



ThemPra
Social Pedagogy
Community Interest Company

THE ART OF BEING A SOCIAL PEDAGOGUE PRACTICE EXAMPLES OF CULTURAL CHANGE IN CHILDREN'S HOMES IN ESSEX

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Table of Content

| | | |
|-------|--|----|
| I. | The Narrative of the Essex Social Pedagogy Project..... | 3 |
| II. | Social pedagogy – an introduction..... | 5 |
| | Aims of Social Pedagogy – the Diamond Model | 6 |
| | Well-being and happiness: | 6 |
| | Holistic learning: | 6 |
| | Relationship:..... | 6 |
| | Empowerment:..... | 6 |
| | Positive Experiences:..... | 7 |
| III. | Effecting Cultural Change – A Social Pedagogical Strategy | 8 |
| | The Rationale for Developing a Social Pedagogical Strategy..... | 9 |
| | Key elements of the systemic change strategy..... | 11 |
| | Listening and Acting – Taking on Board the Notions and Whispers of the Service | 12 |
| IV. | The Art of Being a Social Pedagogue – Perspectives from the Homes | 15 |
| | 1. Haltung in practice..... | 16 |
| | 2. Using head, heart, and hands..... | 17 |
| | 3. Reflecting and dialogue in practice..... | 18 |
| | 4. Developing relationships..... | 19 |
| | 5. Creating a shared culture | 21 |
| | Life-space..... | 22 |
| | Group work..... | 23 |
| | Team empowerment | 25 |
| | 6. Creating learning opportunities..... | 26 |
| | 7. Enhancing children’s well-being and risk competence | 28 |
| | 8. Being rights-based and child-centred | 31 |
| | 9. Building bridges within the community | 33 |
| | 10. Promoting social pedagogy through dialogue..... | 34 |
| V. | Supporting Social Pedagogy Strategically – Service Management Perspectives..... | 36 |
| VI. | Making Sense of Complexity – Concluding Thoughts | 41 |
| VII. | Appendix I – Reflections on Being in Care..... | 44 |
| VIII. | Appendix II – Social Pedagogy from the Perspectives of Practitioners..... | 45 |
| | A Collection of Reflections..... | 45 |
| | The Child / Young Person | 46 |
| | The Pedagogue..... | 48 |
| | The Task..... | 50 |

I. THE NARRATIVE OF THE ESSEX SOCIAL PEDAGOGY PROJECT

When, in the summer of 2008, Essex County Council's decided to launch a 3-year pilot project to develop social pedagogy within its children's residential services the bigger picture of social pedagogy in the UK looked very sketchy. The year before, the National Centre for Excellent in Residential Child Care (NCERCC) and the Social Education Trust (SET) had explored the potential contribution that social pedagogy could make to England's residential sector. It concluded that 'participants welcomed the appreciative, holistic child-centred approach social pedagogy offers and felt that the possibility of creating real changes for the young people in residential child care' (Bengtsson et al., 2008¹: p.4). And at around the same time the Government had announced in its White Paper *Care Matters: Time for Change* that 'in order to explore ways to improve the quality of care on offer, we will fund a pilot programme to evaluate the effectiveness of social pedagogy in residential care.' (DfES, 2007: p.58²)

This, along with research by the Thomas Coram Research Unit suggesting that the care experiences for young people looked after by social pedagogues in Denmark or Germany were far more positive than those for their English counterparts, convinced Essex to embrace social pedagogy. The strategy which we jointly designed emphasised that social pedagogy was to be the framework for developing cultural change based on existing good practice: it would therefore actively build on, and value, what homes were doing already and support them in further developing their practice, and it would achieve this by engaging everyone within the system and encouraging them to take responsibility. How this happened and what this has achieved is described in this report.

In his analysis of the Government-funded social pedagogy pilot project's evaluation report (Berridge et al. 2011³), Smeeton (2011⁴) argues that the impact of social pedagogy can be best captured through narratives. As evidencing outcomes for the highly transient group of young people in care is notoriously difficult, 'the better measure of social pedagogy would be in trying to gauge any changes in confidence, competence and perceptions of self-efficacy of the residential workers adopting it' (Smeeton, 2011). Narratives convey meaning not just through the stories people tell but also in the way they tell them, the words and metaphors they choose, the examples they draw on to bring their stories to life. This is why, for the purpose of this report, we have decided to focus on telling the stories about the Essex social pedagogy project that seemed to us worth sharing. Naturally, there are many more stories that could be told, many bends in the road of the 3-year journey which we undertook with this project and many junctions that could have taken us down a different route. But this is not so much a step-by-step route description as it is an attempt to paint a picture of what happened on the journey and how it changed the landscape of residential child care in Essex.

¹ Bengtsson, E., Chamberlain, C., Crimmens, D., & Stanley, J. (2008). *Introducing Social Pedagogy Into Residential Child Care in England*. London: National Children's Bureau.

Available online: http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/520971/introducing_sp_into_rcc_in_england_feb08.pdf

² Department for Education and Skills. (2007) London: HMSO.

³ Berridge, D., Biehal, N., Lutman, E., Henry, L., & Palomares, M. (2011) *Raising the bar? Evaluation of the Social Pedagogy Pilot Programme in residential children's homes*. London: Department for Education.

Available online: <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/pdf/Pedagogy.pdf>

⁴ Smeeton, J. (2011). Research – Raising the Bar? Evaluation of the Social Pedagogy Pilot in Residential Children's Homes. *Community Care*, (01/12/11).

Available online: <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/01/12/2011/117844/research-findings-on-social-pedagogy.htm>

The changes in the landscape emerge most clearly if seen from a range of perspectives, and for this reason we have aimed to bring together a number of perspectives here – from practitioners working directly with the children and young people in care and collectively developing a social pedagogic culture where care and education meet, their homes managers embedding social pedagogy within their leadership style and the overall vision of the home, the project manager and the head of service concerned with the strategic fit of social pedagogy within local and national policy, and finally the facilitators concerned with creating learning opportunities, forums for reflection and probing how social pedagogy was being woven into the fabric of the organisation at these different levels. Only in combination can these different perspectives offer a well-rounded insight into the many processes that have shaped this project. And whilst they will inevitably be coloured, their subjective aspects are what made this project worthwhile – the personal involvement and emotional investment of many professionals throughout the organisation were necessary in order for change to be transformative and beneficial for the children and young people in the children’s homes.

Considering that, ‘although the literature on organisational development and change is voluminous, there has been remarkably little empirical research on change in the public sector’ (McNeill et al., 2010: p.9⁵), we are hoping that this document can offer some inspiration for other organisations by illustrating the potential of social pedagogy to have a transformative effect on care practice. If we have somewhat glossed over the manifold challenges that had to be overcome, the mistakes that were made and the avenues that remained unexplored, it is not to deny their existence. They were a necessary part of the learning and development processes, a vital sign that complex change is messy, imperfect and perhaps over-ambitious. Yet, whenever things got difficult, it was the vision of what we had collectively set out to achieve that helped people through the challenging parts of the process, the small achievements that were encouraging and made greater success possible. For this reason we wanted to ensure that our focus was on the positives and might prove a source of reflection and inspiration for readers to find ways of developing social pedagogy within their context, thus keeping the spirit of the Essex project alive.

^{5 5} McNeill, F., Burnett, R., & McCulloch, T. (2010). *Culture, Change and Community Justice*. Report No. 02/2010, The Scottish Centre for Crime & Justice Research.

II. SOCIAL PEDAGOGY – AN INTRODUCTION

Many European countries have developed a tradition of social pedagogy, an academic discipline that draws on core theories from various related disciplines, such as education, sociology, psychology and philosophy. In essence, social pedagogy is concerned with well-being, learning and growth. This is underpinned by humanistic values and principles which view people as active and resourceful agents, highlight the importance of including them into the wider community, and aim to tackle or prevent social problems and inequality.

The term ‘pedagogy’ originates from the Greek *país* (child) and *ágō* (to lead, to guide) and therefore has strong educational roots. ‘Social’ pedagogy has grown organically out of a longstanding tradition of educational philosophers, social thinkers and practitioners who were concerned with creating a more just society through educational means. Therefore, social pedagogy interacts between society and the individual. It aims to provide nurturing conditions and relationships that support human growth in two opposite directions, towards independence and towards interdependence. As this is a lifelong process, social pedagogues can work within a range of different settings, from the early years through adolescence to working with disadvantaged adult groups as well as older people. Consequently, what exactly social pedagogy means depends very much on the context or setting. Social pedagogues who are working with marginalised adults will draw on other specialisms and theories than social pedagogues working with very young children, although they will be connected through a shared ethos and principles underpinning their social pedagogical orientation.

Social pedagogy can be described as a ‘function of society’⁶, reflecting societal attitudes in many ways. It provides clues about how a given society thinks about children’s upbringing, the relationship between the individual and society, and how society supports its disadvantaged or marginalised members. Throughout history, different cultures have therefore constructed varying meanings of social pedagogy and developed certain traditions of social pedagogy. As a result, there is no agreed definition for social pedagogy – its meaning is also specific to the culture and the time.

Irrespective of the cultural contexts and the different settings in which social pedagogues can work, there are shared underpinning principles: What connects all social pedagogies is the way of thinking, the philosophy and *Haltung*⁷ (attitude, stance) with which different methods are used. What characterizes social pedagogy in practice depends not on *what* is done but on *how* it is done and with what purpose – how an action enhances well-being, creates learning opportunities, improves relationships, increases agency and makes for a meaningful positive experience. In this respect social pedagogy is both a science and an art form – it’s not just a skill to learn but needs to be brought to life through the social pedagogue’s *Haltung*.

In order to outline the most central principles guiding social pedagogy, we have suggested elsewhere the Diamond Model (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011⁸) as a visual concept. (And it is no coincidence that we developed the model in response to the many questions around social pedagogy asked by practitioners in Essex.)

⁶ Mollenhauer, K. (1964). *Einführung in die Sozialpädagogik*. Weinheim: Beltz Verlag.
Translation available online: <http://www.thempra.org.uk/downloads/mollenhauer.pdf>

⁷ More information on *Haltung* is provided in Eichsteller, G. (2010). The Notion of 'Haltung' in Social Pedagogy. *Children Webmag*.
Available online: http://www.thempra.org.uk/concepts_haltung.htm

⁸ Eichsteller, G. & Holthoff, S. (2011). Conceptual Foundations of Social Pedagogy: A Transnational Perspective from Germany. In C. Cameron & P. Moss (Eds.), *Social Pedagogy and Working with Children and Young People*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Aims of Social Pedagogy – the Diamond Model

The Diamond Model symbolizes one of the most fundamental underpinning principles of social pedagogy: there is a diamond within all of us. As human beings we are all precious and have a rich variety of knowledge, skills and abilities. Not all diamonds are polished and sparkly, but all have the potential to be. Similarly, every person has the potential to shine out – and social pedagogy is about supporting them in this. Therefore, social pedagogy has four core aims that are closely linked: well-being and happiness, holistic learning, relationship, and empowerment.

WELL-BEING AND HAPPINESS:

The overarching aim of all social pedagogic practice is to provide well-being and happiness, not on a short-term needs-focused basis, but sustainably, through a rights-based approach. While the terms ‘well-being’ and ‘happiness’ are sometimes seen as one and the same, in our understanding they are notionally different: happiness describes a present state whereas well-being describes a long-lasting sense of physical, mental, emotional and social well-being. In combination we can get a holistic view of a person’s well-being and happiness. Importantly, well-being and happiness are very individual and subjective: what causes happiness is highly individual. As a result social pedagogic practice is very context-specific and highly responsive to the individual rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.



HOLISTIC LEARNING:

‘Learning is the pleasant anticipation of one’s self’, according to the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk (cited in Kahl, 2001: p.110)⁹. In this sense, holistic learning mirrors the aim of well-being and happiness – it must be seen as contributing to, or enhancing, our well-being. Learning is more than what happens at school, it is a holistic process of realizing our own potential for learning and growth, which can take place in every situation that offers a learning opportunity. Holistic learning is a life-long process involving ‘head, heart, and hands’ (Pestalozzi). Social pedagogy is about creating learning opportunities, so that people get a sense of their own potential and how they have developed. As we are all unique, so is our potential for learning and our way of learning and development.

RELATIONSHIP:

Central to achieving these two aims is the pedagogic relationship. Through the supportive relationship with the social pedagogue a person can experience that someone cares for and about them, that they can trust somebody. This is about giving them the social skills to be able to build strong positive relationships with others. Therefore the pedagogic relationship must be a personal relationship between human beings – social pedagogues make use of their personality and have to be authentic in the relationship, which is not the same as sharing private matters. So the pedagogic relationship is professional and personal at the same time, thus requiring from the social pedagogue to be constantly reflective.

EMPOWERMENT:

Alongside the relationship, empowerment is crucial in order to ensure that an individual experiences a sense of control over their life, feels involved in decisions affecting them, and is able to make sense of their own universe. Empowerment also means that the individual is able to take on ownership and responsibility for their own

⁹ Kahl, R. (2001). Lernen ist Vorfreude auf sich selbst. *Pädagogik* 1, 110-113.

learning and their own well-being and happiness, as well as their relationship with the community. Social pedagogy is therefore about supporting people's empowerment, their independence as well as interdependence.

POSITIVE EXPERIENCES:

In order to realize these core aims, social pedagogy has to be about providing positive experiences. The power of experiencing something positive – something that makes someone happy, something they have achieved, a new skill they have learned, the caring support from someone else – has a double impact: it raises the individual's self-confidence and feeling of self-worth, so it reinforces their sense of well-being, of learning, of being able to form a strong relationship, or of feeling empowered; and by strengthening their positives the person also improves their weak sides so that negative notions about their self fade away.

Due to its inter-disciplinary roots, social pedagogy offers a conceptual framework that can help guide holistic practice. As an academic discipline, social pedagogy uses related research, theories and concepts from other sciences to ensure a holistic perspective. This means that in realizing those core aims there is a lot of inspiration to be taken from what research and concepts tell us about related areas. All four aims point at the fact that social pedagogy is about process. Well-being and happiness, holistic learning, relationship, empowerment – none of these are a product that, once achieved, can be forgotten. This is why it is important to perceive them as fundamental human rights that we all constantly need to work on if we want to ensure that nobody's rights are violated or neglected.

This perspective of social pedagogy means that it is dynamic, creative, and process-orientated rather than mechanical, procedural, and automated. It demands from social pedagogues to be a whole person, not just a pair of hands. It is therefore not surprising that many professionals in Essex and elsewhere have taken a keen interest in social pedagogy and have found it possible to relate both at a personal and professional level to its ethical orientation and ambition to provide children and young people with the best possible life experiences.

III. EFFECTING CULTURAL CHANGE – A SOCIAL PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGY

*'Social Pedagogy is not merely how individual practitioners should work, it is also how the team, the organisation and the wider system need to function as an interlinked system, based on similar principles, philosophies and visions.'*¹⁰

Organisational culture plays a key role in any strategic change process. 'Culture isn't just one aspect of the game – it is the game. In the end, an organisation is nothing more than the collective capacity of its people to create value', according to Gerstner (2002¹¹: p.182). Culture does not only prove crucial from a business perspective – Gerstner is usually praised for rescuing IBM in the 1990s – but seems even more important given the philosophical perspective within social pedagogy, its focus on developing human potential through relationships. For these reasons, we envisaged that a social pedagogy change process meant, first and foremost, embedding social pedagogy within the organisational culture.

McNeill and colleagues suggest that 'the concept of organizational culture refers to 'shared ways of seeing, thinking and doing' within an organisation (Thompson et al., 1996¹²: p.647): these reflect deeply entrenched traditions, habits, values, beliefs and norms' (McNeill et al., 2010¹³: p.9). The hypothesis at the heart of this project was that most residential child care workers have chosen this profession for a reason: they want to make a difference to the lives of children in care, and this should be somehow reflected within the organisation's non-formalised values, beliefs and norms. The challenge was therefore to draw these out and strengthen practitioners' ethical orientation towards their work, thus nurturing a positive culture of care within the different organisational settings - within the wider organisational culture there are a number of sub-cultures, with each home having its own distinct culture. Not only would this approach strengthen positive aspects within the organisational culture, it would also encourage those whose values and beliefs might not benefit children in their care to rethink whether this was the right job for them and be supported to find alternatives (e.g. Tesco).

