedure-focused. Attention to appropriate procedures is a necessary part of the work, but not its basis. The professionalism of the worker, transparency of practice, a commitment to team work and accountability to others in the team, are seen as the best guarantee of child safety.
- c. Pedagogues think in terms both of the individual child *and* of the group of children or young people. This allows for richer, more productive work with children, whether in play schemes, the nursery or a residential home.
- d. Because they are trained in creative activities, pedagogues are in a position to offer children activities that enhance children's self esteem and may be therapeutic, in the widest sense of that word.
- e. Above all, pedagogy aims to take a holistic view of children and respects them as fellow human beings, each with a unique point of view and a distinctive contribution to make to whatever task is in hand. This stance can support policy that requires the voice of the child to be heard and for children and young people to play their part in, e.g., devising care plans.
- f. Working with parents has an established place in government policy across the spectrum of a progressive universalist approach to family policy. Pedagogy is the predominant qualification for direct work with parents and families in many other European countries. Pedagogues are trained to consider parents as partners, with whom they can enter a dialogue about the development and well-being of individual children, as well as providing advice and counselling on parenting.

Social pedagogy provides a framework for discussing the place of children and young people in society, addressing basic questions:

What do we want for our children, including those who are currently at social disadvantage?

What is a good childhood?



How do we support child well-being, and well-becoming?  
What relationship would we wish to promote between children and children,  
and children and adults?

These are questions that relate to pedagogic aims and values, and should underlie the objectives of the different professionals who are involved with children. Addressing such questions should also underlie policy and practice throughout children's services, including schools, and should inform their administration.

## Problems regarding pedagogy

### *1. Is pedagogy in competition with social work and other professions?*

The greatest difference between social work and social pedagogy is the extent to which social pedagogues are especially trained for work in group settings, where they share the daily lives and activities of children and young people (or indeed adults). This is less true for social work in England. In other European countries, social work and social pedagogy do not appear to be in competition, they have different, complementary, spheres of work (Boddy et al 2008).

A TCRU survey across training settings in England revealed wide interest in European models of training, and some centres already had exchanges with pedagogic training establishments in Europe (Petrie et al 2003). There would also be the need to develop specialist training as optional or post-qualifying courses, in addition to general, or 'core' training. The development of such courses is underway. For example at the Institute of Education, University of London, a framework of social pedagogy qualification is being put in place. A foundation degree, Working with Children, received its first students in 2008, to be followed by a Masters degree in social pedagogy, from October, 2009.

### *2. Without publicly funded training opportunities of the duration and comprehensiveness of those to be found in Europe, a profession comparable to that of the pedagogue cannot be developed.*

Government policy is to increase the number of graduates, generally, and to make good staff shortages in childcare, early education and social care. These are settings that need the stimulation of new approaches. The European experience is that pedagogy degrees and careers are popular options.

There has been no academic field defined as social pedagogy in English universities. However, as mentioned above, such courses are currently in development. Additionally:

- Some existing English qualifications are based on pedagogic principles: for example the BA in Curative Education at the University of Aberdeen; degrees in Youth and Community Work such as those to be found at the University of Durham and the YMCA George Williams College in Canning Town (Canterbury Christchurch University).
- Some foundation degrees are building on pedagogic curricula.
- Camphill Schools, Steiner schools and Montessori schools build on a continental European pedagogic tradition.
- Danish pedagogy students on 6 month full-time placement in English children's services were highly praised by their English supervisors. Reportedly, they



accommodated well to existing modes of practice, they developed excellent relationships with children and staff, and they were creative. They were frequently allowed to undertake responsibilities beyond the normal remit of placement students. Some students were said to promote a questioning culture about practice and procedures, which was seen by staff as beneficial to institutional practice overall (Cameron, 2006).

- A UK agency, specialising in recruitment of German pedagogues, has placed over 200 qualified practitioners in local authorities and other agencies, on permanent contracts (Ladbrooke, 2007).
- Pedagogues from new member states of the EU are said to be increasingly employed in England.
- Subjects studied in European departments of pedagogy are available in universities in this country, and research is undertaken that elsewhere would be seen as contributing to pedagogic theory.

Also, existing courses are often influenced by social pedagogic ideas (for example, the Masters Degree in Residential Care at the University of Strathclyde). In addition, there are across the country first degrees in fields such as Early Childhood, Child Development, and Educational Studies that are theoretically relevant, although they do not have the practice placements, artistic or practical components, and the explicit base in pedagogic principles (see above) that are typical of pedagogy courses in Europe.

*3. The terms pedagogy can be mystifying for English language speakers and the Oxford English Dictionary allows for three ways of pronouncing it!*

This is true – although using a soft *g* as in psychology may have a more English ring! An existing alternative is the term ‘social education’ (but this may suggest lessons in citizenship). On the other hand, the relative strangeness of the term ‘pedagogy’ is also one of its advantages, inviting enquiry, encouraging new thinking and suggesting new opportunities.

## Pedagogy for children’s services in England: possible starting points

It is impossible to achieve, not to say undesirable to attempt, the transfer of whole systems of training, qualification and practice from one country to another – and while pedagogic systems are similar they are not uniform in the countries we studied. Nevertheless, the TCRU research points to ways in which pedagogy, as a model, fits policy concerns for children, and the development of training and services, in England. Currently, while these are areas that present many problems, there is also much evidence of a political will to effect change in how society serves its children and young people. The social pedagogic approach is well fitted to further English policy concerns.

## TCRU social pedagogy research

We are grateful to all those who were associated with the studies on which this paper mainly draws: the participants, research associates and funders. The studies include:

### Completed research

Department of Health, Department for Education and Skills/Department for Children, Schools and Families:

What is Social Pedagogy? The education of pedagogues and their part in residential care? (Denmark, Flanders, France, Germany, the Netherlands)

Pedagogy and Residential care: A comparison of policy and practice in England, Denmark and Germany

Pedagogy and foster care (Denmark, France, Germany and Sweden)

The feasibility of introducing pedagogy in England

Working at the 'edges' of care? European models of support for young people and families (England, France, Denmark and Germany)

Pedagogues in the Swedish extended school, as part of a study of inter-professional activities in multi-purpose children's services, in England and Sweden.

International Perspectives on Parenting Support: Non-English Language Sources. (Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands)

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation:

New Ways of educating: pedagogy and children's services.

European Commission

Care Work in Europe: Current Understandings and Future Directions (Denmark, Hungary, Spain, Sweden, UK)

The studies were carried out at the Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL. Founded in 1973 by Professor Jack Tizard, TCRU is a multidisciplinary research unit and a designated research unit of the Department of Health. It has around fifty staff conducting policy-relevant research within a changing world. Its main focus is on children and young people both within and outside their 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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