

Social Pedagogy and Foster Care: A scoping paper

To inform

The Fostering Network

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Introduction

In late 2010, TCRU was asked to undertake a short scoping exercise, designed to map the current interest in social pedagogy among foster care training providers and other stakeholder agencies. This was part of The Fostering Network's programme of work with the aim of drawing together 'the learning so far in translating European models of social pedagogy into the UK and to explore how such models could be used within a foster care context' (Fostering Network Briefing Note 2010).

In order to complete this paper, we conducted telephone interviews with 13 service providers and representatives of national agencies. These interviews were secured on an opportunistic basis: professional contacts were forwarded to us and in the time available we interviewed as many as possible. With more time, we may have been able to conduct further interviews which would offer further perspectives on the issue of social pedagogy and foster care.

We were also able to examine the following documentation:

- Evaluation of the impact of Holding the Space: a training initiative by Action for Children
- Evaluation of training at Sycamore children's services, Scotland
- Diploma in social pedagogy (outline), Norfolk County Council
- Reports of the Care Matters pilot in Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC)

In this scoping paper we address three main questions:

1. How social pedagogy frameworks guide the provision of foster care in European countries, particularly Denmark
2. What evaluations and lessons are there from the various initiatives in the UK to introduce social pedagogy
3. What possible options and routes might The Fostering Network take to introduce social pedagogic practice into foster care.

1. What has social pedagogy to offer the development of fostering in the UK?

A brief definition

Social pedagogy in the UK is becoming an increasingly familiar term in children's agencies in the UK. Interest in it began to arise from at least the 1980s, onwards, as a result of professional and research interchange with colleagues in continental Europe. These interchanges often focussed not on social pedagogy directly, but on the services in which social pedagogues work, such as early childhood education and care, youth work and work with various groups of children and adults in challenging life circumstances. Since around the late 1990s, research and development has focused more directly on social pedagogy itself. Perhaps the most significant development undertaken has been the DfE pilot project, introducing social pedagogy into children's residential care, undertaken at TCRU.

Pedagogy is a term that relates to learning. For English speakers, it is typically used to discuss matters that arise in formal education, teaching and learning in the classroom, college or university. Social pedagogy, as used in much of continental Europe, has a different meaning, with three distinct but related areas: policy, practice and theory. A definition at the policy level is policy that addresses social issues by, broadly speaking, educational means – rather than, for example, via benefit, fiscal, housing or justice measures.

Social pedagogy practice

The whole child: Social pedagogues work with the whole child, aware that children think, feel, have a physical, spiritual, social and creative existence, and that all of these characteristics are in interaction in the person. This approach is in contrast to the more procedural methods used in working with children, sometimes found among some English care workers (Petrie, et al 2006). And while pedagogues seek to work with the whole child they also bring themselves as a whole person, to their practice. It is quite common for them to refer to bringing 'head, hands and heart' to the work.

The heart: Social pedagogues should bring their hearts to their work as ethical and emotional beings. They are aware of their own emotional reactions to the work and how these can affect their relationships and communications with children and others. They treat others with respect and aim to build security, trust and self esteem through their relationships with other people. They empathise with others and try to see their point of view knowing that this will often be different from their own – they sometimes speak of this as different people having different 'life worlds'.

The hands: Pedagogues see their work as practical, relationships are formed in the course of everyday practical, ordinary activities such as preparing food, taking children to school. These are not treated as merely mundane activities, but as the medium for the relationship

The head: Social pedagogy practice develops through reflection. Practitioners assess their work in the light of theory and self-knowledge and on this basis, make decisions about taking the work forward, according to the best interests of children and young people.

The 3 Ps: Social pedagogues sometimes speak of the '3 Ps', the Professional, the Personal and the Private. As professionals they are aware of their responsibilities towards others and they bring professional knowledge, skills and attitudes to their work. At the same time, they see themselves as persons: fellow human beings with colleagues and children, not afraid to express feelings, or talk about their lives or share humour and fun. But they also judge which matters are private and should remain so, deciding what is for sharing and what would be inappropriate to share.