Change strategies usually happen within a complex organisational context, in which they are embedded within a force field of a multitude of other strategies, restructuring efforts, government policies, and hidden agendas exercising influence and potentially distorting the change process. With increasing financial pressures within the social care sector in recent years, this force field has become more powerful and had a visible impact upon the social pedagogy change strategy for Essex's Residential Service, most notably through the Council's cabinet decision in late 2010 to begin to close down its seven mainstream children's homes. Although this decision was made as part of Essex County Council's wider agenda to become a commissioning local authority, the implications for the social pedagogy change strategy were enormous and altered the overall aim of the project for year three. Where the initial perspective was directed at creating self-sustainability for social pedagogy within the homes in the long term, we ended up supporting teams through their transitions and exploring with them how they could use social pedagogy within this phase of uncertainty as well as beyond, in the hope that their pioneering expertise

¹⁰ Eichsteller, G. (2009). Social Pedagogy in Britain - Further Developments. *International Social Work & Society News Magazine*.

Available online: <http://www.socmag.net/?p=456#comment-6177>

¹¹ Gerstner, L.V. (2002). *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance? Inside IBM's Historic Turnaround*. London: Harper Collins.

¹² Thompson, N., Stradling, S., Murphy, M., & O'Neill, P. (1996). Stress and organizational culture. *British Journal of Social Work*, 26(5), 647–665.

¹³ McNeill, F., Burnett, R., & McCulloch, T. (2010). *Culture, Change and Community Justice*. Report No. 02/2010, The Scottish Centre for Crime & Justice Research.

Available online: <http://www.sccjr.ac.uk/pubs/Culture-Change-and--Community-Justice/251>

would have unforeseen benefits wherever they might be working afterwards. In this sense the Essex social pedagogy project is still very much alive.


The Rationale for Developing a Social Pedagogical Strategy

When exploring the rationale on which the development of the implementation strategy for Essex's residential service was built, it becomes inevitable to look further into the past than the project start in late 2008. One of the key factors why Essex committed itself to developing social pedagogy was the outcome of a pilot project funded by the Social Education Trust (SET) and managed by the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care (NCERCC) in 2007. The aim of this project was to introduce social pedagogy into residential child care in England and to evaluate this process from a Danish and UK perspective. At the centre of the project were two different approaches of introducing social pedagogy over a period of 3 months to residential child care workers: The first approach was rooted directly in the practice of the residential staff in three different homes in the south of England, where one pedagogue worked alongside staff in each home for 12 days and focused on initiating reflective discussions around their practice in relation to the key principles of social pedagogy. The second approach of the pilot project was for two social pedagogues – the authors of this report – to develop and deliver a social pedagogy introductory course, which was attended by 16 practitioners from three different organisations in the north-west of England. The project evaluation showed that the principles and philosophy of social pedagogy resonated with participants and their practice and that it was seen as having much potential for developing residential child care practice. Participants also felt that social pedagogy provided them with a coherent language and a framework, and they felt affirmed and valued in their role as residential child care workers (Bengtsson et al., 2008¹⁴).

The NCERCC pilot project helped nurture more curiosity across the sector to explore how social pedagogy could enrich the development of working with young people in care. In order to support the interest and increase the understanding of social pedagogy within the sector, we (the authors) decided to set up a social enterprise – ThemPra Social Pedagogy – to contribute with our expertise from having developed the NCERCC pilot's social pedagogy course.

At the same time, Maureen Caton, the new head of service for Essex's children's residential services, recognised the potential of social pedagogy to improve the quality of life for children in residential care by offering an overarching conceptual framework for coherent, value-based practice in its 12 in-house children's homes. The dialogue of whether and how the social pedagogy framework could inspire professionals and lead to a comprehensive culture change within the service began at a residential service day, where we gave a presentation on social pedagogy to a large number of Essex's residential staff. As the responses from care workers were very positive, we then jointly created a tailor-made systemic change strategy for implementing social pedagogy.

The following aspects from the pilot project evaluation took most influence on how the social pedagogy strategy for Essex was constructed:

-  The necessity to provide a balance of learning settings outside and within the direct working environment so as to both explore the theoretical foundations and practical skills of social pedagogy as well as to reflect on their implications for practice and the culture of the organisation.

¹⁴ Bengtsson, E., Chamberlain, C., Crimmens, D., & Stanley, J. (2008). *Introducing Social Pedagogy Into Residential Child Care in England*. London: National Children's Bureau.

Available online: http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/520971/introducing_sp_into_rcc_in_england_feb08.pdf

- 📌 The reflections by participants that the implementation of social pedagogy is linked to the culture of how changes and new ways of working are perceived and supported by different levels within the organisation.

From these findings it became evident that it would require a systemic change process in order to nurture the understanding of social pedagogy, and ownership for developing it, across Essex's residential service and, with this, to ensure its sustainability beyond the project. The central aspect was to facilitate an intensive dialogue between all organisational levels, to jointly reflect on the culture underpinning the system and to investigate what social pedagogy could provide to enrich its development. This meant that a social pedagogic culture within the organisation would have to be supported by a structure that values residential practitioners as more equal, active agents in the system. Their initiative was seen as an essential contribution to the dialogue forming the foundation for further organisational development. Such a process of implementing social pedagogy as a joint exploratory journey also required social pedagogic, transformational leadership throughout the service.

This process, within which the residential practitioners were to 'digest' and adapt social pedagogy within their organisational as well as national context, was seen as vital for the development of a UK perspective of social pedagogy. By deciding to incorporate the key principles of social pedagogy directly into the specific practice setting rather than 'establishing a separate role of a "social pedagogue"' (Paget et.al., 2007: p.20¹⁵) Essex succeeded in building on existing good practice and valuing the personal and professional experiences of carers rather than signalling to its workforce that social pedagogy would replace it.

One of the most important considerations in developing social pedagogy in Essex was that the nature of social pedagogy cannot be explained in a practice handbook or 'cascaded down' without trivialising it and thus losing its essence. In this sense it was unlike most approaches practitioners had been trained in and did not fit neatly within existing mindsets of following procedures. At the same time, it was the philosophy, the ethical aspects of social pedagogy, its emphasis on Haltung that appealed to many practitioners. The development of a professional and personal social pedagogic Haltung, however, requires a substantial period of time in which practitioners are provided with opportunities to explore the theoretical foundations, to relate them to their unique practice setting and to reflect upon this theory-practice relationship both individually and within the context of the team, organisation and society. As a result, it was important to emphasise that the implementation of social pedagogy was not just about providing 'another training course' or a new 'model of working', but that it would enable and require from teams to develop their own unique vision and culture.

With the long-term aim to empower all residential carers in Essex to autonomously use the theory and methods underpinning social pedagogy practice, the implementation strategy was scheduled to run for a period of three years. The first year of the programme was dedicated to introducing the theoretical foundations to the practitioners and inviting them to explore how these could enrich their practice. In the second year, the focus was to be set on supporting the implementation within the context of each home as well as the wider system, whilst continuously reflecting upon the process. The final year would conclude the project by establishing social pedagogy as a self-sustainable way of working that does not need to rely on external support but is distinctly embedded in the culture of each children's home.

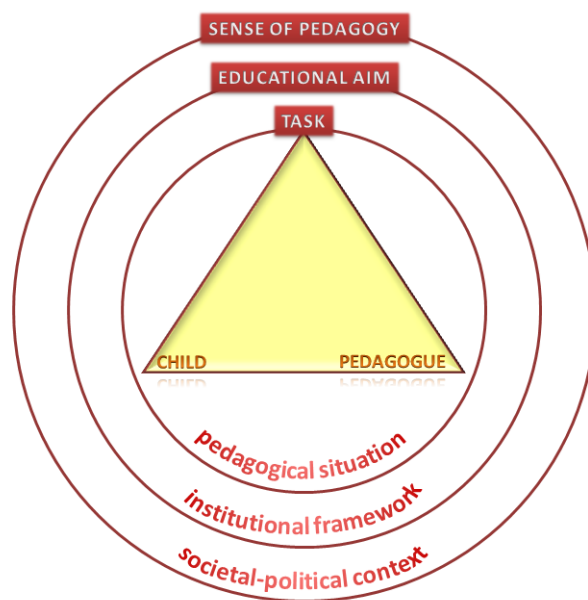
¹⁵ Paget, B., Eagle, G., & Citarella, V. (2007). *Social Pedagogy and the Young People's Workforce – a Report for the Department for Children, Schools, and Families*.

Available online: http://www.socialpedagogyuk.com/images/pdf/social_pedagogy_and_young_people%5B1%5D.pdf

Key elements of the systemic change strategy

The holistic nature of social pedagogy means that any implementation of social pedagogy into practice must endeavour to be holistic itself. This led us towards taking a systemic approach that aimed at improving practice (pedagogical situation), creating the right organisational conditions for practice to grow (institutional framework), and, where possible, influencing the wider culture in which practice takes place (societal-political context).

Given that the 12 children's homes employed around 350 practitioners and cared for children in a range of settings – crisis assessment, long-term residential, secure accommodation, short-break as well as long-term care for children with disabilities – the systemic change strategy had to reflect the diversity of settings and aim to create a critical mass of practitioners in each home who would actively develop the culture. To gain important insights into what changes the introduction of social pedagogy was bringing to the practice of staff and, most importantly, to the lives of the young people in the homes, one internal and an external researcher were commissioned. Using an action research framework, both researchers proved instrumental in re-thinking and re-shaping the project's strategy over the life course to ensure that feedback and critical perspectives from all involved were constructively addressed. Whilst the research findings were only published to a limited extent and unfortunately could not be adequately concluded due to contractual changes, they proved integral to establishing a robust, yet dynamic strategy framework. This consisted of the following project elements:



Social pedagogy courses: Through 6-day personal and professional development courses practitioners, including their managers, were provided with a thorough understanding of social pedagogy. The courses created experiential learning opportunities that enabled participants to jointly explore how their learning could be integrated into their current practice. The courses were divided into 3 two-day blocks, providing practitioners with time in between to make sense of their learning within their practice context and to complete research tasks with the children they cared for. The themes on each course were actively developed together with the participant group to ensure they were most relevant for the personal and professional development of a social pedagogic Haltung and practice within the given context. Through this approach, we could initiate reflective sessions to encourage and support the course participants to become accustomed with the use of reflection as a way to further the quality of their practice and their personal development. The strategy to nurture a reflective culture equally included expecting participants to keep a reflective diary. Furthermore, course participants could gain 30 credit points at level 5 (awarded through the University of Lincoln) by submitting two assignments based on their reflections of incorporating the theoretical principles of social pedagogy into their practice. Overall, we ran 11 courses, thus training more than 160 participants.

Social pedagogy agents courses: These two-day development courses were designed for some of the six-day course participants to become 'champions' for social pedagogy and take on a more active role in driving forward the implementation within their homes. The courses, some of which were run as overnight residential, helped them gain the skills and knowledge of how to encourage their teams to relate their social pedagogy learning to the everyday life in the homes. As these roles became increasingly more important, we ran 8 social pedagogy agents courses and thus developed around 80 social pedagogy agents.

-  **Team development sessions:** To support the growth of a social pedagogic culture within the homes, we visited each team on a regular basis throughout the three-year period. These sessions were designed to ensure a shared understanding of social pedagogy amongst all staff members and to encourage teams to reflect upon how this connected to the present culture in their homes and how they could enhance it. It was important to facilitate a platform that would give residential practitioners the opportunity to jointly construct their vision of social pedagogy from their specific perspective and to reflect together with them what they had done, and could do, to continue this process.
-  **Strategic development groups:** Two groups were set up from the outset in order to support the development of social pedagogy at a strategic level through quarterly meetings. A steering group was charged with overseeing and discussing the project developments. In this dialogue, feedback from the practitioners' network, homes managers' meetings, us as the external facilitators, the two researchers and an outside consultant were also taken into consideration when contemplating how to further develop the design of the implementation strategy. The inter-agency strategic group had the role to communicate the progress of the implementation process across other services in the council and for them to help shape the wider policy framework to ensure its coherence with social pedagogy. Through this, the group was also encouraged to consider how social pedagogy could contribute to an integrated workforce. For the inter-agency strategic group, representatives from other educational, health and social services joined the members of the steering group.
-  **Practitioners' network:** This provided the residential workforce with a forum for them to share ideas, inspire each other and reflect with their peers from other homes on the processes of the implementation across the homes and how this had changed their practice. Furthermore, participants were invited to voice those reflections that were relevant for them regarding the further progress of the social pedagogy implementation strategy. Facilitated by the internal researcher, the themes and structure of these meetings were led by the interests of its participants who increasingly came to take ownership for the network. The internal researcher was then tasked with facilitating the dialogue between the strategy level (represented by the steering group and interagency strategic group) and the practitioners, passing on those reflections that had been identified as relevant by the network participants and feeding back the responses from the strategic groups. To make their discussions and reflections of their experiences of working within a social pedagogy framework available to a wider audience, the practitioners' network set up a newsletter, which was published quarterly and put together by the internal researcher.
-  **Leadership support sessions:** To support the homes managers in leading the change processes, particular sessions were put in place. These provided a learning platform for the leaders to reflect on their role in developing social pedagogy within their cultures and what this meant for their leadership styles.
-  **Awareness-raising sessions:** By facilitating awareness-raising workshops across children's services and as part of the induction programme for new workers we aimed to ensure an emerging understanding of social pedagogy and the change strategy amongst other professionals whose work had an impact on the lives of looked-after children. It was seen as important to improve relationships with other agencies, in the hope that social pedagogy could provide a shared language in the dialogue with other professionals.

Listening and Acting – Taking on Board the Notions and Whispers of the Service

Whilst the above strategy seemed to provide a suitable framework throughout the project, the actual process of the strategic implementation had to be dynamic and take into account unpredictable factors that would impact upon the change processes. In a social pedagogic fashion, it had to be responsive, reflective and congruent with

the overall vision rather than rigidly following a preset schedule. The feedback loops created both formally – for instance, through the research, practitioners’ network, meetings – and informally – for example, through our experiences and other communications – ensured that a multitude of perspectives could be taken into account in actively developing the implementation process at a strategic level.

Two examples highlight this reflexive approach. One of the first things to emerge was that the percentage of participants on the six-day course seemed to play a major role in how social pedagogy was taken forward in the homes. In the homes where many practitioners had been trained, these seemed to provide each other with peer support, which enabled them to engage other team members more easily in the process and gave them more strength in incorporating their learning. As a consequence of this observation, the project strategy was refocused and a higher emphasis placed on building up a critical mass of course participants to secure the continuous development of social pedagogy in practice.

Another aspect that took influence on the overall programme was the recognition that the social pedagogy agents proved paramount to the development of social pedagogy within homes’ cultures. For example, social pedagogy agents organised monthly social pedagogy team sessions, or a comprehensive activity programme for children and staff to develop the Common Third. With the aim to support the social pedagogy agents in their ambitions and to give them a platform to jointly reflect on their roles and activities, the steering group decided to offer them biannual dedicated support days. We also aimed to create opportunities for them to be more involved in activities that would deepen their understanding of social pedagogy, such as participating in media interviews, presenting at conferences, developing policies, writing articles, or facilitating introductory days together with ThemPra.

Overall, the most significant success factor for the strategy was that it was carried through professionals’ determination to make a positive difference for the children in their care. It unleashed their passion and saw them as the change, thus giving them ownership for social pedagogy in their context and opportunities to have influence beyond their own setting.

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THE
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Social Pedagogy

Practitioners' Newsletter

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

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Welcome To Your Newsletter!

Congratulations to all of you who were able to contribute to the first edition of the Social Pedagogy Newsletter! Let's get one thing straight - this is your newsletter, written by residential practitioners, for residential practitioners. What goes in it is entirely up to you. I'm editing it and putting it together, but the content is entirely what you make it.

'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has'

Margaret Mead, US Anthropologist

The aim of the newsletter is to make it easy for residential workers to share ideas and experiences about putting social pedagogy into practice. Everybody is curious to know about what's been going on in other homes - this is your chance to swap stories about how social pedagogic practice is developing for you and to find out what other

Leverton House

At Leverton House we currently have two ongoing pedagogical projects which are run and maintained in conjunction with on-site education and have acted as a 'Common Third'. This has been instrumental in building relationships between staff and young people. These two projects are the allotment, which was dug out by staff and young people and is still being maintained and has provided fruit and vegetables for the unit.



Social Pedagogy Agents: Braziers Park

people are up to. The newsletter is also a way of putting people in touch with each other. If you read something interesting, phone the person who wrote it and ask for more!

This is a space for your successes, ideas, suggestions, questions, frustrations and hesitations. If you'd like to contribute or have suggestions, please get in touch with me on: 07775 226841 or at Nicola.Boyce@essex.gov.uk



We also have 'Lets Get Cooking' which is the young people cooking with staff as part of the on-site educational program.

