

An outline of my presentation on Feb. 5th to NICE and SCIE Programme Development Group Meeting

Social Pedagogy – an example of a European approach to working with looked after children. By Karen Prins, UCC Copenhagen DK.

Presentation: I am a lecturer in Pedagogy at the University College Copenhagen, educating social pedagogues to work in a wide range of public facilities, among them looked after children. The education of social pedagogues is a 3,5 year BA. I am also an International coordinator, and among other things I have, for the last 5 years, been coordinating a joint BA course on European Social Work and Care, together with the University of Portsmouth.

I will talk about the social pedagogical approach introducing the Danish way of working with looked after children with some European comparative perspectives. I will concentrate on the professional approach rather than the welfare state system and the framework around the professional work. I hope the social pedagogical approach can inspire the PDG but during my years working with European comparative perspectives I have been constantly reminded of the difficulties in transferring aims, strategies and methods from one country to another. On the other hand that doesn't mean that we cannot learn from each other. I am sure we can.

I would like to start out by introducing the social pedagogical approach. This means giving a brief overview over the philosophical background, the theory underlining the tradition and the methods applied in practice.

The social pedagogical approach has a holistic view of the child, meaning a perception of the child as unique, competent and sociable individual. Physical, emotional, social and cognitive wellbeing is interrelated and a holistic view implies that the caretakers must look for resources in all areas and draw attention to how eg. emotional problems has an impact on cognitive development etc.

The perception of the child comes partly from the tradition of developmental psychology and the cultural studies tradition. Above all the impact from the Swiss Philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau is very strong.

Working in Practice the methods are therefore very connected to developing relations, between caretakers and children/young people, children to children and children and their biological relations. The fundamental starting point in the social pedagogical approach is building relations, trying to make up for lost or broken relations and seeing that as key to further the child's development in general.

Next to relations, creative activities and the common third are common methods stemming from the idea that children develop self esteem, competences and potentially good relations through creative activities. Also the common third, where the caretaker and the child engage in something that is neither the child nor the adult but something they can share as equals – is seen as a very important method. For example cooking dinner together, having a good time doing something that is not about the child's problems or difficulties but about equal persons giving their engagement to something for the common benefit. This means that the caretaker must respect the child as a respectable person and refrain from having a set learning outcome for the activity.

Another strong value in the pedagogical approach is the family-like environment. Most institutions for looked after children try to make the institution look like a real home. That goes for the indoor environment as well as the everyday life. This means having candlelights, a cosy living room, reading bedtime stories, doing homework etc., etc. It also means giving the children chores as they would have had if they were living at home.

The treatment of the children is governed by the individual treatment plan that must be made for all looked after children. The plan is individual and so is the treatment approach in the institutions. Each child has different resources and difficulties and therefore different needs. Over the last 30 years the social pedagogical approach in Denmark has moved away from a group-model where all rules were the same for all the children to individual rules for individual children.

The Danish model leaves a very heavy responsibility on the professionals since they are the ones to secure quality development for the children. A recent European study showed that the people working with children in Denmark were the ones with the highest level of education and also the country with the highest percentage of trained staff members.

If there is time and interest I will touch briefly upon how we educate such professionals.

In terms of effectiveness and outcome measurement there are many difficulties in trying to point out which methods have a noticeable impact. I will give a short overview of the main results, but it is important to say that until recently only very few studies were made in Denmark. To my experience our two countries have a very different tradition on this matter, since we have very little outcome and effectiveness measurement.

Outline

- 1)Philosophy, theory, tradition and methods in social pedagogy
- 2)Examples of practice of working with looked after children
- 3)Main outcomes for looked after children
- 4)Education of social pedagogues