

Theory *meets* Practice

ThemPra Social Pedagogy C.I.C.

ANNUAL REPORT
ON THEMPRA'S
COMMUNITY INTEREST 08/09

Gabriel Eichsteller
Sylvia Holthoff
Mike Tidball

www.thempra.org.uk

ThemPra Social Pedagogy Community Interest Company



1. WHO WE ARE

ThemPra Social Pedagogy C.I.C. is a community interest company with an ambitious vision: we believe that children and young people deserve the best and that a social pedagogic workforce can improve children and young people's life experiences through creative, holistic and child-centred services.

Behind ThemPra are the three directors Sylvia Holthoff, Gabriel Eichsteller and Mike Tidball, complemented by our two associates, Lotte Harbo and Robyn Kemp. Sylvia and Gabriel have developed and facilitated the first social pedagogy seminars in the UK, which were part of the 2007 pilot project run by the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care and funded by the Social Education Trust, for which Mike was acting as Company Secretary. As part of the project Robyn introduced us to residential child care in the UK, and Lotte was one of the social pedagogues who contributed to the other part of the NCERCC pilot project – in a nutshell, that's how we all met.

In order to drive social pedagogy forward and to expand from these experiences we have set up a social enterprise which symbolizes the synergy of social pedagogy in theory and practice: ThemPra. ThemPra stands for *TheorymeetsPractice*, which reflects our style of working and way of thinking. We have set ourselves the ambitious overarching aim to support the development and implementation of social pedagogy in the UK in various ways.

2. INTRODUCTION

Set up in September 2008, ThemPra Social Pedagogy is celebrating its first anniversary. Within the last year we have been very active in supporting the development of Social Pedagogy within the UK, working in England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. This short report aims to give a brief outline of what we have achieved in our first year and how our work has benefitted the community of professionals and children in care we have set out to serve.

Community Interest Statement

ThemPra Social Pedagogy Community Interest Company provides benefits to various groups within the general community. Through its emphasis on Social Pedagogy ThemPra promotes a positive approach to children and young people, particularly those looked after by local authorities.

There is overwhelming evidence that children and young people benefit in their personal and social development where professionals are trained Social Pedagogues (see research by Thomas Coram Research Unit, University of London – Petrie et. al, 2006). This is especially relevant for those children and young people who are disadvantaged as they can be helped to achieve better outcomes and improve their life experiences through a social pedagogic approach (cf. conference by the international child care organisation FICE International and National Children's Bureau, 18/01/2008).

The pilot training in Social Pedagogy, which we designed and delivered for the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care in 2007 (see National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care/Social Education Trust report: Introducing Social Pedagogy into Residential Child Care in England, 2008), clearly demonstrates the manifold immediate and long term benefits that Social Pedagogy offers to children in public care.

The issues were discussed in a workshop in Ghent, Belgium in October 2007 involving several local authorities and voluntary agencies in the UK with social pedagogues from a number of European countries. The impact of this work on practice and thinking in individual children's homes managed by these agencies is now being independently evaluated by Dave Crimmens, Reader in Children's Social Care and Education at the University of Lincoln.

ThemPra will offer a variety of services, described below, which will complement the interest in social pedagogy of the Department of Children Schools and Families and also the academic work of the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the Institute of Education, University of London.

Our focus will be to provide a service to local authorities, voluntary and private agencies, based on the assessment of their needs, to improve the quality and focus of their work practice, within a businesslike framework agreed between ThemPra and its clients. This has already generated very positive support from a number of local authorities and other agencies in the UK, with whom we have already worked, and we have received a number of enquires expressing interest for the future.

While we ultimately aim to contribute to improving the lives of children and young people, we are aware that this requires raising the quality of the children's and young people's workforce. Therefore ThemPra will predominantly educate and train professionals in Social Pedagogy.