Allan Thompson (pictured above)

IV. THE ART OF BEING A SOCIAL PEDAGOGUE – PERSPECTIVES FROM THE HOMES

Social pedagogy, it could be argued, is all about *being* – about being with others and forming relationships, being in the present and focussing on initiating learning processes, being authentic and genuine using one’s own personality, and about being there in a supportive, empowering manner. As such, social pedagogy is an art form: rather than being a skill that can be acquired, social pedagogy is expressed through the professional’s *Haltung* (our attitude or mindset). In other words, social pedagogy is not so much about what is done, but more about how something is done. This perspective of social pedagogy means that it is dynamic, creative, and process-orientated rather than mechanical, procedural, and automated. It demands from social pedagogues to be a whole person, not just a pair of hands.

Implementing social pedagogy into residential practice in Essex children’s homes therefore had to convey to the professionals within the teams the art of being a social pedagogue, to inspire and nurture the social pedagogue within them. And it had to address wider systemic aspects to ensure that practitioners are expected as well as feel empowered to be social pedagogues. For this reason the project consisted of direct work with practitioners and their teams in training seminars and on team development days as well as more strategic aspects, most notably developing social pedagogy change agents, setting up a cross-service strategic development group and a practitioners’ network.



The art of being a social pedagogue can be illustrated by many practice examples we have come across as part of our engagement with Essex children’s homes, and we hope that this narrative will provide greater insights into what it means to be social pedagogical, so that readers can explore and re-think how their practice connects to social pedagogy. To visualise how the many aspects fit together and that they depend on, and reinforce, each other, we have developed the model of the Social Pedagogy Tree (, Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2009¹⁶) see image). This illustrates that teams need to ‘grow’ social pedagogy over time within their own environment, which requires careful and continuous nurturing. The development processes outlined below aim to describe some of the

‘seedlings’ that emerged in the children’s homes and demonstrate their progress in different areas. As the

¹⁶ Eichsteller, G. & Holthoff, S. (2009). *The Social Pedagogy Tree*. Available at http://www.thempra.org.uk/concepts_tree.htm

environmental conditions varied between the homes, each setting developed their own social pedagogy culture at their own pace, which meant that the processes described below cannot be generalised across all homes but are rather intended to paint a picture of what is possible when developing social pedagogy in practice.

1. *Haltung* in practice

As mentioned above, fundamental to social pedagogic practice is the social pedagogue's *Haltung*, which roughly translates as ethos, mindset, or attitude. In German, *Haltung* describes how a social pedagogue brings her own values and beliefs into professional practice. Expressed in her interactions and how she encounters others, her *Haltung* therefore tells us something about her concept of children.

In this sense, *Haltung* connects the professional to her most fundamental values and ethos. It requires from the social pedagogue that she is constantly mindful of how these inner beliefs find a way of expressing themselves in the outer world, for instance in her relationships with children and the degree to which she is authentic and congruent, but also in her interaction with adults, be they colleagues, other professionals, or parents.

Many of the participants on our social pedagogy courses and team development sessions therefore described social pedagogy as being about who they were, that it felt like a skin rather than a jacket. This is important, because it suggests that social pedagogy lies within them and cannot be taken away as a jacket might. That makes developments and change processes more sustainable and substantial.

This is the central reason why social pedagogy resonated so well with the teams and why they developed their practice in many ways. Social pedagogy reaffirmed professionals in their practice, allowed them to personally and professionally connect to social pedagogy with their own head, heart and hands, and could provide them with a language and understanding of relationships that enabled them to focus more on dialogue and interaction with the children. As a result, teams found a new sense of confidence, which became apparent in their day-to-day care practice and in the way they talked about their work.

All teams highlighted that being genuine and authentic was very important to them, not only because it felt better to them, but more importantly because it allowed the children to see staff as real people with natural personalities, not just paid carers. This was beneficial and role-modelled what the teams wanted to see in the children: that they have their own identity and feel comfortable to explore and find out who they are.

One way in which some teams aimed to convey their positive concepts of children was by introducing a 'golden book'. Unlike most other paper work, which was designed to record incidents, the golden book was conceived to have a place in which to write down the valuable experiences. Whether child or adult, anyone could write into the golden book and thus record the positive events of their day, share their feelings or gratitude for having been supported or part of an activity. In this sense the golden book was an excellent tool to capture some of the many great things that happen in children's homes every single day and to demonstrate that teams valued these highly. By providing a complementary history to the official records, teams created a collection of memories that they and the children could return to and reminisce about, that encouraged children to reflect and hold on to the positive memories, and reminded them of good times when they might be feeling less positive.

2. Using head, heart, and hands

*'Social pedagogy makes me think outside the structure and frees me up to have my own ideas'
(Residential child care worker)*

The holistic nature of social pedagogy is often encapsulated in the expression 'head, heart, and hands', which was coined by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, a Swiss educationalist in the late 18th, early 19th century. With this he referred not only to the way in which education should enable children to learn – to inspire their minds, to provide spiritual and moral guidance, and to have a physically engaging, practical dimension too. Pestalozzi also expected pedagogues to use their 'head, heart, and hands', to be mentally, emotionally and physically involved in the education process and thus be more than just a teacher.

Whilst this might sound very simple and obvious, significant parts of the legislative and policy framework can often make practitioners feel as if they have to follow a particular script from which they must not deviate. Frequently such notions are also perpetuated in myths that were born in a particular time but outlived a temporary policy or decision, taking on a life of their own. In Essex, much time was spent demystifying through clearer communication and reinforcing the message that practitioners could make their own decisions. The introduction of social pedagogy made teams realise their role as playwrights and their opportunity to lead rather than blindly follow, thus becoming more emotionally involved and thinking more about how the children are feeling: 'Now I'm a lot more aware of my own feelings, of myself and my perceptions'. Through a greater understanding of their own and others' feelings and a sense of being expected to use their head, hearts and hands, practitioners could make better use of this in the relationships with the children.

As one participant wrote in her student assignment, 'for example we had a meeting at a child's school regarding his education plan and what we were going to do to help him access education at his pace. Taking the pedagogue way of thinking, I took the child along to the meeting so that he could hear what could be done to help him and so that he could hear it first-hand. At the meeting, one of the professionals that attended was not happy that the child was at the meeting as she felt she could not talk as freely as she would like. Whilst I understood that it was hard for her to convey what she thought without offending the child, I felt that it also stopped her from thinking of the child as just a problem and had to make her think of him as a person as she could see him. I found that the child got a great deal out of the meeting as, when we both discussed it afterwards to make sure he understood what had been said, he seemed very happy and instead altered the plan to suit him better. The original plan involved a few more steps in the arrangement to get the child into school, but the child decided to skip some of these steps and move straight to being at the school. I could see that the child felt empowered by this decision as he knew that no one was making him do this and that it was solely his decision; by being at the meeting he could also see how many people were prepared to help him and offer him support to achieve this goal. On reflection, I was glad that I had taken the child to the meeting as it had given him the empowerment he needed to make the first steps in re-attending school.'¹⁷

¹⁷ Published in 'Social Pedagogy from the Perspective of Practitioners' – see appendix II

3. Reflecting and dialogue in practice

'Critical reflection on practice is a requirement of the relationship between theory and practice.

*Otherwise theory becomes simply 'blah, blah, blah' and practice, pure activism.'*¹⁸

The emphasis of social pedagogy on *Haltung* and 'ethics as first practice' (Moss, 2006¹⁹; Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011²⁰), which requires from social pedagogues to use their personality and their own ethical orientation towards the world as part of being a professional, means that reflection and reflective dialogue within the team are paramount. Reflection allows social pedagogues to relate their theoretical understanding to practice situations as well as draw on their self-experience in ways which can benefit the children in their care. With its coherent conceptual framework, social pedagogy can support and guide reflection upon practice, as teams have found.

This value of reflection was discovered by most teams, both for staff individually but also collectively. Reflection was seen as offering an essential wealth of learning opportunities for the team, and the reflective dialogue with colleagues had a very positive impact on the further development of practice, with in-depth reflective processes enabling teams to identify areas of development. Teams found that analysing different situations and people's perspectives on them equipped professionals with a wider range of ways in which to respond, made them more proactive in addressing issues before they might escalate and helped them realise how their own behaviour and communication might impact upon a situation.

In most cases, teams developed reflection structures which recognised that reflection is not just about talking about bad practice, but that it can be very insightful to unpick an example of very good practice in order to understand what made it so successful and in what other situations this can be applied. Thus achievements are being more appreciated and celebrated, not just taken for granted. This understanding made reflection much less intimidating to practitioners and put the emphasis on identifying the learning potential both within good and not-so-good situations. Many teams commented that there was now more dialogue and communication within their team, that reflection was now a constant process enabling them to be more innovative, to try out new ideas and fine-tune them through observation and reflection.

As part of this process, many teams were developing a clear ethos allowing colleagues to challenge each other in a valuing, constructive way concerning their practice, role and the structure of their home. They found it possible to work through the different levels of understanding of social pedagogy as a team, to overcome differences in perceptions, and to see this as potentially beneficial as it can widen one's own perspective of a situation. There was more support in the team for each other and an openness to question things in an appreciative way. Some members of staff were even confident enough to have an argument or discussion in front of the children, feeling confident to role-model how to constructively resolve differences

One team has reflective group meetings each morning, while the children are at school. These have provided a forum to bring issues and develop practice. They are not just about creating a forum for social pedagogy but are also about being pedagogic with each other. This has helped develop more trust in colleagues and has led to more openness and understanding others' actions and intentions. One of the results is also that the team is less anxious about getting things wrong but feel they can try out new ideas and make mistakes as part of the process. This has relaxed them and improved the atmosphere.

PRACTICE
EXAMPLE

¹⁸ Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin Books. [original published in 1968]

¹⁹ Moss, P. (2006). Structures, Understandings and Discourses: possibilities for re-envisioning the early childhood worker. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 7(1), 30–41.

²⁰ Eichsteller, G. & Holthoff, S. (2011). Social Pedagogy as an Ethical Orientation towards Working with People - Historical Perspectives. *Children Australia*, 36(4), 176–186.

in opinions. This allowed practitioners to deal with differences of opinion in a safe, open and honest way, addressing issues at the time and directly between each other.

Many professionals also stated that they had become more self-reflective as individuals as well. They questioned what they could do and what their responsibility was, and they reflected on their own impact upon a situation. This allowed them to take more responsibility for their own decisions and helped them feel encouraged to use their own experiences – their own head and heart – to make good decisions. Even if something went wrong they felt they could reflect on it and learn. This reduced the blame culture and led to a relaxed atmosphere wherein mistakes were more seen as part of the learning process.

How teams incorporated reflection into their culture varied from home to home. Some teams made time for reflection in designated reflective sessions; others built it more into team meetings. Some teams also changed their supervision structure towards being more reflective, with a focus on relationships and support, positive feedback and progression in personal and professional development. A few teams also built a specific part into the handovers from one shift to the next. In these cases, part of the handover consisted of a structured reflection on the previous shift or a debriefing. This made the actual handover of key information more balanced and focussed on planning the following shift more constructively, which positively impacted on how professionals approached the next shift.

Several teams commented that as a result there was more shared ownership and positivity, a clear willingness to invest in new ideas: ‘The whole team is problem-solving now’, according to one group that said this had previously been seen as the seniors’ responsibility.

4. Developing relationships

“Every kid needs at least one adult who is crazy about him”²¹

Relationships are at the heart of social pedagogical practice. The Danish concept of the 3Ps illustrates that social pedagogues bring together the *professional* self, the *personal* self, and the *private* self. The *professional* is about being constantly reflective and observing, thus being able to relate theories to practice and find possible explanations and responses, for instance for someone’s behaviour. The *personal* emphasises using one’s own personality and creative skills, being authentic, and building strong, positive and personal relationships. There is, however, a difference to what is the private self – this consists of things that are only shared with close friends or family, but should not be part of practice as they do not have any benefit to children and young people.

Across the children’s homes, social pedagogy impacted very positively on relationships. Staff teams recognised the importance of building closer, stronger and more equal relationships with the children and within the team as the basis of their practice. In this process they found a more reflective approach as outlined above very helpful, as it provided guidance to help them keep a balance between the professional and the personal in ways that supported children’s sense of feeling cared about and their ability to build positive relationships with other people.

²¹ Uri Bronfenbrenner, Russian-American psychologist

Through the introduction of social pedagogy and ensuing changes in policies, practitioners felt that they were allowed to be more human, to give something of themselves, with the 3Ps providing a framework for doing this safely and appropriately. Staff noted that bringing more of their self into work meant that they could have a more human side, thus showing children they were there because they cared, not just because they were being paid. It appeared that this was clearly noticed and generally emphasised by children in care as hugely beneficial as it allowed them to develop their own identity, to feel loved for who they are and by extension to care about others.

Such relationships did not just happen by accident but required a constant effort. Teams put a lot of emphasis on getting to know the children and taking time to really understand their thoughts, feelings and experiences. This provided them with a better insight into the children's inner and outer world, an opportunity to empathise and 'be more in touch with them'. One care worker, for example, told us that a girl at this home for children with disabilities liked to scream at her mirror image. The only way to interact with her then was to adopt her form of

communication, so the care worker stood next to the girl and joined in, which seemed to create an instant connection between them, judging by the girl's response. In that situation it was also very important to the care worker to emphasise that screaming along was about meeting the girl in her life world, not about making fun of her.

In all homes there was a strong emphasis on using the Common Third, a Danish concept highlighting the potential of engaging together in an activity which connects both the adult and the child, helps them develop their relationship on a more equal and genuine level and lets them learn together. Teams recognised that sharing an activity as a Common Third helped create a positive and creative space wherein relationships can thrive and care workers can enjoy spending time being with the children. In these situations both are meeting as equal human beings connected by a shared interest in something, be it playing golf, baking a cake, chatting while watching a movie, taking the dog for a walk, sharing a passion for motorcycles, or riding a bike. The actual activity matters less than the opportunity which it provides for growing together and learning from each other, sometimes even with the child teaching the adult.

The power of the Common Third made teams realise that it is one of their key roles to create an atmosphere in the children's home wherein relationship-building can take place, with virtually any situation containing that potential. The gradual process of developing relationships led to many positive experiences, which encouraged practitioners to bring in more of their personal experiences and stories. They noticed that they were talking with the children more openly and were not afraid to share something that was personal and might really make a child think. They commented that they did not just share more about what they liked but also who they were, thus demonstrating a deeper understanding of the personal aspect of the 3Ps. Importantly, this went along with structural changes to what could be shared in order to get more of a team consensus. Whilst not every care worker wanted to share personal things – and the decision what to share should ultimately rest with each individual – team conversations about the kinds of things they considered worth sharing often helped overcome hesitancy or uncertainty about where to draw the lines between the professional, personal and private self.

A young boy had just come into the children's home, away from his family for the first time. He felt very homesick and found it especially difficult to settle at bedtime. One care worker therefore decided to tell him about her own experience of going to boarding school as a girl, how she had felt and what had helped her gradually overcome her homesickness. Through the conversation the boy and the care worker developed a connection, and her personal life-story helped him realise that he wasn't the only child in the world having these feelings and that he was cared for by people who cared about him and wanted him to feel at home here.

**PRACTICE
EXAMPLE**

The emphasis on building relationships generally had a very positive effect on the culture within the homes. Teams emphasised that there was more emotional warmth but also more physical contact, with a culture of side-hugs having been replaced by a ‘culture of cuddles’. It was no longer frowned upon to give a child a cuddle when the situation was right. The children appeared to feel happier and reassured as a result, as this made relationships real and genuine rather than robotic.

Better and more genuine relationships did not just improve the atmosphere in the homes and the quality of care, but were also reflected in the care plans, which in some homes began to convey the in-depth knowledge staff had of the children. As all staff could contribute to care plans whenever they discovered a new side to a child, e.g. what might upset or scare them, the care plans became a living document rather than a file gathering dust.

Several teams emphasised that increased respect between children and staff and more meaningful relationships had also led to fewer incidents: ‘When you’re having a difficult time [with a child], it’s the relationship that holds it’, as one care worker stated. This explains why many homes achieved a notable reduction in physical restraints, violent episodes, damage to the property, arrests, placement breakdowns, assaults and sanctions. One team stated that they could not remember when they had last had a strategy meeting due to a young person going missing, which had previously been more common: ‘Now they always come back home’.