Sharing the Living Space: Social pedagogues see themselves as sharing the same 'living space' as the people they work with. They try to get away from feelings of 'us and them' between different professionals and between adults and children ensuring that, whatever the setting, a group values all its members. In the 'living space' all group members are equally persons, with a right to participate and be heard. Pedagogues work 'in dialogue' with children and colleagues, believing that different perspectives make for richness and creativity.

The common third: An important concept of social pedagogy is that of the common third - a mutual focus and the medium in which relationships are formed. Sometimes these are creative activities, sometimes more everyday tasks and sometimes just playing and having fun together.

Teamwork: Social pedagogues value teamwork and the contribution of other people in bringing up children. They try to form good working relationships with other professionals and members of the local community, and especially with parents and carers.

Role models: In all aspects of their profession, social pedagogues are aware of being role models for the adults and children they work with, especially in the respect they show to others, their attentive listening and supportive responses to other group members.

Social pedagogy and fostering in Europe

This section draws on findings from three studies conducted at TCRU, but principally on a study of fostering in Denmark, France, Germany and Sweden conducted in 2004-5 (Petrie 2007). In general, foster carers were not qualified as pedagogues in any of the countries visited. Exceptions were found in the professional foster care provided by a few agencies in Eastern Germany and in the Danish *Opholdssteder*. The *opholdssteder* model provided an example of residential provision that combined a professionalised (social pedagogic) approach with a homely environment for children whose needs were unlikely to be met by foster care provision, but who required a less intensive model of intervention than that offered by residential care.

However, the principles of pedagogy were apparent in the training and support of foster carers which, with the exception of Sweden, were often carried out by people who held qualifications in pedagogy. France, for example, required foster carers to complete 240 hours of training, which was often delivered in schools of social work which also trained *les éducateurs spécialisés* social pedagogues.

In the countries studied, the perceived strengths of the pedagogic approach for foster care included that it provided a 'normal' way of thinking about children and their upbringing, and that it focused on children's strengths and their everyday activities.

Over the three countries, training covered a wide spectrum of subjects including child development, separation and attachment theory, upbringing, protection, nurturance, respect for rights, meeting needs, supporting relations with the child's family of origin, the profession of foster carer working as a team member, the legal context, communication, reflection and social pedagogy. Methods of training included formal presentations and lectures, sharing and discussing experience, and the use of case studies, vignettes and role play.

In all countries, experiential methods were said to be particularly important, because they built on and developed personal reflection. Group work was seen as the context for obtaining a balance between 'professional' and personal perspectives and for developing the foster carers' skills and understandings.

Staff involved in supporting and training foster carers were often themselves social pedagogues and able to draw on their own pedagogic theory and knowledge of child development. Importantly, their experience and education provided insights into working with 'the head, the hands and the heart', all of which are required in fostering.

In addition, pedagogues were often employed specifically to support the placement of children and to work directly with them during the placement.

Denmark

Currently, 47 percent of children in care are in foster care placements in Denmark, of whom a small proportion are placed with kin carers (Bryderup and Trentel 2010). The general tendency is that younger children are placed in foster families and older children are placed in residential care centres. The TCRU study found that nearly all (90%) placements have the voluntary agreement of the parents. Foster placements are of three main types: respite care, ordinary foster care, and *opholdssteder* (literally, 'a place to stay'). Most foster placements are relatively long-term, often throughout childhood; about 25% last less than two years. Egelund and Vitus (2008) found that of 227 teenagers placed in care in Denmark in 2004, 26 percent had a placement breakdown within the 15 month study period, while 59 percent had a stable continuous placements and 15 percent had a planned change of placement.

Children's views about their placement must, by law, be listened to from the age of 12, and all placements of young people aged 15 and over must have the agreement of the young person concerned. Municipalities can continue to fund a foster placement until the young person is 23 years old.

