

Social Pedagogy in the UK

Since around 2006 there has been considerable interest in what continental approaches to working with children, especially social pedagogy, have to offer children's services in the UK.

Following government funded comparative research and government and other sources of funding for UK based pilot and feasibility studies, a national pilot programme investigating the impact of social pedagogy in children's residential care was launched in 2007. This pilot recruited social pedagogues who had been trained in Germany, and other European countries, to vacant positions in children's homes and supported their attempts to introduce social pedagogic practice to the existing staff. In England, the care workforce in children's homes are not obliged to have a particular qualification on entry to the work, although they are expected to commit to obtaining a vocational award, called a Level 3 Children & Young People's Workforce Diploma while at work. This is a lower level qualification than the Danish Social Educator /Pædagog bachelor degree. The pilot programme showed that there were many challenges for working with social pedagogy in English residential homes, but in some cases the social pedagogues were very successful in working with the staff to learn new ways of working and to grow in confidence as a result.

The recruitment agency for the Pilot programme was Jacaranda Recruitment (<http://www.jacaranda-recruitment.co.uk>), which during this period has recruited many social pedagogues to work in a variety of positions in social work and child welfare services in England. Jacaranda Recruitment has taken the lead in developing a website (<http://www.socialpedagogyuk.com>), which houses information about social pedagogic developments in the UK.

Employer led training and development courses in social pedagogy have been commissioned by a number of employers, both local authorities and independent agencies. For example, in 2008, Essex County Council contracted Thempra Social Enterprise, run by two social pedagogues and some UK trained associates (<http://social-pedagogy.co.uk/>), to work with their residential child care workforce over a three year period.

Interest in social pedagogy could also be seen in the very high demand for presentations, workshops and training days at practitioner and policy conferences over the period 2007 – 2011. There is also a social pedagogy development network which supports grassroots led learning about social pedagogy and meets twice a year, attracting around 80 – 100 professionals to each meeting.

Overall, I would say that while interest grew rapidly after our research results were published (Petrie et al., Working with Children in Care: European perspectives), in the last year since the UK general election and the reduction in public spending, local authorities are much more constrained about spending on training and development. About 12 or so employers have

engaged in a programme of training around social pedagogy, and the training organisations, including the Centre for Social Pedagogies at the Institute of Education University of London, Thempra and Jacaranda have learned much about how best to do this. For example, it is clearly important to see training as a development that takes place over time, and includes many participants beyond the immediate 'care' workforce, and not a one off. There is considerable interest in Scotland as well as England and some in Northern Ireland.

In England, people with social/pedagogic qualifications are not always recognised by the professional body responsible for registration of social workers/social care workers – it's done on case by case basis. The profession of social pedagogue is not recognised, but social pedagogic approaches to practice are usually valued by those who have training. There are some fledgling higher education courses, such as an MA at the Institute of Education, which ran in 2010, but is not recruiting in 2011. Peter Moss and I recently edited a book called *Social Pedagogy and Working with Children and Young People: where care and education meet*, which was designed around the MA sessions. This includes chapters from Danish authors.

Most recently, employers have approached me to say they would like the social pedagogy without the title or they want to use it as a framework to reorient practice as they like the values and coherence, but can't afford extensive training for staff.

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