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3. ACTIVITIES IN 2008/2009

From the outset, ThemPra defined its activities in four different strands and envisioned the benefit to the community as follows:

Activity	Benefit to the community
<p>Activity Strand I: <i>Providing personal and professional development courses and consultancy to children's and young people's workforce</i></p>	<p><i>Thoroughly trained professionals who are capable of using core pedagogic principles in their practice, thereby improving children's and young people's overall well-being and personal and social development. It must also be noted that this serves to improve professionals' self-confidence, knowledge, abilities and skills.</i></p>
<p>Activity Strand II: <i>Promoting Social Pedagogy through workshops, conferences, public speaking, publications, partnership working and networking with similar-minded or interested organisations</i></p>	<p><i>Professionals are offered opportunities to consider how they can adopt a social pedagogic approach.</i></p> <p><i>These activities are also suitable to drive the implementation of Social Pedagogy forward on a national level, raising awareness for the benefits of using Social Pedagogy and how this will reflect on the Government's strategy and outcomes for children and young people's in "Every Child Matters".</i></p>
<p>Activity Strand III: <i>Conducting research in adaptability and advantages of working with a social pedagogic approach</i></p>	<p><i>Since Social Pedagogy is still a very new approach in the U.K., though not in other European countries where it has been established for many years, much will have to be done in order to convince the children's workforce and their managers of the benefits.</i></p> <p><i>By conducting academic research and ensuring scientific evaluation of ThemPra's work, we aim to provide evidence as well as find out what approach in adopting Social Pedagogy is most viable.</i></p> <p><i>This will help other professionals to consider different options as to how they can make best use of Social Pedagogy within their work context. Our work will also complement the work of other academics in the U.K.</i></p>
<p>Activity Strand IV: <i>Developing accredited qualifications enabling practitioners to train in social pedagogic approaches to care and education</i></p>	<p><i>As most practitioners are qualified at NVQ level, we aim to provide opportunities for them to gain an accredited qualification in social pedagogic approaches for care and education.</i></p> <p><i>We hope this will have the double effect of qualifying the workforce better using present and familiar structures and will possibly encourage some practitioners to pursue an academic qualification during their career.</i></p> <p><i>The aim of up-skilling the children's and young people's workforce is very much in line with Government initiatives and the work of the Children's Workforce Development Council.</i></p>

Here is a list of the activities we have undertaken in each of these strands to benefit the community of children in public care and the professionals who look after them in children's residential homes:

3.1 ACTIVITY STRAND I:

Over the last 12 months we have run a total of 9 social pedagogy courses with 3 organisations: Essex County Council, Sycamore Service in Kirkcaldy, and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. Participants in these courses came from at least 15 different children's homes and have since been active in implementing social pedagogy across their work place.

The project in Essex County Council is being independently evaluated by Dave Crimmens from the University of Lincoln. Whilst no official research report has been published informal and anecdotal feedback has been very positive, with many participants outlining how Social Pedagogy has made a positive difference for the children they look after. In a televised interview with the BBC1, one child at an Essex children's home we have been working with said: "Before they started to mention all this 'pedagogy' [sic.] thing, they didn't do as much involving us," one ten-year-old explains. "Normally, the adults make the decisions but, instead, they let us help the adults to make the decisions." ¹

Our 9-day course with Sycamore was evaluated by Ian Milligan, assistant director (education) at the Scottish Institute of Residential Child Care. His report also highlighted the benefits of social pedagogy to professionals and, by extension, the children in their care. Milligan concludes that:

"There is no doubt that the programme has been very highly rated by the participants, who consist of a cross-section of Sycamore Services staff with varied levels of qualifications and experience. [...] It is striking that staff with diverse levels of previous training, and length of experience, appeared to be equally positive about what they had gained personally from the course."²

The professional relevance of social pedagogic theory was also underpinned by the following feedback Milligan mentions: "A number of participants said they valued the 'theory' they had learned during the course and that this helped them to make sense of both the overall Sycamore approach and their own work practice. This was a notable finding because there were no questions which asked about 'theory' as such."

¹ Broadcast on 3rd February, 2009, on the BBC1 News at 10. See also the blog by Mark Easton, the BBC's home editor, who interviewed children and staff at the children's home:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/markeaston/2009/02/caring_about_children.html (last accessed on 04/09/09).

² Milligan, I. (2009). Introducing social pedagogy into Scottish residential child care: An evaluation of the Sycamore Services social pedagogy training programme. Available for download online:
http://www.sircc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Social_Pedagogy_Final.pdf (last accessed on 04/09/09)

These findings confirm the message we have been receiving from nearly all participants who have learned about Social Pedagogy and have found it very useful and relevant for improving the life experience of children in care, as well as reaffirming and clarifying their professional understanding and identity.

3.2 ACTIVITY STRAND II:

Conferences and lectures

ThemPra has presented about Social Pedagogy on two major conferences. The annual conference of the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care took place in Manchester on 5th November, 2008, where Sylvia and Gabriel ran a workshop on further developments in Social Pedagogy. The session was attended by around 70 delegates.