About one third of foster carers are thought to have relevant professional background, such as a degree in pedagogy, social work or teaching. Very few come from non-Danish ethnic backgrounds. Most are self-employed, and paid a two-part fee by the municipality: one part (taxable) varies according to the demands of the placement and the child's needs, and is reviewed annually; the other (non-taxable) covers 'board and lodging'. Some foster carers (usually pedagogues) run mini-institutions (*opholdssteder*), and foster three or more children placed by a municipality, in a domestic environment with 'professional parents'.

In Denmark, both municipalities and independent agencies (there 14 of the latter, organised into an umbrella association, *Familieplein*) have responsibility for recruiting and supporting foster carers. The regulatory environment for fostering in Denmark is set by municipalities in conjunction with two trade unions who represent foster carers. Municipality staff inspect each foster care home annually; social workers draw up and review action plans for each child every six months. Trade unions organise foster carer networks to provide local support, and hold annual national meetings of network leaders.

The TCRU study found that support was unevenly available across the areas visited, but included: additional training days; monthly visits and telephone support from *kurators* (counsellors employed by foster care agencies); formal therapeutic supervision (either individually or as a foster care couple) with a therapist or psychologist, paid for by the family or the municipality; support network meetings and holidays.

At the time of the study, there were few problems with recruiting foster carers. Their conditions of work were professionalised and were the same across the agencies. There was some paid holiday entitlement. Fee levels were broadly equivalent to the salary of an unqualified pedagogue. Foster carers are a relatively stable group, and so recruitment was focused on increasing numbers, rather than maintaining supply.

Training was not a legal requirement, and unevenly available. Some was highly developed, especially in the Familieplein agencies. One municipality in the study had established a training programme for new and existing foster carers in conjunction with a social pedagogic seminarium (university college) and the role of the training coordinator, who was a pedagogue, was critical in this arrangement. The most frequently mentioned training programmes were RUGO (a government-supported programme) and PRIDE (Parental Resources for Information Development and Education), both of which are competency based and include pre-service training at the assessment stage, and stage two training after foster carers are approved.

In a recent cross-national study of young people in public care and their educational pathways that included Denmark, about half the young people interviewed had had a main placement in foster care and these were in general highly valued (Bryderup and Trentel 2010). There were some difficulties with foster carers, and these were usually first placements.

On the whole, those young people who changed placements described it as a turning point in their lives, without which they could not have reached their educational ambitions. Those young people who lived with only one foster family described the experience of living with a foster family as very positive and supportive. Educationally supportive foster carers were those who offered practical help but more than this talked about educational possibilities for the future and helped them shape their plans. This most often happened in families where the carers were well educated themselves and had their own children, where the 'families were well functioning, where they talked and ate together and generally had a nice time' (Bryderup and Trentel 2010: 109).

The salient features of Danish foster care families that could be described as social pedagogic was that they offered young people a place where there was space to be on their own and with others, where there was a sense of community and where they felt they belonged. The families offered reliability and presence: 'living in a foster family offered them the peace of mind that they needed but which they never obtained when living with their biological family or with their first foster family' (ibid.). Moreover, supportive foster carers did not lose contact when the young person left home. As Naja said: 'I have great contact with my foster family. I saw them yesterday, I often see them. I go to visit them and stay overnight and if you are tired it is great as they cook for you and take care of you.' (Bryderup and Trentel 2010: 109).

Social Pedagogy: Developments in the UK

Below we outline some current developments in the UK

Organisations and networks

Centre for the Understanding of Social Pedagogy (CUSP) at the Institute of Education A programme of research, from 1999 onwards, conducted at Thomas Coram Research Unit, the Institute of Education, has investigated the theory and practice of social pedagogy in continental Europe and its role in services such as children's early education, residential care, foster care and family support services. This programme is the foundation, in 2009, of CUSP led by Pat Petrie, as an international forum to promote research, and teaching in social pedagogy (<http://www.ioe.ac.uk/research/40899.html>).