One assistant homes manager summarised that: ‘Social pedagogy has enabled me to speak confidently about the relationships I have with the children and how it is important to be authentic within these. Children are seen as children and not defined by their past experiences. Our relationships with the children are personal and each participant gives something of themselves to enable the attachment to grow. It is only by residential workers showing the children that they are worthy, loveable and valued human beings, that they can then go on to develop and grow into adults that have a chance at maintaining loving healthy relationships’.

A care worker in one children’s home runs a music studio and enabled the young people to create and record their own lyrics and rhymes. They quickly took to this and found it an enjoyable form of expressing their thoughts and feelings. Gradually, they began to rhyme not just during sessions with the care worker but whenever they felt like it and wanted to get something off their chests.

**PRACTICE
EXAMPLE**

5. Creating a shared culture

‘The home seems to be full of laughter and fun’ (Home’s manager)

A significant measure of developing social pedagogy within each children’s home was the extent to which the team had embraced the opportunities to create a shared culture. With increasing confidence teams began to actively reflect on their values and vision in order to arrive at a common understanding of what culture they wanted to set within the home, what norms they valued as part of providing children with a safe and stimulating family environment, and how they could translate this into the every-day life at the home. In this process several notions proved fundamental and are explored below in more detail: life-space, group work, and team empowerment.

LIFE-SPACE

*'The life-space is a mini society in its own right. No matter how well it is integrated with the society in which it is located, it has a cultural life of its own.'*²²

The idea of working in the life-space of the children resonated with teams and helped them recognise the importance of making the residential setting a home for all, with everybody having a sense of ownership and belonging. Where traditionally the terminology in residential care is full of terms reminiscent of manufacturing - such as the 'unit', 'shop floor', or 'shifts' - the themes within life-space create more of an image of nurturing, with attention paid to caring for and about others, having rhythms and rituals, and creating a family-like atmosphere. Teams recognised the importance in developing their homes into a life-space, both by making changes in the physical environment and by supporting children in developing an emotional connection to their home and the people within it. This process of making the place their home led to increasing involvement of the children in more meaningful ways, for instance not just letting them choose what's for dinner but encouraging them to participate in cooking or preparing the meals, or going beyond asking them to choose the decor by then painting the walls together.

On our reflective sessions, several teams highlighted that there was more a notion of having a shared living space, which felt more equal to both adults and young people (less like them vs. us), where they were involved much more and got a sense of the children's home as their home. This was evidenced by a reduction in vandalism, suggesting that the young people felt more ownership and took more care of their environment. Staff said that the young people appreciated what they were doing and felt listened to, which had led to better quality relationships. As one young person stated: 'You're more normal in how you are with young people'. As a result, new children arriving at the home were moving into a culture of different expectations, which felt very different to how it had used to be, more settled (although the dynamic of the group might still go up or down, depending on the children and their needs). Interestingly, young people who used to live at the homes but were still visiting from time to time had noticed and commented on how different many things were now.

In many homes the life-space had become more homely and more shared. There were much more pictures up and they did not get ripped down as often as before, when the children had not felt as much that this was their home. Quite often care workers would mention that the photos, which had been taken at trips or particular activities, did not get destroyed when a child was in emotional turmoil, that the plants which had been bought and potted with the children were spared when tempers flared, and that the walls children had helped paint did not end up being graffitied. These were just some physical signs of children's sense of ownership of their life-space. It also became more common for homes to have joint dinners and to make the best of these opportunities to develop more equal relationships. For instance, several homes had previously served dinner by asking the children to line up in the kitchen to get their meals before sitting on one of the tables in the dining room. Very quickly the teams decided to connect the tables so as to have one big table and to put the pots and platters of food on the table as would be normal in most families. They wanted mealtimes to become a valuable group living experience, with everybody coming together and spending time with each other, and they quickly realised that this could only work if the adults behaved in similar ways as was expected from the children. Thus it became a cultural norm that everyone would sit down together until all had finished their meal and that neither children nor adults would get up in between to answer the phone. This worked very well, and the teams found that there were also more discussions with the children about all kinds of things, as would be normal during a family dinner. One team reported that their young people were very curious about the political climate and cost-cutting and

²² Keenan, C. (2002) Working Within the Life-Space. In J. Lishman (ed.), *Handbook of Theory for Practice Teachers in Social Work*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

were thinking a lot about how the home could save money too, so they were more supportive of doing things that did not come with a large price tag.

Very often children's homes were equipped with playrooms and a generous garden area, which were gradually put to much better and more frequent use. Organic vegetable gardens sprang up across most homes in a short space of time; summer BBQs became more common, and sometimes the children from the whole neighbourhood would play together in the garden; playrooms in the homes for younger children became less regulated and no longer just a place for an individual child to play with their key worker. Overall, it became evident that teams were putting a lot of thinking and actions into engaging the children in purposeful activities, having fun together and using the life-space as a nurturing environment.

Children's involvement in the life-space also increased through children chairing and minuting community meetings, and learning to resolve their own conflicts rather than having to depend on an adult to do this on their behalf. One staff commented that 'it's not about control anymore, it's about sharing that space equally', 'it feels more that we're living in this family space together and we've all got equal importance'. This was also echoed in a student essay by one participant, who wrote: 'If you enable the children to attempt to resolve their own conflict, a solution is often found. It might not always end in the way that you would have expected or hoped. However, the process is important as it gives them the beginnings of developing the tools that will take them into adulthood. [...] By me handing over the authority to the group to participate in [the resolution], the process was an empowering experience for all the children.'

The homes for children with disabilities put particular thought into further developing the use of the indoor and outdoor environment so as to create a child-friendly life-space. One team was finally able to buy a trampoline after previous red tape. Another team highlighted that they were recognising much more the importance of using activities for building and strengthening relationships, and there seemed to be much more of an enjoyment of sharing the life-space and a sense of one home. The biggest changes had happened in the atmosphere and ethos of the home, for example with the whole team now being involved in problem-solving where this used to be the responsibility of the shift leader, and generally an increased level of understanding and awareness of what happened in the different flats of the house and when they might need support. According to one other team, social pedagogy had helped them make the home a safer place and a 'home away from home', where young people felt more ownership and had friends to interact with.

GROUP WORK

*'There is much to be gained by encouraging groups of young people to work together to share experiences, to explore feelings, to support each other, to use information and to design strategies to enable them to manage their lives. Groupwork provides a forum for young people to develop and learn more about themselves by sharing experiences with others who have similar issues and concerns, thereby enabling them to make informed and positive choices in their lives.'*²³

Social pedagogy's emphasis on engaging in activities and experiences together, as equals, reinforces the notion of life-space by bringing the individual children and adults together and actively developing a family culture in which every person plays a valuable role. With increased confidence amongst staff to work more with the entire group rather than on a one-to-one basis, group work became a method more frequently used in the homes. Teams aimed to facilitate opportunities for the young people to develop more positive relationships with each other by undertaking activities together with everyone, for example going to the local park to play games, having karaoke

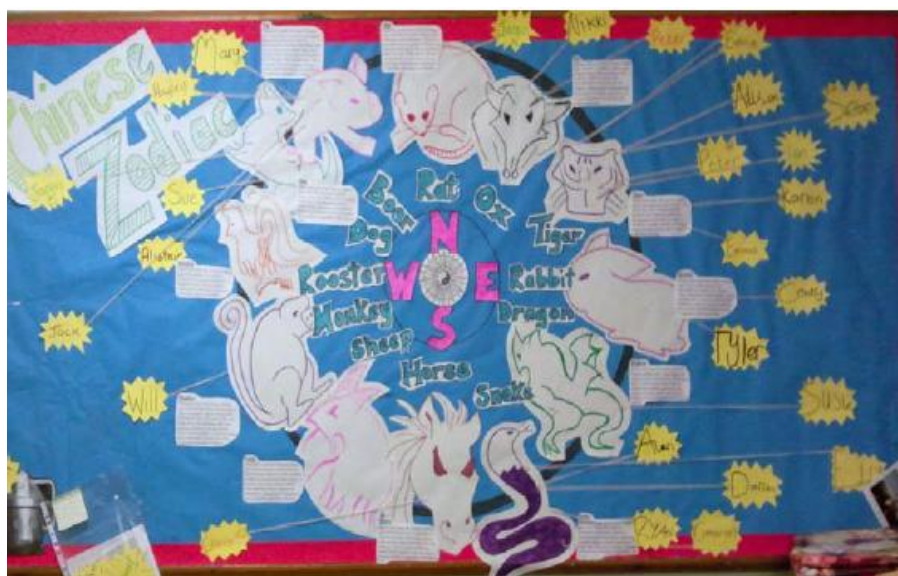
²³ Westergaard, J. (2010). Providing support to young people through groupwork: Delivering personalised learning and development in the group context. *Groupwork*, 20(1), 87–102.

nights or spray-painting a graffiti wall. Through these situations workers were encouraging the young people to think about the rest of the group and what their wishes might mean to others – for example when one young person wanted to go to Chelmsford and be picked up this might have a knock-on effect on what the others could do. Overall several teams reported that there was more dialogue with the young people and between them. Events such as a joint activity holiday at an outdoor centre, which was undertaken by all homes together, further created opportunities for young people to develop relationships with their peers from other homes by jointly engaging in group activities.

One short-break home for children with disabilities decided to put much more attention to the group aspects by aiming to arrange bookings in a way that the group of children would share similar interests or have commonalities that would enable them to interact more with other children and make friends. They found that this dramatically reduced incidents and made for a happier environment in which both children and staff enjoyed themselves more and could do more things together rather than having to keep some children separate from others. In this as well as other large homes that were divided into flats, group activities also began to take place across flats, so that small groups of children from different flats could engage in particular activities together and get to know children from other flats a little more, thus having access to, and seeing themselves as part of, a bigger peer group. This approach proved very successful on many levels and also seemed to make life easier for workers, which in turn benefitted the children.

Another noteworthy example of engaging the entire group of children and adults in a project designed to improve both the physical and social life-space was given by one residential worker in the Essex newsletter: 'We did a small, ongoing project on finding out about the Chinese Zodiac. I drew a circle on the wall and one of the young people researched the Chinese Zodiac. We made a table of the years relating to animals. The children and their friends in the neighbourhood drew the animals relating to signs and we added them to the display. All staff, young people, domestics, gardeners and night staff (in fact anyone who came in the building!) had a name card made for them. We used wool as arrows to point to animals. This encouraged lots of interacting and conversations between staff and children, especially at mealtimes, about which signs people were. Many staff had not a clue which sign related to them and the young people were so happy to find out. After a week or so people began asking what the different signs meant on the Chinese Zodiac. So we again went to good old

"google" and found out the meanings associated with different signs. These are now attached to the board as well. The board has been up for 4 weeks, the children are still enjoying asking people what sign they are and reading out the meanings. The children have begun to reflect and identify themselves and staff in some of the meanings associated with particular signs. For example children have said things like, 'oh that's true, I am like that sometimes' or 'that's not true because I'm not like that!' This has



also encouraged the children to use the laptops for research purposes rather than games! Over the weeks this project has been of continual interest; even now new names are still being added.'

TEAM EMPOWERMENT

The third aspect that had a significant effect on the culture in the homes was a sense of empowerment amongst many residential care workers both individually and, importantly, as a team. Empowerment came to be seen no longer as something that teams should be given by their senior managers but as something that they could achieve for themselves, a process in which they built up increasing trust in themselves and others and in which they found a stronger voice able to articulate the importance of their work and its contribution towards the wider vision. This was, for instance, seen in residential child care workers questioning some decisions of social workers in ways that were appreciative and sometimes made it difficult for the social worker to argue against, or in both professionals working more closely together and valuing each others' contribution and knowledge. Similarly, teams became more confident to find solutions for children's education where they were not attending school and to provide temporary opportunities for alternative educative experiences.

Whilst some workers dismissed social pedagogy as not having much fundamentally new to offer, most professionals took a more positive perspective and recognised the potential of social pedagogy to create the kinds of changes they genuinely welcomed. Very often teams noted that social pedagogy had given them permission to do what they believed in and had freed them up to do things with and for children, for instance go on a trip to London's Hyde Park, go swimming at the beach on a sunny day, bring a worker's own puppy into work, or take a young person along to a family trip to the zoo. It was often the small situations that signified big changes and showed practitioners' confidence: for example, one team decided against having their internal Christmas party and instead did Secret Santa with the children and had a shared Christmas lunch with them. Workers were doing this and much more to promote their children's inclusion in several aspects and were looking at engaging with each individual in order to do more with them, where previously they would have focussed mostly on doing things with their key child rather than 'interfering' by engaging too much with a colleague's key child.

In this process practitioners became more confident to bring their personality into their work and to feel professional in the ways they were doing this, understanding and reflecting upon the 3Ps to keep a balance. They were more involved and being authentic, which had positive effects on the children. From the children's feedback, they felt more listened to and felt that staff had started to listen better and to act more upon what the children had to say. They also felt more cared for, for instance by being supported around issues like bullying. Staff noted that they would tell children now that they loved them, and felt a sense of achievement by comments from a new child saying 'it's good to be home' when coming back from school.

Empowered staff teams are less concerned about exercising power and control over children than they are about sharing these with the children. Several homes recognised that their role needed to be about behaviour support rather than behaviour management, that sanctions and punishments usually accomplished the opposite of what they wanted and often taught the children much less than restorative approaches could. Restorative practice (see Hopkins) therefore increased in many homes and provided the children with ways to better understand their own behaviour and how it impacted on the people around them. The experiences were overwhelmingly positive and often convinced even those practitioners who had initially been sceptical. Many homes relayed back to us that the children were often much stricter with

'We're a family now, and that makes every part equally important.' Through social pedagogy teams became more confident to refer to themselves as a family in the widest sense. When picking up their children or going shopping together or being at the GP the children would now call the workers their 'auntie' or 'uncle' when asked 'is this your mother' (or father). Previously the children and adults had felt uncomfortable answering these questions and were concerned about being labelled. They recognised that their role wasn't to replace the children's parents but that they still were an important part of the child's family, of the proverbial village which it takes to raise a child.

**PRACTICE
EXAMPLE**

themselves than they as adults and that these situations provided much scope for learning about their own and others' feelings as well as what they could do to make amends. Professionals also recognised more the efforts children put into the restorative process and that they might still be unable to say 'I'm sorry' but could show their regret in other ways, which had to be valued. Interestingly, workers in many homes also stated that they themselves had begun to say 'I'm sorry' and acknowledge their own human shortcomings, whereas previously they had been concerned that this would undermine their professional position. Now they found that it usually did the exact opposite and nurtured an empowering culture where it was okay to get things wrong and say sorry.

Nearly all teams felt that they had more ownership in developing their practice and as a consequence felt more encouraged to take over more responsibilities where previously structure had often dictated those. They also tended to feel more heard within the wider service and valued the platforms created for practitioners to network and reflect upon their practice beyond their homes, for example by participating in the 6-weekly meetings of the Practitioners' Network and the support sessions for Social Pedagogy Agents.

6. Creating learning opportunities

'It is not possible to teach. It is only possible to create situations in which it is impossible not to learn.'

Within social pedagogy subtleties are significant, and the difference between teaching and creating learning situations is not just about semantics: It is about the perspective from which education is seen and suggests that adults need to leave their perspective and see learning from the child's point of view, empathically understand what might inspire them to learn, what atmosphere is conducive and what knowledge, interests, skills, emotions and challenges they bring to the learning process. These considerations highlight aspects of education that, unfortunately, are often neglected in formal education settings. They show the importance of relationships within learning processes and indicate that learning is an active process engaging far more than the brain. In many instances, this understanding of education genuinely appeals to residential care workers who can recognise that their role is not just about care but also about creating learning opportunities. It suggests that they possess many vital attributes – most importantly a close relationship with children that provides them with many insights and opportunities to support children's learning – and therefore should not just leave education to schools.

With its emphasis on holistic learning, social pedagogy reminds many practitioners of the contribution they can make and that 'educative possibilities are infinite', as one team in Essex suggested. Every situation contains some learning potential, and often the difference between dismissing a situation as meaningless or recognising the power of the situation depends on how the professional approaches everyday situations – whether she sees washing up the dishes as a chore or as a chance to have a nice conversation, develop a relationship further, help a child to gain a useful life skill, or enjoy splashing about in soapy water; whether she thinks that packing a child's suitcase for a weekend away is done more reliably and efficiently by her as the adult or gives her a chance to explore with the child what they might miss, what they expect from their weekend and what to take with them, even if the suitcase might end up being twice as heavy.