At the bi-annual History of Youth Work and Community Education Conference, organised by *Youth & Policy* and the University of Durham from 7th until 9th March, 2009, Gabriel gave a keynote speech on the history of social pedagogy. Sparking lots of interesting discussions among the 90 delegates, the presentation helped raise interest and thoughts about the parallels between youth and community work and social pedagogy.

In addition, Gabriel also gave a lecture at the School of Health and Social Care at the University of Lincoln on 11th June, 2009. The focus of this presentation was to outline how social pedagogy brings theory into practice. An audience of 40 fellow academics, practitioners, and senior managers joined him.

Publications

As one of the key ways of increasing professional understanding of Social Pedagogy in theory and practice, we have been very active in writing articles aimed at a wide range of audiences with different backgrounds.

- The *International Social Work and Society News Magazine* published Gabriel's article on Social Pedagogy in Britain.³
- As the online encyclopedia *Wikipedia* lacked a description of Social Pedagogy, we wrote a detailed article about the principles, characteristics and historic developments of Social Pedagogy, pointing at a range of other online resources.⁴
- For the *Children's Webmag* special edition on Social Pedagogy we provided various articles and descriptions of practical pedagogic concepts, which we also discuss in the courses. Again, our interest was to make these concepts

³ Eichsteller, G. (2009). Social Pedagogy in Britain – further developments. *International Social Work and Society News Magazine*. Available online: <http://www.socmag.net/?p=456#comment-6177> (last accessed: 04/09/09)

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_pedagogy

freely available and known to practitioners with an emerging interest in Social Pedagogy.⁵

- As a new magazine for the children's workforce, the *Every Child Journal* was keen to publish an article on Social Pedagogy in its very first edition. We wrote an article on Social Pedagogy in practice, which is aimed at early years professionals, teachers and educational support workers.⁶
- A more theoretical, academic article on the important pedagogic thinker Janusz Korczak has now been published in the *International Journal for Children's Rights*. In addition to opening up Social Pedagogy to a whole new audience, this article helps provide more detailed background reading for those with a developed interest in Social Pedagogy and its tradition.⁷

Website

A further useful tool to increase the understanding of Social Pedagogy is our website, www.thempra.org.uk. Rather than just featuring details on our services, it contains a lot of resources about the history of Social Pedagogy, several core theoretic concepts, and descriptions of what the practice of social pedagogues is all about. Over the last months we have had a steady increase in visitors, with up to 1,600 page visits per month. This demonstrates that the website has become a well-recognised online resource that captures people's interest and contains useful information – it is much more than a marketing tool.

Interviews

Over the course of our first year, we have not only written articles about Social Pedagogy but also contributed to journal commentaries and articles on Social Pedagogy. Amongst others we gave interviews as part of the *BBC1* report on Social Pedagogy and residential child care (03/02/09), and were quoted in articles in the two of the most influential magazines for the children's and young people's workforce, *Community Care*⁸ and *Children & Young People Now*⁹. Although what was being printed about Social Pedagogy was not always accurate, it linked in with our aim to promote the understanding of Social Pedagogy as it publicized what is happening around Social Pedagogy in this country.

⁵ <http://www.childrenwebmag.com/articles/social-pedagogy/towards-a-pedagogic-conceptualisation-of-risk> (last accessed 12/09/09)

⁶ Holthoff, S. & Eichsteller, G. (2009). Social Pedagogy in Practice. *Every Child Journal*, 1(1), 58–64.