Jacaranda Recruitment

Jacaranda Recruitment is a small (7 full-time staff), provider of recruitment, consultancy and training services in Social Pedagogy and Social Work led by Abby Ladbrooke (further details from www.jacaranda-recruitment.co.uk). It places social pedagogues and social workers from Europe in permanent jobs in the UK and offer training and consultancy in Social Pedagogy. Jacaranda sponsors and runs the social pedagogy website (www.SocialPedagogyUK.com) with an editorial team consisting of TCRU, NCERCC, SET, ThemPra and Jacaranda. Jacaranda was the official recruitment partner of the TCRU for the DfE funded pilot programme in Social Pedagogy in England that took place between 2008 – 2011, and also works with local authorities, private companies and charities providing residential child care. Jacaranda runs training and development programmes in social pedagogy, notably in Derbyshire.

ThemPra (Theory meets practice)

ThemPra is a social enterprise, formed in 2008, to provide training courses and promote social pedagogy across the UK, mainly through offering bespoke and in-house training courses. ThemPra was begun by Gabriel Eichsteller and Sylvia Holtoff, two German social pedagogues. Since 2008, ThemPra has been working with Essex County Council, among other employers, focusing initially on children's residential care but included some foster carers. Through a combination of training courses for residential care workers, direct team support and work at a strategic level, social pedagogic practice has developed. Practitioners report significant learning, supported by organisational change (www.thempra.org.uk).

ThemPra is also active in Scotland, providing courses for staff at the child care charity Sycamore Service and on behalf of the Scottish Institute of Residential Child Care (SIRCC). Courses have also been run in Northern Ireland, with two teams of the Belfast Health & Social Care Trust.

Social Pedagogy Development Network

The Social Pedagogy Development Network is led by ThemPra in partnership with CUSP, NCERCC, Jacaranda Recruitment, and the English branch of the international children's professionals' organisation FICE (Fédération Internationale des Communautés Éducatives). This is a grassroots movement for shaping and developing a UK tradition of social pedagogy. Meetings have been held in November 2009, June and November 2010 and April 2011. These were hosted by local authorities and were well attended (around 70 participants at each) from across the children's sector and higher education institutions, in the UK. Another meeting for 2011 is planned in Scotland. Further information on the Network can be found on www.thempra.org.uk.

Social pedagogy training and consultancy group

The group – Thempra, CUSP, Jacaranda, NCB, - has been meeting at the IOE since early 2008, to exchange information, collaborate and identify ways forward for training and education in social pedagogy, in England. The original group has been joined by representatives of Break, Norfolk County Council and the University of Lincoln.

Training and education in social pedagogy

Essex County Council

Around one third (150) of the county's residential child care staff from all 12 children's homes have undertaken initial six day training courses in social pedagogy with trainers from ThemPra. The training was supported by awareness-raising and team-building days for whole teams to contribute to ongoing strategic developments for the residential service. A full-time Development Officer has been appointed for children's residential services to help support the development of social pedagogy. The project is being evaluated by a practice based researcher and further training is in development. However, the County Council has now planned to sell its residential homes.

Walsall Borough Council

Walsall is undertaking a Social Pedagogy Pilot supported by a training and development programme (provided by CUSP and Thempra) for children's residential services to improve outcomes for looked after children. At the same time, social pedagogues are being recruited to work locally.

Government Office West Midlands and Strategic Health Authority

NCB and CUSP, for Government Office West Midlands and the Strategic Health Authority organised a short series of workshops with Looked after Children's Nurses and other key professionals to identify practical examples of how elements of Social Pedagogic practice and Multi Treatment Foster Care can support attachment building and placement stability and (ii) develop training materials for Looked after Children's Nurses / Foster Carers/ incorporating key learning from the workshops.

Norfolk County Council and Break Charity

A pilot Level 3 diploma has been undertaken with 20 students, 15 from Break and 5 from Norfolk CC, all of whom are residential care workers. This will feed into a planned FdA (Foundation degree) in Social Pedagogy accredited by UEA (Department of Education).