Whilst some practitioners were initially struggling with this emphasis on the 'how' and were expecting to be told 'what' to do, teams took very positively to concepts like the Learning Zone Model²⁴ which helped them consider how to practically unearth the learning potential within an experience by teasing children out of their comfort zone but not pushing them into their panic zone. In many instances, teams applied this model to children's school experiences and explored creatively what they could do to make education a learning zone experience, which

²⁴ Senninger (2000) proposes that each person has a comfort zone, a learning zone, and a panic zone. See www.thempra.org.uk/concepts_lzm.htm for more details.

often had to do with the children's emotional experiences of school. This change of focus from getting children to attend school towards helping them to find joy in learning is nicely illustrated in the essay of one residential worker about a child who could not be motivated to go to school but found the alternative of having to sit at the home doing worksheets unappealing too: 'By "boring" the child we were not giving the child any opportunity to want to learn for themselves or offering them a situation in which they could help themselves – and in actual fact [this] was putting them further into their panic zone, making them feel that there were only two sides: school, which they hate, or being bored, sat in a corridor at home. By giving the child worksheets to complete, this was not creating a situation where it was possible for them to learn, and in many instances the child would rather rip up the worksheets than complete them. By taking a pedagogic stance with this situation I found that the child would respond more by doing things that relaxed them and that when they were in this space they were taking more in and actually learning. For example, by taking the child to the local shops to buy ingredients for a cooking exercise, they were doing maths and learning life skills without even realising. When working with a child who is refusing to attend school I now question myself about what it is I should give them to work from and explore other situations I can create that may give them more opportunity to learn. I also reflect more on how they must feel and how their refusing to attend school is telling us something rather than just them being defiant.'

Seeing learning as an active process, teams put a higher focus on interaction, on getting into discussions with the young people to find educational solutions to issues such as smoking or using aerosols as flamethrowers. One team stated that previously there would have just been a blanket ban of aerosols for every young person in the home following an incident, but now they adopted a more individual approach, discussed the dangers with the entire group and allowed the other young people to keep their aerosols if they would use them responsibly (i.e. not as flamethrowers). More generally, the team felt they were looking more at the individual now, at their development and at what may have caused a certain behaviour whereas prior to their social pedagogy journey they would have been more concerned with 'policing'.

Importantly, this did not mean doing without any boundaries. Whilst initially some staff who had not been on the training courses and therefore had a superficial insight into social pedagogy were sceptical of what they thought of as an 'anything-goes' approach, many teams had to work through the practical implications of having more flexible and responsive boundaries rather than lots of lines drawn in the sand. As one team reported, there was increased flexibility now. For instance, the response to a young person smoking in their bedroom was less punitive, which is not to say that it was tolerated or went without consequences. But the team was aware that one size does not fit all, that in order to bring about behavioural change, attention needed to be paid to the lead-up of an incident, the situation, history, and individual factors. This meant that the consequences became much more about the young person's learning and their understanding how and why they might want to improve their behaviour.

In many teams there was a greater emphasis on learning than ever before, with a clear team effort towards providing education in the widest sense of the word by using workers' own skill sets. For example, a practitioner might do a bike repair workshop with a group of children or initiate a beauty treatment session in which the children would mix their own masque. Given the wide range of professional experiences many residential care workers brought with them from a previous life, teams realised that they often had many more skills and internal resources available than they knew. There was a real sense of sharing new experiences with the children and using situations as opportunities for learning, for example by exploring what happens to a football when it is put on a camp fire, first by discussing with the young people what might happen, what fumes this might cause, whether the ball would explode, et cetera, before then allowing them to try this out with an old and damaged football and creating a safe environment for young people to experiment.

As a result children got to do more and staff made more effort to involve them in the daily life and in activities as practitioners were discovering different ways of engaging the children by using the Common Third. At several points we heard that children were very keen to spend more time with staff and considered it a rewarding

experience. The adults acknowledged that they had more opportunities to bring in their own personalities and to be active, and that their work had become more individual and child-focussed, concentrating on what children wanted to do.

A greater variety of workers were helping children at the homes for children with disabilities access activities, and the enthusiasm from an activity was then shared with those who may not have been able to participate but could still become a part of the overall experience. This led to more opportunities to build relationships with all children, not just a practitioner's own key child. Importantly, this change was perceived as beneficial by all and had helped staff to discover new sides in themselves and the children.

Teams put a lot of emphasis on giving children new experiences that they would not normally have had, seeing each experience as something that could enrich a young person and teach them something about themselves or others. At one of the short-break homes for children with disabilities some of the more unusual experiences included taking the children to stay at a staff member's own beach hut for a day out, looking at a staff member's motorbike and revving the engine, which one boy very much enjoyed, having artists engage the children in creative work, or bringing in some of their own children so that the young people would have a range of different children to play with and did not feel separated from children without a disability.

7. Enhancing children's well-being and risk competence

Well-being and happiness are the overarching aims within social pedagogy – every action of professionals should intend to increase a child's overall well-being in the long term and support their sense of happiness. This requires a profound understanding of the individual child as a physical, emotional, social and spiritual being. Through social pedagogy we encouraged teams to focus more consciously on holistic well-being and see their care practice within this context. Many residential care workers felt they had much to offer from this perspective and found that their increased understanding of well-being and its importance had a positive effect on the wider culture within the home, for example with regards to risk assessments and creating a positive atmosphere in the home.

One participant described in her university essay how her emotional involvement had contributed to a sense of happiness for a girl she looked after. 'I was sitting in the playroom with the other children, and we started an activity that involved someone tapping actions on a person's back and made stories up to the actions. There were four children and two adults involved, and we would take it in turns to be tapped and be the person who tapped. This resulted in a lot of laughs and enthusiasm to continue with each other. Gradually the rest of the group began to leave the playroom, leaving the young girl and myself. We both were still experiencing the excitement of the previous game. We were looking at each other and she stood up and made a silly noise and waved her hands about. I immediately stood up and did the same thing. She laughed and said 'copy me', which I did, and then I said 'copy me', which she did. This went on until her bedtime, and each time we would fall down together on the sofa laughing uncontrollably. As she was going up to bed she called out 'that was good, it has made me so happy, I'm going to go to bed happy tonight'. I remained on the sofa and felt a warm glow inside. I felt happy, and this was compounded when I heard what she had said.'

The importance of empathy resonated with teams as well, and in the process of implementing social pedagogy many teams felt they had become much more empathic with what it might mean for a young person to live in a children's home but also what it meant to have to leave, as one of the short-term homes reported. Through this they had become much more flexible in the way they responded to new admissions and were now more focussed on making sure that the well-being of the young person concerned was established, even if this meant having to change assessment schedules and having more work to take on.

Practitioners' clear emotional and authentic involvement made everyday activities such as waking the children up in the morning much less of a boring routine and more of an enjoyable ritual. This created not just more positive experiences for the children but also meant that their carers had a better time and spent more time with the children. In many homes, staff members were focussing more on children's positive behaviour and offering more praise towards children. As a result the atmosphere had become more open and warmer.

Across the homes the notion of risk competence – of supporting children in understanding, taking and managing risks themselves – made practitioners feel liberated from the previous 'can't do culture' and saw a move from a risk-averse culture to a benefit-orientated culture. This also required a systemic change, with risk management policies and communication from the head of service downwards reassuring practitioners that they were trusted to let children take more risks that would benefit their development – and importantly that practitioners would not be crucified for making mistakes. The effect was profound: risk assessments were used to enable things to happen rather than stop them from happening and teams embraced risk-taking to the extent to which it nurtures children's risk competence. Social pedagogy helped make the case for more risk-taking, encouraging the children to try things and allowing them to make their own mistakes. It enabled staff at the homes for children with disabilities to do activities like horseback riding, trampolining, taking children to the local library, or cooking properly – with children using real knives, being in the kitchen, and putting trays into the hot oven. It also meant having lit candles on special occasions.

One team supported a 16 year old boy in going to an overnight Halloween party at the local games club, which he and several of his friends had been invited to and which was run by experienced youth workers. Despite last-minute resistance from the social work team leader that there were too many potential risks and several unsuccessful attempts to engage in valuing dialogue with this person, staff at the home successfully rounded up senior management support and advocated for the boy to go. It proved a beneficial experience as the boy thoroughly enjoyed himself, made new friends and felt more included and listened to.

**PRACTICE
EXAMPLE**

Often teams developed risk-benefit assessments that balanced both the potential risks and the potential gains from doing an activity, thus showing that taking more risks had been connected with seeing benefits: children got more opportunities to take a risk, to understand the risk itself and subsequently learn how to act safely and responsibly, for example when having campfires, swimming in the sea, or climbing a tree. This required not simply a conducive organisational policy framework but also increased competence and confidence from practitioners to help children explore risky situations. This became obvious when we facilitated a team development session with one of the homes where staff had been night swimming with two teenage girls the evening before – it was mid-October, not particularly mild, and they had gone swimming at a spot where a boy had drowned earlier that summer. Even before our session began several workers had heard about the situation and arrived at their own conclusion that surely this had not been very pedagogic! They began to change their minds though when the two carers who had been on duty explained their perspective of the situation. The girls had set their minds on going night swimming together. Faced with the alternative of creating a very unsafe situation by saying 'no', which would likely have prompted the girls to abscond and do it without any supervision, the practitioners had decided to take the girls to the beach. There they had asked them what they thought was important in order to do this safely, and the girls had come up with very sound suggestions. The two workers felt confident that they were in control under these circumstances, that neither of the girls wanted to put themselves at risk, and so they joined the girls for the swim, which meant they would have been nearby if they had needed to intervene. As it was not exactly a warm October day, the girls did not spend a long time in the water but thoroughly enjoyed the entire experience. Whilst many team colleagues could see the benefit when they heard the explanations, some practitioners admitted that they would not have felt confident enough to facilitate night swimming themselves. Together we came to the conclusion that in order to make such situations as safe as possible, and a positive

experience for all, it was not only paramount to understand the potential benefits but also to feel able as a professional to contain the situation and to be in control – and this could not be expected from everybody but had to remain their decision.

The situation was similar in other teams, whose risk perceptions had changed as they had become more focussed on the Common Third. Staff were feeling empowered to judge a risk when taking young people swimming or cycling as they were given a lot more freedom to decide and were confident to use their own judgment. Practitioners commented that ‘we take more ownership for our decisions’, ‘you really think about your decision’ and that ‘because I feel more empowered I can own my decisions’. They also allowed children to make decisions and take risks and try something, emphasising that it was okay to try and fail, because this was part of learning.

Naturally, not every activity went down without any incidents, and on a few occasions a child fell off a bicycle, skateboard or the trampoline. However, practitioners were able to see it as part of a normal childhood that a child would scrape a knee, get a splinter, or twist an ankle – and often a child would learn much more from these experiences than they would have otherwise. Even the rare broken limb was dealt with in the way that most parents would.

Through relationships between adults and children being more trusting and human as described above – and the children knowing that they were being trusted – care workers felt that the children also took on some responsibility in containing a risky situation. For example, one practitioner took five young people to see the fireworks in London on New Year’s Eve. She had discussed with the young people that she would trust them to behave well and could only do this if they would be responsible, which they subsequently were, leading to a great and empowering experience for all involved. Another home allowed a young person to undertake on his own a train journey to Wales when staff and the young person felt he was ready and could manage this on his own. This and similar experiences, such as being entrusted bigger sums of money, were now considered an important part of a young person becoming more independent, whereas previously it would have been frowned upon, as teams admitted.

Having pets had been another problematic topic for some homes, where staff members were concerned that these would not be taken good care of. In developing social pedagogy within their homes, several teams decided to take the risks and allow children to have pets. One practitioner wrote in the social pedagogy newsletter: ‘We have also introduced our house hamster, Donut, who is welcome to all the young people. Through Donut our young people are learning to share much more effectively, it is allowing them some more responsibility and it has made the house feel a lot calmer as all our young people are worried about upsetting Donut’s feelings if she is downstairs in the lounge, and they are being rude or abusive. Donut is the most effective Common Third we have used and even our residents who can’t stand each other will spend time together to be around Donut.’ Whilst Donut’s life ultimately came to a tragic end, her existence made a real difference and helped the young people to find out how to take care of another being, especially one much weaker than them, and to take responsibility for someone else. These are important life lessons for children to learn.

Another home, where some staff members had been bringing in their own dogs for some time, highlighted similar experiences. Having a dog around acted as a diffuser of aggression, for instance when the dog got agitated by loud shouting, which in turn led to a much more empathic response from the young people as they started to get concerned about the dog. Importantly, staff often used pets to create a Common Third, meaning that they were making use of their own pet caring skills to help the children develop such skills, for example by clearing out the fish tank together or taking the dog for a walk. A young person who had shown that he was capable to look after his gold fish and had become very interested in fish was then allowed to have a bigger fish tank. Through this the increase in responsibility was shared and seen as a learning curve that made the task of caring for the pets manageable and therefore a beneficial experience.

8. Being rights-based and child-centred

‘To accord rights is to respect dignity: to deny rights is to cast doubt on humanity and on integrity’²⁵

As a human rights profession (Staub-Bernasconi, 2007²⁶), social pedagogy offers a particular perspective on children’s rights as intrinsic human rights that connect us to others. The social pedagogue’s role is to support children in realising their own rights according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – for example to be involved in decisions affecting them – and to have regard for the human rights of others – for example to listen to their views and take into account the impact of one’s own decisions onto other people.

In a social pedagogical understanding, being rights-based requires a long-term approach that focuses on educative and inclusive processes that help children better understand the world and how things work and how they can actively shape their life world – rather than being dependent on adults doing this on their behalf. The example given by one residential care worker highlights why this is so important and what practitioners can do to actively support children’s increasing participation in the decisions made by adults: ‘Today I took a young person to school for her first day. However, timetables and taxis had been mis-

There is a big change in the communication with young people and in the staff team. The young people are perceived to voice their opinions and ideas in a more trusting and open way and have experienced that their input has been taken into consideration in the further planning of both small and big things. The theme of ‘nosy business’ has been introduced to encourage the young people to be more inquisitive around anything that happens in their home.

PRACTICE
EXAMPLE

communicated, making the whole thing a negative experience from the off. They were going to send her home despite the mountain she had had to climb to get there. The bit for me was having the professional confidence to question the impact this would have on the girl’s well-being and her future impression of educational establishments. This in turn seemed to give her the confidence to voice her own grievance, and the matter was resolved in her favour. This then later led to the most intense PEP meeting I’d ever participated in where the young girl articulated herself extremely well by explaining the very negative impact that moving schools and having no control over her education was having on her. I really hope that this event had an impact on the other professionals involved – it seemed to at the time. [...] I suppose this is another example of how really getting to know our young people is so important, so in situations like this we can stand united to make sure we are being listened to in order to get the best outcomes. Making assumptions on their behalf is so detrimental and can make a difficult time a hundred times more difficult. I think the strength of relationships is also so valuable here as we both felt comfortable challenging this issue (I suppose it was a Common Third experience in a strange kind of way!) but I’m very proud of what she achieved today and was glad we managed to move it forward and still manage to have a good laugh on the way home!’

In many homes, children and young people reported that they felt more listened to, that carers were actively trying to understand what the children were saying and to act upon it, and that they were more involved in making decision. Interviewed by the BBC’s home editor, Mark Easton, one ten-year-old explained: ‘Before they started to mention all this “pegagogy” thing, they didn’t do as much involving us. Normally, the adults make the decisions but, instead, they let us help the adults to make the decisions.’²⁷

²⁵ Freeman, M. (2006). What’s right with children’s rights. *International Journal of Law in Context* 2(1), 89–98.

²⁶ Staub-Bernasconi, S. (2007). Soziale Arbeit als Dienstleistung oder Menschenrechtsprofession? In A. Lob-Hüdepohl (ed.), *Ethik Sozialer Arbeit: Eine Einführung*. Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh.

²⁷ Easton, M. (2009). *Caring About Children*. Blog from 09/02/09.

Available online: http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/markeaston/2009/02/caring_about_children.html

Several teams acknowledged that they had changed their approach away from punitive or negative responses or just saying 'no' to any requests; now they were more forward-thinking and exploring how these could be made to happen, often involving the children in trying to find a solution and explaining why something, like their desire to move back to their own parents, might be hard to realise. One team stated that children having sleepovers at friends, having their own pets, or going snowboarding would previously not have happened. However, by recognising that these were important wishes that the children had and deserved to be taken seriously, the team decided: 'we'll risk it and have a go'. This change in attitude was also supported by the council giving more leeway to practitioners, which meant that as teams they discussed rules and boundaries and where they needed to do things differently.