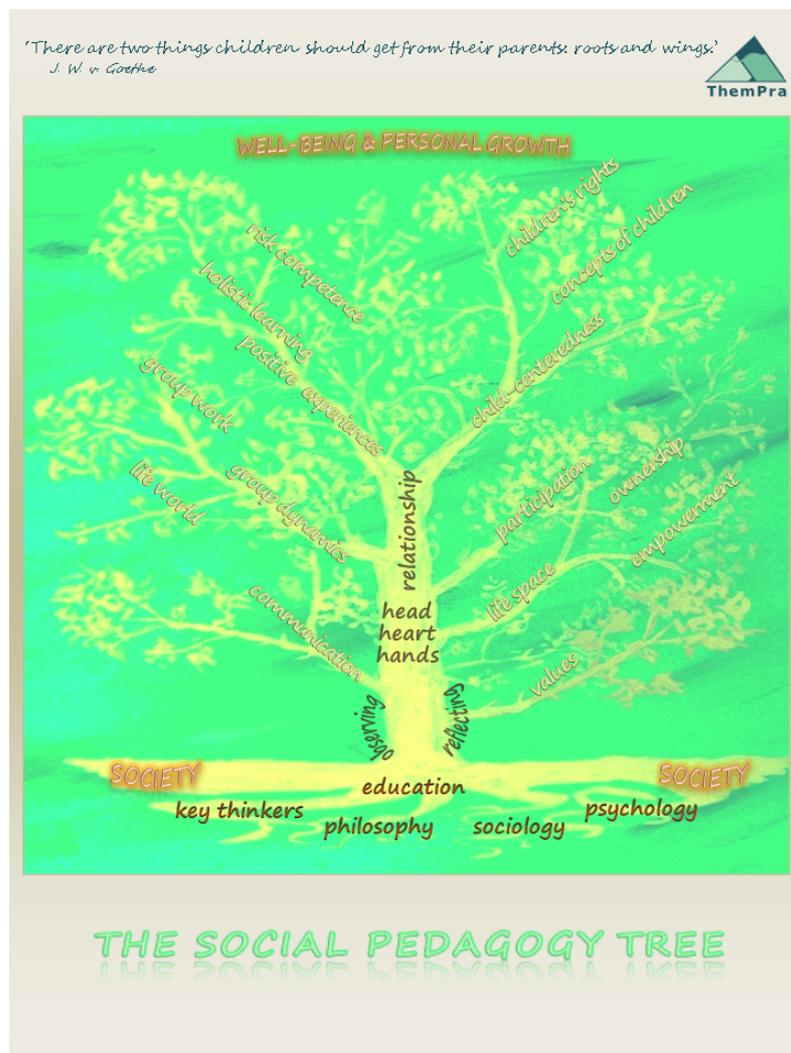
⁷ Eichsteller, G. (2009). Janusz Korczak – His Legacy and its Relevance for Children's Rights Today. *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 17, 377–391.

⁸ Oxtoby, K. (18/03/2009). Social Pedagogy in Practice. *Community Care*. Available online: <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2009/03/18/111007/social-pedagogy-in-practice.html> (last accessed: 04/09/09)

⁹ Lepper, J. (02/04/2009). Social Pedagogy Demystified. *Children & Young People Now*. Available online: <http://www.cypnow.co.uk/inDepth/ByDiscipline/Social-Care/895194/Social-Care---Social-pedagogy-demystified/> (last accessed 15/05/09)

Social Pedagogy tree postcards

As a more creative form of raising interest for Social Pedagogy and people's understanding of what it constitutes, we decided to distribute around 400 postcards with a model we have developed to illustrate what Social Pedagogy is about. As the actual understanding of the roots, concepts and elements of Social Pedagogy is still somewhat vague amongst many professionals, these postcards with the so-called Social Pedagogy tree (see below) helped to capture people's interest. In addition to the picture of the Social Pedagogy tree, we attached a small package of tree seeds together with a step-by-step guide for growing a Social Pedagogy tree.



FICE-England

In our continuous effort to link in with other organisations active in building a tradition of Social Pedagogy in the UK, Gabriel agreed to be a member of the FICE-England shadow board. FICE-England is the national branch of the International Federation of Educative Communities, which promotes child and youth care

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throughout the world and bases its work on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Our commitment to FICE-England has enabled us to get a complementary perspective on the issues affecting the community we are serving.

ThemPra residential

With the aim to stay in close and regular contact with representatives of the communities of residential child care workers and children in care, whose best interest is at the heart of our work, ThemPra organised an international residential in Ueckermünde in Germany. We invited the two national centres for residential child care – *NCERCC* and *SIRCC* –, the charity *A National Voice*, which advocates on behalf of children in care, and other organisations and individuals from various countries we have come to work in close partnership with. Over 4 days in January 2009 we shared international perspectives on residential child care and worked out what ThemPra has to contribute to improving the life of children in care and how this could be done jointly.

We also decided that this type of residential will take place biannually, and the next ThemPra residential will take place in October 2009 and include more practitioners, academics and leading thinkers in residential child care.