Promoting children's participation and active involvement in the wider service also led to two girls being part of a panel that selected the provider for the residential service's physical intervention training. They assessed three providers, each of which gave a 30 minute presentation of their techniques. They asked questions and completed a score sheet, with their views carrying 30% of the scoring of the tendering process. According to their carers, the girls' involvement had not only been beneficial in that their participation had helped the adults understand children's perspectives of being physically restrained; it also meant that the girls now knew when adults were allowed to use physical interventions and what rights they had as children.

In order to increase young people's involvement in their own care trajectory, several homes encouraged them to contribute to their care plans, to help write daily logs and summaries in their own reports. Despite some initial scepticism the young people's involvement in these matters was increasingly seen as important and produced very positive results by creating opportunities to jointly reflect with a young person on their self, their behaviour and their ambitions. Practitioners frequently found that the young people were very self-critical and could then use the situation to encourage and praise a young person.

By gaining greater insights into how the young people perceived themselves and what was going on for them, teams found it easier to see the bigger picture, to identify underlying aspects of certain behaviours and the link to the context, with an increased awareness for the overall situation of the young people and an interest in finding out what may be triggers. These insights often meant that practitioners could diffuse situations before they could escalate. For example, one team found out that issues with settling one young boy were due to him being scared of the dark and of spiders, which was then taken into consideration when settling him at bedtime. The young people in turn could develop an idea of how they could diffuse their own anxieties, thus making it less necessary for them to transfer their distress onto the adults through according behaviours.

One of the short-break homes for children with disabilities collaborated with FirstSite art gallery on a series of participatory art days at the home. Staff saw this project as important not just because the children got a lot out of the sessions with the artists, but also because it opened the home up to outsiders coming in and linked them to the community. The team was impressed with the artists' ability to be responsive to the children's ideas of what to do with the creative material provided rather than being directive and telling the children what the adults wanted them to do. Staff stated that this had made them more reflective on the extent to which they should be directive in activities and had gone over to giving children more space to do things in their own time and respond to the children's ideas about the kinds of activities they wanted to engage in. There had been a real 'blooming' of art and creativity with activities emerging in dialogue with the children rather than being adult-led or directed. Night shift workers had also become more involved in activities and were coming in early to do things like reading, arts and craft or toffee apples on Halloween with the children, which had made their work and the relationships with the young people more positive.

One course participant summed up these points by describing the meaning of social pedagogy as 'an opportunity for young people to be treated as equals, to be valued and appreciated by those who in the past have had the greatest influences on their lives and well-being; for young people to be heard and their views and opinions respected without ridicule or damning!'

9. Building bridges within the community

'There are two things children should get from their parents: roots and wings'²⁸

Besides the focus on the individual child described above, social pedagogues must also focus on the wider community in order to facilitate children's inclusion. Many children's homes had put more effort into improving relationships with the local community and help the children feel part of the neighbourhood. In a crisis intervention home they more actively encouraged children to keep contact with local friends, had a local reverend coming into the home once a week and were involved in fundraising events for charity and the local community, such as coffee mornings or car washes – generally speaking, they were out in the community more. The links with the neighbours, which had previously been far from good, had much improved as a result of these efforts.

Other homes reported similar progress. One team had encouraged the young people to interact more with the community and were going to local parks and joining in with activities that did not cost much, such as playing rounders or playing games with the park wardens. The same home also took a group of young people on a caravan holiday during which the young people made many friends and were enjoying a sense of normality. They were very well-behaved and perceived positively by other holiday-makers.

A practitioner from a different home offered another example: 'This year we did something that has not happened before at [our children's home]. It was a complete success and is hopefully going to happen every year from now on. We had a karaoke and barbeque for all the young people at [our home], and they invited their neighbourhood friends. The children helped to prepare the food. The staff involved obviously worked very hard putting all this together. Staff came in on days off, one of our young people invited [a member of staff from a different home who he knows] from band practise, other staff stayed on after their shift. The children had invited our domestic, who had recently left, and they were delighted that he came. Xxx (member of our staff) organised the karaoke. Each child had a certificate for their attendance at school and a present. Each member of staff was rewarded with a different certificate from the children; each one was identifiable to each staff member, [and] these were quite amusing! In the evening local children and their parents were invited to come along. They joined in with some garden games and fun was had by all. A picture board was made up as a memory of a fab day!!!'

This was not the only example of how the home had helped the children feel part of the community. They reported that the children's neighbourhood friends were able to come very frequently, and many children from the street were dropping by to play in the garden and visit their friends at the children's home – sometimes they even wanted to come when none of the children were actually home. There was a sense that all parents were looking out for all children in the street, and overall, staff members found this sense of community integration really beneficial for the children.

Other teams also stated that, with increased confidence, they had more actively worked on improving the community's understanding of children in care. There had been more work done to be part of the community as well, which had been reinforced by such positive perceptions and better relations with neighbours. One home reported that they had received many presents and chocolates from neighbours at Christmas time, which had not happened before.

Several homes also felt that it was important to contribute to the community and were therefore involved in charity walks to support local projects. This enabled the children to give something to their community and engage for others, which they enjoyed. For example some homes participated in an initiative to donate Christmas

²⁸ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German poet

presents to children in the majority world, finding out with the children how their peers in other countries were living and thus nurturing a sense of responsibility and compassion for others.

10. Promoting social pedagogy through dialogue

The focus of social pedagogues on the wider community also includes bringing their professional ethos into the relationships with other professionals and the families. Many homes increased the involvement of parents, for instance through family barbeques, open days, or even by helping a looked-after child's mother with refurbishing her flat and thus developing more positive relationships as well as parents' abilities to care for their children. One short-break home for children with disabilities introduced coffee mornings for parents to chat and have a support network and gain some skills, for example in learning Makaton so as to communicate better with their children.

As a result of their hard work in developing a social pedagogy culture, several homes noticed that other agencies they were dealing with had changed their perceptions too. One team that had initially felt looked down upon by the external world and had subsequently decided to talk more about the positive work they were doing reported that they now felt more respected for the work they were doing as staff, both from within the service and from other professionals, such as independent reviewing officers and social workers who were more positive about the practice at their home. The most important shift that had taken place was in how the team perceived itself, how the workers talked about their practice: there now was a sense of self-belief, support and ownership within the team, which had not been tangible when we had first started working with them. Their increased confidence also had a positive effect on the relationships the home had with other services and when they might have to deal with difficult situations, which they now did in a calm and professional way. For example they were able to take on a young person with highly sexualised behaviour as an emergency placement, which previously they either would not have been asked to take on or would have made the team very anxious. But now they told themselves that they could do this – 'this is what we've got, let's work with it' – and managed well. Their success was also reflected in the Ofsted rating, which improved from 'inadequate' when they first started their social pedagogy journey to 'outstanding' a year and a half later, thus showing how much the team had grown and actively developed.

The increased confidence and professional competence of residential workers was not always appreciated by other services, especially where it challenged unequal power dynamics and empowered practitioners decided to question decisions that were not in the best interest of the children they were caring for. Where social pedagogic practice led to conflicts with other services, e.g. schools or social work, staff at several homes told us about how they approached these in a social pedagogic way, aiming to convey their own understanding of a given situation and providing learning opportunities. In one instance, one practitioner sought dialogue with a social worker about perceptions around risk and offered further subject-related reading resources. As staffs' sense of empowerment changed, their relationships with other professionals were being reframed, as the example given by one assistant homes manager shows: 'We had an opportunity for a child to have what we believed would be a really positive experience and a great learning opportunity, but we hit a stumbling block when the social worker refused it due to risk! Despite my best efforts to promote this opportunity and evidence how we could reduce and manage the risks, it was blocked by the social work team manager. This left the child feeling let down and unheard and me feeling very frustrated. After reflecting on this I gathered some evidence from the ThemPra website on risk competence²⁹ and also attained a study conducted in Scotland about the possible detrimental effect risk

²⁹ Eichsteller, G. & Holthoff, S. (2009). Risk Competence - Towards a Pedagogic Conceptualization of Risk. *Children Webmag*. Available online: <http://www.thempra.org.uk/downloads/risk.pdf>

assessments can have on a child's well-being and development (Milligan & Stevens, 2006³⁰). I passed these documents on to the social worker and asked him for his feedback on the matter. He has already discussed this with me and appeared very inspired. He has begun to circulate this around his team and is in discussion with his team manager about the topic. Social pedagogy for me is not just a way of working with children but it's about creating learning opportunities for adults too. Other professionals that we work with will only really begin to understand social pedagogy and what we're trying to do if we talk to them about it. Social pedagogy is about working in dialogue with other adults as well as children, and I believe that hopefully by using pedagogy in all that we do we can really begin work in partnership and change practice for the better of our children.'

³⁰ Milligan, I. & Stevens, I. (2006). Balancing Rights and Risk: The Impact of Health and Safety Regulations on the Lives of Children in Residential Care. *Journal of Social Work*, 6(3), 239—254.

V. SUPPORTING SOCIAL PEDAGOGY STRATEGICALLY – SERVICE MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES

In developing a social pedagogical culture of care, the role of strategic leadership played an essential role. Whilst many individuals contributed to this role, the project placed particular demands onto two senior managers within Essex's Residential Service: Suzie Stephens as the project manager, and Maureen Caton as the Head of Service. Their perspectives therefore offer further insights into the challenges, emotions and perceptions evoked by the social pedagogy change processes.

Reflections on a Social Pedagogy Journey (Suzie Stephens)

Social what? My scepticism about a new, foreign and to me unknown approach lasted a while. What is it? What is different about it? How does it connect and build on the skills/knowledge and a wide range of different approaches we already use?

Over about 6 months these became clearer and my sceptical view became closer to a professional curiosity I strive to attain. I visualised social pedagogy as fog or a cloud; hard to grab and contain, but noticeable especially by how it feels, when you're in it. It is also an evolving and mysterious shape, you can never see it all, and it is affected by everything around it and is always unique.

My role was to project manage the proposed 3 year implementation of a cultural change across 12 children's homes and about 400 staff, supported by training in social pedagogy. This involved maintaining communication with senior managers and Elected Members, on-going financial commitment, steering the contractual negotiations with social pedagogy trainers and researchers, being a conduit of messages and processes, an advocate for the idea and a behind the scenes organiser. I oiled the wheels for the external researcher to be authorised to be funded and created a job description, recruited and line managed the in-house researcher who worked with the children in the homes. I also became chair and minute taker of the commissioning and strategic meetings established to oversee and support the implementation process. Over the journey my role evolved into a more facilitation role, taking agreed ideas and enabling them to be realised. So I was a venue booker, communicator and PR spokesperson at local and national events; throughout I was in the thick of it.

It was a journey, an adventure, a challenge, at times a frustration, but throughout an unmissable experience. I got to know colleagues at a far deeper level; I was privileged to go on a journey with them which, due to the subject matter, established lifelong friendships. The process challenged the thinking and practice of us all; how we conducted, recorded and shared the discussions and decisions from the various strategic meetings with the rest of the service, how we operated and worked together as a group, how we addressed difference and disagreements and learned to avoid defensiveness but explored our shortcomings. We became able to own our mistakes and discuss our different understandings and make use of the learning beyond the social pedagogy work.

We evolved, and I certainly did, to be more aware of my resistances, and the triggers, my preferences of approach in meetings and in communication, and my way of responding, engaging with people and providing feedback. There were times when rapid changes occurred, when 'chair' became 'facilitator', when collaboration and shared ownership of allocation of places on courses was devolved to the whole homes manager group, when presentations at national events were recognised as successful, when disagreements were aired and explored in the room rather than somewhere else, and when the process became shared and owned more widely across the residential service. Our external and internal researchers contributed to our understanding and provided evidence and feedback based on their work with staff and the children and young people. We were able to make sense of our actions and implementation of ideas from a range of perspectives, to check out if what we intended

was occurring or if an unforeseen impact was having a negative impact. We did not want to 'manage' the outcomes, but we wanted to provide opportunities for the service to create the cultural change and whole-service approach that social pedagogy training was designed to support. We were guided by our German colleagues, NCERCC and the researchers, while walking the line of achieving cultural change within a large local authority where many of the ideas we were supporting were very challenging to the wider system.

I was privileged enough to present our social pedagogy journey in numerous forums where residential staff, managers and senior staff either co-delivered or led the delivery. My relationship with the in-house researcher involved intense discussions and reflections on engagement, real participation, theory to practice ideas and exploration of the process of implementation. We discussed the best ways to communicate with people, the reasons behind unexpected reactions or responses, the academic achievements of some staff and the unrealised potential of others as well as practical ways to achieve the vision of cultural change we held dear. Her academic focus was complemented by my practical approach, we are both 'doers' and explored how this blocked others having the opportunity to do and how to reflect on rather than 'fix' things going 'wrong'. She had a key role in engaging with workers across the homes at practitioners days and social pedagogy agents days. She worked hard to ensure these were not her events. Her unique role was the work with groups of children and young people, once ethical approval was granted, which provided insight into how the implementation in particular homes was experienced. This usefully complemented the view of the staff and helped even more with the understanding of unexpected consequences and the challenge of accepting feedback that does not support your view. This was invaluable when it helped the staff to stop, hear, listen and adapt what they were doing as a direct consequence of the feedback from the children and young people. Well-intentioned adults (including myself) are able to run away with their own good intentions and not notice when the affect and impact is not as intended. I sent out communications that were intended to be clear but were received and interpreted as directive; some of my work attempting to engage with other professional groups and areas of the School, Children and Families (SCF) Service were perceived as colluding or forming coalitions against the residential service. If people had not been able to air their views I would not have understood their reactions and responses to me.

These incidents and 'mistakes' were useful when there was feedback that was honest, authentic and genuine. This provided a platform for honest discussion and a levelling of hierarchies (prevalent in all local authorities) and a re-balancing of power. For me, when it's real it's safe and can be trusted and therefore responded to and worked with. I am suspicious of incongruence and people who assume that their communication is providing enough information they have determined is appropriate. The gaps are obvious, and as they are unspecified and not defined, it is often impossible for others to understand the connections and sense. It is not transparent and blocks collaboration. Not knowing where we are all coming from makes it very difficult to move forward together, it is a frustrating avoidance and one I am more aware I am not very tolerant of.

I was also able to co-ordinate sharing of our learning and our journey with visitors who were researchers, staff and managers from other local authorities, journalists, charitable foundations, film makers and philanthropists. Colleagues facilitated a number of interviews with young people and filming in the homes. Events took place where homes hosted talking with groups of visitors and presenting their experiences in a variety of ways. Without exception these were well received and reinforced our confidence and belief in the staff. They demonstrated their growing confidence, their ability to reflect and their professionalism. Homes and the staff self-selected, so as co-ordinator I would never know who would be doing what for the visitors. The impact of this was empowering for the staff and far more relevant to the visitors who often asked not to have all the positives presented – they wanted the reality. This they got, but in a way that showed maturity, deep reflection, a balanced approach from all the staff.

Risk-taking became an area where staff and managers across the homes felt the local authority and senior managers did not fully understand, did not really know about the risks being taken by staff within the homes,

which was acknowledged as a concern, making people feel vulnerable. The Head of Service arranged a whole-service day, collaboratively designed with a group of Homes Managers, where these concerns were aired and addressed. The whole service heard that risk avoidance was not the aim, that risk is part of living and some of their fears were alleviated and dispelled. Risk was put into perspective and the responses people received to requests, confessions to mistakes and poor inspections reinforced that what was said and was carried out in actions. Mistakes were acknowledged but the learning from them was a string focus. Some doubters remained, but on the whole the homes became more able to make informed decisions or check out ideas they were considering with more confidence in the knowledge that they would be encouraged to be heard, and to find a way through that best suited the needs of the child.

The 3 areas that it became apparent were being greatly challenged by our efforts to achieve whole-service cultural change were:

- 📌 Health and safety and how Essex County Council and SCF had applied and interpreted legislation through their policies, practice and procedures, and how are practice had become risk-averse;
- 📌 We were a large whole residential service within a large local authority, our change needed to be accepted and accommodated by the rest of the service, and we wanted the whole system to shift to support this, which was not always achieved; and
- 📌 Until January 2012 Ofsted and regulators in their inspections did not place as much emphasis on the relationships between the children and the adults, and the feel of the home environment as a result.

I was involved in the work to raise awareness of the benefits of taking a different stance, where the child was at the heart of the decision-making, and through cross-service meetings to share the vision and enthusiasm our service had for social pedagogy. I was involved in raising the issues locally and nationally and contributing to the achievements and changes that were made. Though it is early days, the most dramatic shift has been in how Ofsted inspections are carried out.

All of our evolving perspectives, practices, increasing confidence and demonstrated professionalism took place within a large local authority, where established ways of doing things continued, as we worked hard to change. My understanding of systems theory, ideas of change theory and resistance helped me to reflect on and make sense of the journey, our successes and our ideas that did not get taken forward. The fostering service were keen to incorporate social pedagogy, but for a variety of reasons have to date only achieved a fraction of their desired ideas. The importance of senior manager ownership as well as people to make the vision a reality was brought home to me. I had a role helping to 'make it happen' and was therefore able to reframe, reflect, adapt, reconvene and try again many times. It was a memorable journey, an emotional rollercoaster and a very large-scale implementation project. Though we will soon have only 5 of our 12 homes still open, many of the staff and children take with them the ideas and enthusiasm they found or rediscovered, and in their new settings are spreading their learning far and wide. They can never 'not know' and I am confident that they will adapt and use their knowledge and skills, in different contexts. They were all part of something very special and I hope they learned as much as I did from the experience. It was an unforgettable journey and I would not have missed it for the world.

Why Social Pedagogy in Essex? (Maureen Caton)






Why social pedagogy in Essex? We decided that this philosophy, training and culture was the way forward for residential care in Essex. It gave staff a professional culture and training that would impact on the lives of children looked after. It gave permission and the support to care, to feel, and to promote experiences and support for children and young people that would be provided by good parents. It set practical day-to-day care within the

social care profession and not outside of it. Reflective practice promoted challenge to risk-averse care that did not have the development of the child at its heart. Social pedagogy and its use of interdisciplinary theory promoted an individuality of response to ensure individual children's needs and the skills, competencies and personalities of the staff and the authentic relationships being forged were creative and had real meaning for all involved in the process.







Our discussions with ThemPra and the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care (NCERCC) way back in 2008 looked at how we could provide staff with a toolbox of skills and competencies and a professional identity and status that would build the confidence to change practice. We set up an infrastructure for implementation and strategic development that has benefitted ThemPra and other local authorities using our training model today.

Gaining senior management and Elected Member approval for what was a professionalization of the service and delivery of less institutionalized care was less complex than expected, even with the clarity that Ofsted may see the journey to full implementation of social pedagogy in a negative light within their current inspection framework.

It was also clear that in order to gain commitment beyond the financial commitment of the initial 3 years required a variety of support and promotional structures not only in Essex – other local authorities needed to support social pedagogy too, thus giving our journey credibility. Essex therefore hosted local authorities who showed interest in the approach and who were keen to change practice, as Derbyshire are doing today. Keynote speeches were delivered at national and international conferences. The national press and media coverage that Essex received highlighted support for the approach and the innovation of Essex. Staff and young people interviewed were proud of their joint creativity and the strength of the relationships that were established, which children and young people described and valued:

-  Greater participation in decision-making
-  The feeling of being heard and given honest answers to questions
-  Family networks being involved in the life of the home
-  Homes becoming more like family homes, having pets etc.
-  Adults who showed they cared about you

The management of this development required:

-  A three year development plan.
-  A strategy group made up of key interagency stakeholders.
-  An implementation group of key internal stakeholders.
-  Ongoing independent action research of the journey through the involvement of David Crimmens from Lincoln University, including the secondment of a member of staff to specifically research the impact on and the views of young people and to feed into the research project.
-  The creation of a Development Officer post to support practical implementation.
-  Additional and specific training courses for staff who would become Social Pedagogy Agents to promote change within their specific homes, and provide feedback to aid further progress.

The management team implementing the development also undertook a journey in ensuring meetings and the exchange of ideas, general communication and decision-making were also undertaken with social pedagogic principles in mind. However, the roots of change were the social pedagogy agents who encouraged the reflection, challenge and remodelling of practice at the home and with colleagues and young people. The issue of power and control surfaced at many levels as a consequence of the change process itself, how information was communicated, who should get what training, who made what decision and why, what was expected of individuals at all levels, and what our internal and external partners expected. At some points delegated decision-making was chaotic, creative, challenging, successful and non-productive. Roles and responsibilities need clarity,

and we had to address risks and issues of blurred boundaries within the strategy group and the implementation group to ensure that we worked in partnership and did not alienate other professionals or families themselves.

There was also the dilemma of needing statistical evidence of change for what was a long-term development plan and the need to develop individuality, empathy, creativity which would have, and had, a lasting impact on a highly regulated service. This data is available, but more importantly the changes in behaviour and thinking and the experience of care that was emotionally warm, supportive and promotional was the outcome young people valued.

Essex had expressed its desire to be a commissioning organisation at the start of our journey. However, it was a devastating blow that the very homes which were spearheading a change that is now alive in a number of other local authorities across England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales as well as internationally, were to be closed to allow a choice of placement for children and young people – against the backdrop of the argument that if you provided homes yourself and matched placements, beds unoccupied created a double cost. This was also the point at which homes were receiving Ofsted gradings of 'Good' and 'Outstanding'. The financial and development investment made by Essex has benefitted young people who experienced good authentic child care and is now, through investment from KPMG Foundation (who visited Essex and supported the model and practice seen), being developed within the national fostering service, as well as within the residential care sector nationally.

The journey has been frustrating, enlightening, and absolutely the right journey at the right time for both the young people and staff who experienced the change in practice and culture.

VI. MAKING SENSE OF COMPLEXITY – CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The intention of this report was to provide insights into the most comprehensive attempt to date to systematically introduce social pedagogy into the organisational culture of a large-scale residential service in the UK. Given the project's complexity we made the conscious decision to focus on drawing together many of the narratives which illustrate how social pedagogy has affected, inspired and empowered professionals and what achievements are possible where leaders and teams embrace social pedagogy and draw out its potential. We do not suggest that these achievements come easily or that Essex's social pedagogy journey has been smooth – without challenges to overcome any accomplishment would feel undeserved, and we wanted to convey through the narratives a genuine sense of what the achievements felt like and why they were important to teams. Obviously, these are subjective reflections, but that does not make them any less valid from a scientific point of view as narratives can aptly capture the meaning-making processes, self-perceptions and motivations of individuals. They convey a passion about caring for children which cannot be quantified and expressed in numbers, and we hope that these insights will inspire readers – not to imitate what practitioners have done in the children's homes in Essex but to explore themselves how they could draw on social pedagogic theories and principles in order to further develop their practice and the culture within their own organisations.

The Importance of a Whole-Systems Approach to Social Pedagogy

Most significantly, in order to successfully develop social pedagogy in practice, social pedagogy must be reflected throughout the entire organisation. Its values and vision must be congruent with social pedagogical principles not just in terms of what they are but also how they are owned by employees and brought to life in interactions. Therefore, the Essex project was jointly conceived as a long-term systemic change process that would address and support all elements within their residential service in developing social pedagogy. This included training courses and team development sessions aimed to enable practitioners to relate social pedagogy to their own unique context in ways that complemented existing practice and instilled a sense of ownership and empowerment within them. Furthermore, the project created a strategic development and implementation group as well as a practitioners' network to provide opportunities for ongoing dialogue and reflection on how to further embed social pedagogy across the entire service and beyond.

Naturally, social pedagogy provided an element of challenge to existing organisational thinking and practices, most notably cultures of distrust, risk aversion and change resistance. Our approach ran counter to what many practitioners were used to as we wanted them to define what social pedagogy could mean for them and refrained from telling them what to do. They were provided the opportunity to lead the change rather than be dictated by it, and much work went into supporting and enabling them to take on this role, to become social pedagogy agents and social pedagogic leaders irrespective of their formal position. Such cultural changes are never really accomplished but require continuous nurturing, and in this sense 3 years are a somewhat short period. After all, distrust, risk aversion and change resistance often have deep roots and should be accepted as understandable responses based on previous experiences. By valuing and embracing those who were initially sceptical of social pedagogy and unconvinced that it would make much of a difference, we frequently succeeded in including them in the change process, and often those who had been most resistant at the outset of the project became some of the most active culture carriers once they had had an opportunity to explore the meaning of social pedagogy in their own ways, experience the positive ways in which it had affected relationships, and develop trust in others' motivations.

As Berridge and colleagues (2012) summarise, in providing high-quality residential child care 'effective leadership is key; staff coherence and consistency are important; and [...] these can be enhanced by a common philosophy

or theory' (p.94). Many of these key terms, however, are not value neutral, and it is their ethical dimension that seems highly significant. Leaders whose words and actions were ethically grounded in social pedagogy seemed to achieve much in transforming cultures and practices within their homes; and many teams realised that consistency in a social pedagogic understanding was highly value-based as it required their practice to be congruent to their own values and their shared vision rather than to consist of robotic responses.

The Art of Being – Social Pedagogy in Practice

From a social pedagogical perspective, care practice is about the art of being with children. By describing practice as an art form and as concerned primarily with 'being', as opposed to 'doing', the focus is directed towards who we are as adults. What we do in practice – the methods we choose – is an expression of our personal and professional identity and ethos, without which they run the risk of becoming meaningless. If we engage with a child in an activity without any genuine interest, without wanting to develop a better relationship and simply be there with them, we will have missed an opportunity to create something special. Social pedagogy provided residential workers in Essex with a clear focus on relationships. By using their own head, heart, and hands in order to fully engage with children and build strong relationships they demonstrated that they genuinely cared about the children. Developing authentic and supportive relationships was of course not new to practitioners, but the difference which social pedagogy seemed to make was that it provided a framework to conceptualise and reflect upon how care workers could bring in both personal and professional elements of their self whilst still having the best interest of the child at heart. Their understanding of social pedagogic concepts such as the 3Ps (the professional, personal and private) and the Common Third (using activities to develop relationships) helped them appraise what they had to offer as persons and attributed great value to relationship work. In many cases this had a transformative effect on the cultures within homes, which became increasingly more defined as relational spaces, as a shared life space for everybody within the home.

The confidence which participants gained from the social pedagogy courses provided a number of further benefits: Where practitioners had previously considered their role to be just about care, social pedagogy widened their understanding of the contribution they could make in other areas, such as health or education. Many homes took very positively to social pedagogic concepts highlighting learning and well-being as core aims; and following the maxim that, whilst it is not possible to teach, it is possible to create situations in which it is impossible not to learn, professionals within the care homes actively initiated such opportunities and recognised the learning potential inherent in many small everyday-life situations.

The change in mindset also resulted in teams developing a can-do attitude and taking on many challenges in order to improve their culture and practice. In incremental steps teams tackled some of the easier challenges first, such as getting a round table in the dining room in order to create more of a shared atmosphere, before using their increased confidence to address more profound issues, such as turning around the blame culture within parts of the organisation. In this process they often recognised that collectively they essentially had all the resources needed to overcome such barriers, for example to establish a reflective culture where difficult conversations could be held constructively or to change neighbours' negative views about the home. These are no small achievements and show that social pedagogy had set free lots of energy in many teams, which motivated them to continue their social pedagogy journey.

As each team had its own unique culture and personalities the social pedagogy journeys looked distinctly different from home to home, with each being supported to relate social pedagogic concepts and principles to their particular context. At the same time they were systemically connected through joint social pedagogy training courses and the practitioners' network as a forum to share the different experiences and develop social pedagogy as the overarching conceptual framework and vision reflected in all home in their own unique ways. We do not suggest that all homes equally embraced the opportunities afforded to them, and often the extent to

which teams developed social pedagogy depended on the home's leadership, the activities undertaken by the social pedagogy agents to create cultural change, but also on the depth of reflections in which teams engaged as this seemed to determine their ability to develop their practice and explore the potential of social pedagogy as a framework for doing so. For some homes, the project could not have come at a more opportune time, and there social pedagogy quickly provided the desired foundation to bring about positive changes by giving homes a greater sense of freedom, responsibility and ownership. One home, for example, went from being rated by Ofsted as 'inadequate' to 'outstanding' over the course of 18 months by fully embracing social pedagogy as the cultural foundation and indefatigably developing relationships – between each other as professionals, with the children in their care, and with the outside world (other homes, social workers, schools, police, reviewing officers, etc.). The difference could not only be felt when walking into the home, it was visible in every young person we encountered there – and it was also reflected in paper work such as care plans, which conveyed a sense of practitioners genuinely knowing the young person.

In this home and in most others, social pedagogy made a real difference through its effect on practitioners. Making a real difference to the care experiences of just one child who has never before felt she had a home or an adult who really cared about her is truly priceless. And we should not forget that many residential care practitioners work towards this every day. By valuing their important contribution and relating social pedagogy to who they are, what they do and how they do it, the Essex project has had a profound impact on many lives in ways that have made all the struggles and frustrations feel insignificant in the light of its achievements and benefits. The testimony of one young person, reported by The Who Cares? Trust³¹, reflects the difference made collectively: 'social pedagogy has made a big difference. Things are easier to do and there's a better relationship with staff. We have campfires, family barbeques, we go on holiday together. It's beautiful here. I see this place as my home, not a children's home.'

³¹ The Who Cares? Trust (2010). Children's Homes – What's Up? *Who Cares Magazine*, Issue 91, Summer 2010, 20–21.

VII. APPENDIX I – REFLECTIONS ON BEING IN CARE

This is the contribution of a 16-year-old boy who came into care at the age of 5 and has lived in mainstream residential care for the past 5 years. When his home was threatened to shut down he felt so strongly about it that he wrote a letter to the Prime Minister³². His words convey something of what it means to feel cared for, which is why we decided to reprint them here:

I believe we should all develop our emotional understanding involving the past, present and future
The past is not an excuse for negative behaviour; however, the excuse has become the present situation.
For each one of the children that come to the home, you need to give them a whole of a time when possible because they deserve it.
You should try to understand each individual as they come whatever their upbringing or their circumstances.
Why not take advantage of the disadvantages when all you have are carers.
I believe we should take advantage of the unnatural opportunities that present themselves (those that may not occur in usual family life) and I don't feel I should be penalised for doing this.
I feel I should take full advantage of spending time with staff as it makes me comfortable and safe.
Because we come from disrupted backgrounds we should make the most of it and make the best of the situation.
We need a united approach, an ongoing chain so we can have stability. We need to be able to revisit any issues without feeling unable to. We need reassurance that we will be listened to.
Certain things may occur which make doing certain things not possible, but there should always be compromise.
People should be considerate towards those who are very deep and insightful. I am very deep and insightful. I get confused over what makes a 'family environment' and having to commit to an 'independent' structure. It's never going to be a natural feeling when going home on contact or staying here but I am pleased with the outcome of my past experiences and am now focused on my future (joining the army).
Children should not be expecting everything. I think we can have a combination of an 'over the top' fun time and have boundaries.
Children are behaving badly because of a bad start and it's because they have lost hope and they need it back.
They have a bad start but they can have a brilliant middle and ending. make care a nice ending.
This is care, not something else. I care so does everyone else, they just need to be taught it again.
I want to leave a legacy or an idea because I want other young people to have the best care possible.

³² As reported in the media, e.g. The Guardian on 4th June, 2011 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/jun/04/teenager-cameron-closure-childrens-homes?intcmp=239>)

VIII. APPENDIX II – SOCIAL PEDAGOGY FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF PRACTITIONERS

This paper was published on www.childrenwebmag.com in 2009

A Collection of Reflections

In recent years the exploration of social pedagogy has increased considerably within services for children and young people, especially for children in care. Connected to this is a widespread interest in and curiosity about how 'frontline' practitioners could make use of a holistic and overarching concept that defies definitions and does not come with a 'how-to guide'. So how have UK professionals who have participated in our social pedagogy development courses actually embraced and integrated social pedagogy into their practice? This paper aims to give a short insight into the professional and personal development of some of these participants, who went on a further learning path and submitted assignments which were in turn assessed through ThemPra and the University of Lincoln. To establish an ongoing process of reflection and to enable them to trace their learning, it was a requirement for all course participants to keep a reflective diary. These recordings were the baseline of the assignments, illustrating how practitioners have perceived the input from the course and how they have constructed their thinking and practice from there onwards.

To structure the contributions from the assignments, they have been categorised under the three main elements that are always present in a pedagogic setting, focussing on the main elements of the situation described: The child or young person, the pedagogue, and the task.

Regarding the child, this would mean: What has changed for this child in their everyday life and what does this change mean for their further development?

Looking at the pedagogue, the main focus is on: How do professionals now reflect upon their practice, how do they make use of their learning, and how do they utilise the social pedagogic models?

And finally regarding the task: What is now actually seen as an educational task? How is it now approached? What impact has this change had on the children, colleagues and the overall atmosphere?