Social Pedagogy Development Network

The high publicity that has been given to Social Pedagogy over the last year or so has led to various developments across the country. Many organisations seem busy exploring what benefits and improvements Social Pedagogy could bring to their service. Recognizing that a meaningful construction of a UK tradition of Social Pedagogy will happen best in synergy, cohesively with all key players, we have decided to set up a *Social Pedagogy Development Network*, which will bring together the various Social Pedagogy pioneers across the country. We believe that the links between these pioneers and the sharing of their experiences provides a unique chance for a practice-led grassroots movement towards Social Pedagogy and helps build a tradition of Social Pedagogy that draws on existing best practice where possible.

In this spirit, we have approached the *National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care*, the *Thomas Coram Research Unit*, *Jacaranda Recruitment*, and *FICE-England* to act as fellow organisers, which they were keen to do. The first of hopefully a series of free-of-charge network events will take place on 27th November, 2009, and the response from the sector has been a very positive one, with around 25 different organisations requesting to send delegates. ThemPra will facilitate the event and liaise with the hosting organisation.

3.3 ACTIVITY STRAND III:

In our first year we have decided to focus our energy on the other activity strands and on growing as an organisation. Therefore we have unfortunately had no time to realise our research plans and actively conduct research.

However, the research and evaluation of ThemPra's projects in Essex and Sycamore (see above) has helped and will continue to help achieve the intended benefits to the community, which are to demonstrate the importance of Social Pedagogy in developing high quality practice that is grounded in relevant interdisciplinary theory, humanistic values and children's rights.

3.4 ACTIVITY STRAND IV:

One of the challenges in developing a UK tradition of Social Pedagogy is the difference in training and qualification that practitioners have to undergo to work in residential child care in the UK as compared to social pedagogues in Germany or Denmark, for example. Social Pedagogy is a full-time 3½ year BA degree in most European countries, and not a quickly explained or learned approach. Therefore, ThemPra has been keen on developing a qualifications framework that addresses some of these differences.

In partnership with the University of Lincoln, we have developed an accreditation framework for our 6-day course. This course is now accredited through the University, which will award 30 CAT points at level 5 to students who have signed up to do the course as a module. In effect students have to submit two assignments that demonstrate how they have linked the learning from the course to their practice. This accreditation helps participants to develop a reflective and critical understanding of Social Pedagogy with regards to their own practice, and it gives them a personal stake in their professional development.

Based on these experiences and recognising the need to have a practice-based qualification, we are currently also developing a level 3 qualification for the sector. The National Minimum Standards for Residential Child Care require 80% of practitioners to be trained to level 3. For us this means that if we want practice to be underpinned by Social Pedagogy, there needs to be a level 3 qualification in Social Pedagogy, although we consider this very much as an entry-level qualification that aims to encourage students to develop themselves further beyond level 3 and hopefully reach comparable levels of qualifications as in continental Europe. Our efforts to develop such a qualification have so far proven difficult due to changes in the qualification system and a lack of finances. We have met with the *Children's Workforce Development Council* and have prioritised this project for year 2. We have also applied for matched funding.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, ThemPra's development over our first year has been a very positive one, with a range of different projects that have hopefully helped accelerate the discourse about how to improve the life experiences of children in care. We are committed to continue our efforts to make a meaningful and sustainable contribution to this discourse as well as to improving the practice of those professionals that work with children in care and beyond.

This is not to say that their practice is inadequate; quite the opposite, we believe that good professionals are open-minded to new ideas, concepts and perspectives, to critically reflect on what they do and to strive for ways of developing their practice. This is where Social Pedagogy fits in, and it is how we want Social Pedagogy to be understood – as a way of enhancing what works best and doing more of the type of work that makes a difference in children's lives.

As part of this it becomes more and more apparent that we need to take a systemic perspective. Most professionals are doing their very best to care for children, but are often restrained by policies and procedures. It is the systems that will require more attention in the future, if we want to embed Social Pedagogy into organisational practice. With ThemPra we are now in a position where we can make this clear to inquiring organisations from the very outset, and we hope that this will help generate success in implementing Social Pedagogy, thus encouraging further organisations to follow suit.

We are very much aware that we are at the beginning of a long, challenging but inspiring journey. ThemPra will try our very best to enthuse organisations to take on this journey, and we will continue to help lead the way in any way we can.

Contact:

Directors:

Gabriel Eichsteller	Sylvia Holthoff	Mike Tidball
gabriel@thempra.org.uk	sylvia@thempra.org.uk	mike@thempra.org.uk
+44 1248 810238	+49 3971 125724	+44 1727 863650

Associates:

Lotte Harbo	Robyn Kemp
lotte@thempra.org.uk	robyn@thempra.org.uk

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