The following assignment extracts all originate from residential care professionals in Essex County Council, who ThemPra has been working with very intensively. These examples demonstrate both how social pedagogy is different as well as similar to practice, so while they may not necessarily be new to professionals they demonstrate how social pedagogy underpins best practice, affirms practitioners' confidence and their understanding of a situation, and thereby has a positive effect on the children and young people. The excerpts were also chosen in a way that transcends residential child care – we hope that other groups of professionals will find them interesting and relevant for their practice too.

We would like to thank these course participants for what we believe are valuable insights into social pedagogic practice. And we hope they will inspire other professionals to explore the potential of social pedagogy and to critically reflect on their own practice, as these participants have done. Enjoy reading!

Sylvia Holthoff & Gabriel Eichsteller, October 2009

Directors of ThemPra Social Pedagogy

The Child / Young Person

“The third core element³³ of working as a Social Pedagogue is that I should enable children to empower themselves. This involves making assessments in partnership with users, not on their behalf (Biehal, 1993). In my role as a Pedagogue I feel that this element is important as children should have a say in all aspects of their lives especially in important decisions that involve them (Wolff & Hartig, 2007).

For example we had a meeting at a child’s school regarding his education plan and what we were going to do to help him access education at his pace. Taking the Pedagogue way of thinking I took the child along to the meeting so that he could hear what could be done to help him and so that he could hear it first hand. At the meeting one of the professionals that attended was not happy that the child was at the meeting as she felt she couldn’t talk as freely as she would like. Whilst I understood that it was hard for her to convey what she thought without offending the child I felt that it also stopped her from thinking of the child as just a problem and had to make her think of him as a person as she could see him. I found that the child got a great deal out of the meeting as, when we both discussed it afterwards to make sure he understood what had been said, he seemed very happy and instead altered the plan to suit him better. The original plan involved a few more steps in the arrangement to get the child into school but the child decided to skip some of these steps and move straight to being at the school. I could see that the child felt empowered by this decision as he knew that no one was making him do this and that it was solely his decision, by being at the meeting he could also see how many people were prepared to help him and offer him support to achieve this goal. On reflection I was glad that I had taken the child to the meeting as it had given him the empowerment he needed to make the first steps in re-attending school. (Reflective Diary, September 2009).

This element also focuses on the need for children to be allowed to participate in areas of their lives (NCERCC Development Pack, 2009) and their right to be able to participate (Vrouwenfelder, 2006).”

“What I have learned through my recent reflection is that if you enable the children to attempt to resolve their own conflict a solution is often found. It might not always end in the way that you would have expected or hoped. However, the process is important as it gives them the beginnings of developing the tools that will take them into adulthood. [...] By me handing over the authority to the group to participate in [the resolution], the process was an empowering experience for all the children.”

“On first arriving at the Camp all the young people (and adults) were very keen (anxious) to get settled into their cabins, and were less concerned, as a whole, about the activities available and other children arriving. They also immediately squabbled about bunks and who had the best cabin.

I also remember witnessing the same thing at [a previous] Camp: Initially, and at [the previous Camp], I had put this down to competitiveness mixed with anxiety, and even sought to redirect them and get them prepared for the first activity. However, on reflection I was able to consider this in terms of the Learning Zone Model. I was able to respect that, by the young people ‘merely’ leaving their home to come to camp, they had already left their comfort zone, and I could consider their encroaching anxiety as a sign that they were approaching their panic zone.

³³ Referring to the Diamond Model described above.

Therefore, I understand that their need to identify their cabin and bunk (and possibly start squabbling) were attempts to relieve their anxiety and recreate their comfort zone.

Similarly, we had brought with us several personal items for each of the kids (as is common practice for us, and me, in my private life), such as duvets and pillows and personal effects, which they were also keen to find a new home for. The importance of this is easily identifiable when considered in terms of their comfort zone as being an area of familiarity, and therefore more easily re-creatable with items of considerable familiarity.

(Excerpt from reflective diary completed 19/08/09 reflecting on various events throughout the Camp based over 17-19/08/09)

The importance of one's comfort zone is that it gives space to reflect and recover, and provides a sense of security (Thompson & Thompson 2008). Often young people who have experienced trauma may develop a reduced capacity for learning as anxiety and fear can too quickly over-power their ability to maintain their normal pattern of behaviour and they will exhibit signs of having entered their panic zone. It is therefore important that, when offering opportunities to take risks and explore (entering their learning zone), individuals do not feel isolated and cut off from areas of comfort, such as a personally set up 'homely' bunk."

"Through group meetings and active listening we have focused on finding out how the children feel and have empowered them to make decisions alongside the adults. The children were able to verbalise that mealtimes were particularly difficult for them, so together we looked at ways that would make mealtimes easier for them. Since these discussions the adults have been working alongside the children to lay the table; instead of instructing them to do it, we share the task and the responsibility of the chore. In the discussions it was agreed that the food would be on table so that the whole group could be served together rather than having to queue up in the kitchen which prevented the group from eating at the same time and could be perceived as "institutionalised". Children also felt that the adults often left the table regularly to answer phones or to do other tasks, so it was agreed that the adults would remain at the table until dinner was finished. Then the whole group would share the task of clearing the dinner things together.

The feedback from the children has been very positive, they feel that their views and feelings have been listened to, and this has also been reflected on how the mealtimes have changed, enabling the children to have more positive experiences of mealtimes and more quality time with the adults to help build and maintain positive relationships. The children have also expressed that they feel more valued and that their thoughts and feelings are being taken into account by the adults."

"I now give great emphasis to using the 'Common 3rd' approach to building relationships with the young people. Seeking out opportunities via a seemingly endless scope of activities will allow for valuable bonding between two individuals or groups. By giving way too much attention to non-urgent administrative duties I was attuning myself to the office atmosphere of disillusionment. Some staff members frequently use this space to air their grievances regarding the young people and it is easy to become drawn into that negative culture. To remedy this I decided to utilise my time more effectively and get out of my own comfort zone. Since I was no longer a Key Worker I made the most of building up positive relationships with all the young people. I remarketed myself as accessible and traded admin for activities with a sense of urgency! This helped tremendously towards influencing a positive atmosphere in the home, boosting my own morale and that of others. As I grew in confidence I found myself

directly challenging or preventing negative practice by planning and agreeing intended outcomes of a shift with my colleagues and the young people.”

“I was quite surprised initially that he answered my question, and at first I did not understand why. Was it not a normal thing to do to ask children I work with what they expect from their relationship with me? As I continued to write, the answer I came to was: No, it wasn’t normal working practice and yet it should be.

During link sessions or just ordinary conversations I ask my key children lots of questions such as, what activities they like to do, what more could I be doing for them that they may not think I am doing for them at the moment, and lots of others. Something about that question made our relationship completely transparent and non-hierarchical, as it should be. When I initially asked him I could see he found it a strange question and yet his eyes appeared to sparkle, which is something that is rare for him. I wondered at this point what he had picked up unconsciously in his mind; although he found the question unusual he was pleased to be asked it.

This exercise appeared to have a good effect on the reciprocal relationship with my key child in allowing a more honest and open relationship to develop. In the future I will always ask this question to all young people I work with, so they do not see me as just another adult who thinks they know best about the things young people are looking for in their relationship with adults.”

The Pedagogue

“Up until now I have used reflection as a means to look at a situation that has not gone so well. I now see reflection as a lot more holistic and consciously think about how I approach this. I realise that to develop and grow it is also important to reflect on what goes well too. For me this is a new concept that I hadn’t considered before. [...]

I also have started to realise, through my reflections, that I need to take a deeper level of ownership of my actions and to question what I am feeling – to give myself the time to ask myself the question, ‘why I am I feeling this and what does it mean?’ This has enabled me to question some of my responses to the children’s requests and actions. “For example, one of the children asked me to get him a flip chart out of the art cupboard. There was a lot of activity going on around us at the time. I responded immediately with ‘no, not now’. I was able to recognise my feelings at that moment, which was agitation. I reflected back to him that I have said ‘no’, but I don’t know why I have said ‘no’, only that I feel agitated at this moment and can see that he also feels agitated, because I have said ‘no’. I became aware that it was only a flip chart and questioned why he can’t have this. It became apparent to me that I felt agitated as the children had a lot of items from the art cupboard and in my opinion the lounge was starting to look messy. I thought that what was messy for me was in fact a creative activity for the children. What I was able to do was to acknowledge my feelings and talk this through with the child”. *(Excerpt from the Reflective Diary)*

Fast-forwarding on to recent events, and once again my fourth key child, Sam³⁴, has no school placement. I am, however, fully committed to accommodating her needs by including her and others who are off school in a variety

³⁴ Name changed for reasons of confidentiality

of tasks during the day. She is very unsettled by the idea of a new school and has been out of the educational loop for some time. During a school day Sam and I went out for some key time together, which involved a simple walk and lunch out. Being sensitive to her feelings towards school I chose not to raise the issue; however, Sam seemed settled enough raise it herself. We talked about how her trampolining classes went, and she explained what moves she could do and how she would like to continue with this. She then talked about school, as she had witnessed 3 young people refusing to attend this morning. I explained that consistent refusal of things like education and health appointments may result in a placement being reviewed, and that she should try and take advantage of the support that is being offered and to not let herself be influenced by the choices made by others. I sensed we both felt comfortable chatting and therefore shared my own personal experiences of school, both positive and negative. Her response was: 'Well, I'm not wearing a uniform!' I gave her a big hug and said 'We will cross this bridge when it comes to it but believe this to be a vast improvement on previously refusing to attend school whatsoever.' We then planned to celebrate by baking a cake when we got home. I intend to inform the staff team of this development at the coming meeting and request that consideration is made to plan a variety of tasks that will provide stimulus throughout the day. (*Reflective Diary 10.09.09*)

The opportunity presented itself to act on my initiatives and this took place during a team meeting. I had put an item of School Refusal on the meeting's agenda, and I talked to the team about when the young people refuse school their expectation is not to be given time or opportunities to discuss this in a relaxed environment. I explained the difficulties of currently having two young people without school placements and how planning needs to happen to keep them stimulated. The same should also be made available for those not at school as a platform to engage them as per the Common Third Pedagogy approach. I mentioned that if the young people are continually dismissed there are consequences. Often they get more and more agitated and tend to push the boundaries by creating their own distraction of winding staff up intentionally. I highlighted a recent event which culminated in two young people being arrested. The team's reaction was very positive, and we agreed that we need to find a new way of working and should attempt to try new methods to re engage them with school'. (*Reflective Diary, 16.09.09*)

Sam is now looking forward to starting secondary school and has been proudly showing off her new school uniform. For me, a valuable learning experience has taken place. Employing the technique of reflection has certainly enriched my practice and given me the confidence to convey my ideas with conviction; and, equally important, Social Pedagogy has helped tremendously towards re-establishing my enthusiasm. It has provided a framework within which to challenge and support events and experiences that occur within the life-space of the home. Using head, heart and hands to share this life-space holistically and therapeutically is, as I emphasised earlier, simply common sense.

I love the Pedagogical way of reflective practice; I see it as essential to the work. Mullins (2006 pg 348) and De Janasz (pg 32) use the "Johari window" as a simple model for looking at self insight, and the reduction of hidden behaviours, through self disclosure and through feedback from others. The "Johari Window" is the window of opportunity. In a crisis unit the young people display all kinds of behaviours, as do the staff reciprocally in their relationship with the young people. If there was more time for reflection rather than just being reactive to the young people's behaviour ... for example a child breaks a window, so what will the sanction be? Staff are missing the communication from the child and straight away resorting to a sanction.

“The Pedagogue is a practitioner. Who they are as a person plays a major part in how they fulfill their role. The 3P’s plays a major part in how they then work with the young people. The first one, **Private** or privacy: I agreed with the statement and wrote in my diary that I agreed because I thought that one of the Pedagogues’ roles was to draw out the child, not to impart information which could distract them from seeking insight into themselves into seeking insight into someone else. **Personal**: This to me is the pivot of the 3P’s. Reflection: Asking questions such as ‘where is the child at this moment in time?’ ‘Where does the child need to go?’ ‘How can I/we progress towards this?’ ‘Am I providing developmental opportunities for the child?’ ‘Am I moving too fast/too slow?’ ‘Do I need group support to give an over view?’ ‘Does the child need a new face who could broaden their developing skills more effectively than you?’ Total transparency and honesty with self is needed. No matter how good we are at something (or how good we think we are), there may be someone else whose unique skills may be just the trigger needed. **Professional**: This also is where reflection is crucial in order to remain objective. When a young person is displaying disruptive behaviour towards you or other people it allows you to key into where they are coming from and why they are acting in such a way.”

Initially I sought to resolve these arguments and stop the bickering, laying down rules that I considered to be in the best interest of the group and also enabled staff to better maintain the supervision of the group. I later considered that, as the young people wanted to demonstrate their ownership of their cabins and were able to discuss, or argue (mostly on equal terms) what rules they wished to abide by, I backed off and allowed them to decide for themselves what they wanted to do.

(Excerpt from reflective diary completed 19/08/09 reflecting on various events throughout the Camp based over 17-19/08/09)

Through this process the young people were able to develop their sense of ownership and also feel empowered to make decisions over an important part of their camp experience.

The Task

“Pedagogy has enabled me to think more critically about how I use my time when I am with the children. To really experience and share the living space with the children for me becomes ever more important. This means to be fully engaged and authentic in my relationships. One particular incident enabled me to fully appreciate the time and experience I had shared with a young girl:

I was sitting in the playroom with the other children, and we started an activity that involved someone tapping actions on a person’s back and made stories up to the actions. There were four children and two adults involved, and we would take it in turns to be tapped and be the person who tapped. This resulted in a lot of laughs and enthusiasm to continue with each other. Gradually the rest of the group began to leave the playroom, leaving the young girl and myself. We both were still experiencing the excitement of the previous game. We were looking at each other and she stood up and made a silly noise and waved her hands about. I immediately stood up and did the same thing. She laughed and said ‘copy me’, which I did, and then I said ‘copy me’, which she did.

This went on until her bedtime, and each time we would fall down together on the sofa laughing uncontrollably. As she was going up to bed she called out ‘that was good, it has made me so happy, I’m going to go to bed happy

tonight'. I remained on the sofa and felt a warm glow inside. I felt happy, and this was compounded when I heard what she had said." (*Reflective Diary excerpt*)

"Before the team undertook the [social pedagogy] training the term "education" related more to an academic sense of the word. The training has helped us to look at the overall [meaning] of the word and the importance of educating the children in all aspects of life."

From viewing this in a social pedagogy way I have now learnt that what we were doing was not conducive or at all beneficial to the child. This was also confirmed when the child still refused to attend school. By 'boring' the child we were not giving the child any opportunity to want to learn for themselves or offering them a situation in which they could help themselves – and in actual fact [this] was putting them further into their panic zone, making them feel that there were only two sides: school, which they hate, or being bored, sat in a corridor at home. By giving the child worksheets to complete, this was not creating a situation where it was possible for them to learn, and in many instances the child would rather rip up the worksheets rather than complete them.

By taking a Pedagogic stance with this situation I found that the child would respond more by doing things that relaxed them and that when they were in this space they were taking more in and actually learning. For example, by taking the child to the local shops to buy ingredients for a cooking exercise, they were doing maths and learning life skills without even realising.

When working with a child who is refusing to attend school I now question myself about what it is I should give them to work from and explore other situations I can create that may give them more opportunity to learn. I also reflect more on how they must feel and how their refusing to attend school is telling us something rather than just them being defiant.

For example, one of the children refused to get out of bed and get ready for school. Rather than force him or give him ultimatums about what would happen if he did not get up, I left him in bed and dealt with getting the other children off to school. There is a lot of chaos that goes on in the morning, and I thought that by leaving him in bed it would stop the situation from affecting the other children and possibly stop them from going to school as well. I also thought that the extra chaos may also have a detrimental effect on the child, who was already worried about going to school. I kept on checking on the boy, however, and gave him his uniform, so that he knew that he was not forgotten and that he could get up and get ready if he wished. Once the children had gone to school I went back up to the boys' bedroom and chatted to him about why he did not want to go to school. I recognised that his reasons for not going made me feel agitated, and for personal reasons I felt that I needed to get this child to school. I became aware that the child may be telling me things he thought I wanted to hear to cover up his true angst about school and instead asked him further questions about what he didn't like about school. From our conversation I understood that the child was worried about a certain subject and instead offered to help him with this. The child got up, and when he was ready we started to read through his textbook. The child said he did not want to sit in the classroom within our home, and I could see that this was causing him to become agitated, so I instead offered for us to sit outside and look through it.

*What I was able to do was recognise my fears about the child not attending school and allow him the opportunity to want to learn. (*Reflective Diary, September 2009*).*