Staffordshire County Council

Staffordshire is participating in the residential care pilot programme. Higher management has a history of interest in social pedagogy and desire to introduce it and embed it within the authority. They have bought in additional training for staff, are seeking to appoint more social pedagogues and have appointed an officer with special responsibility for introducing social pedagogy in Staffordshire.

This summary is indicative of interest and is not exhaustive as the situation changes rapidly.

Social pedagogy and creative activities

Participation in creative activities is important in the education and practice of social pedagogues in many European countries. Helen Chambers (NCB) and Pat Petrie (CUSP) have examined the rationale for this in Denmark in a project funded by the Arts Council England (Petrie and Chambers, 2009).

For Culture Creativity and Education, Chambers and Petrie produced a learning framework (REF), informed by the principles of social pedagogy, for artists working with looked after children, but applicable more widely. The framework has been used as the basis for many training events.

Sing Up's programme, promoting and delivering singing opportunities for primary age children, has been extended to looked after children, based on the artist pedagogue framework, and has been evaluated accordingly by CUSP (report forthcoming 2011).

Five workshops were delivered on the arts and social pedagogy to children's services and other personnel and arts practitioners in different parts of the country, as part of the DfE pilot programme. Others were delivered as part of the West Midlands work (above).

Further and Higher Education

Modules: Accreditation & Assessment

ThemPra's social pedagogy courses can be accredited as a course module through the University of Lincoln. Participants have the option of gaining 30 credits towards a level 5 degree-level qualification in a related subject. This provides participants with a range of academic options. Credits are transferable, and no formal enrolment with the University of Lincoln is required. In order to gain accreditation, participants are required to undertake 2 formal assignments. Jacaranda has had a 40 credit module accredited through the University of the West of England. The CWDC has developed a Unit on Social pedagogy which can be taken as part of the Level 3 Children & Young People's Workforce Diploma. At the time of writing this was not yet available on the CWDC website.

Degree programmes

There have been the following developments in University degree programmes:

- The BA in Social Pedagogy, Aberdeen University and Camphill Schools, follows a social pedagogy curriculum attuned to the practice and philosophy of Camphill Schools

- The BA (Hons) Social Work, University of Portsmouth, includes a module on comparative social work examines European and international models of social work, including social pedagogy
- The Foundation Degree, Working with Children: education and well-being, Institute of Education, University of London, includes modules informed by social pedagogy
- The MA Working for Children & Young People: Youth Work at University of Wales, Newport has an optional module on social pedagogy
- The MA in Social Pedagogy, Institute of Education, University of London, started in September 2010

Less explicit reference to social pedagogy but nevertheless informed by it can be found in other education programmes in the UK including:

- Various BA degrees Early Childhood Studies which developed in the early 1990s were informed by continental traditions of educating pedagogues to work with young children.
- The MSc in Advanced Residential Child Care, Glasgow School of Social Work, as one of the objectives of the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care (SIRCC) initiative.
- Residential courses for managers, senior workers and care staff run by the Planned Environment Therapy Trust and the Mulberry Bush Training organisation
- Various degrees in Youth Work are in harmony with the principles of social pedagogy

Activity in Scotland

- Children in Scotland has been helping the Scottish Government to promote discussion and debate around the children's sector workforce. There has been a particular focus on the role, practice and education of pedagogues and the contribution this model might make in workforce development. Scotland's Minister for Children and Early Years asked Children in Scotland to arrange a study visit to Denmark for a small group of those involved in managing children's services and delivering qualifications to them. Their report is available on www.childreninscotland.org.uk/workforce.

- Children in Scotland is also leading a cross-European programme, Working for Inclusion which is examining how improving the qualifications and skills of those working with young children can help reduce poverty and improve social inclusion. A full list of publications is available at www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi/wfi5.htm
- As well as the University courses mentioned above, there have been across- sector learning conversations about developing social pedagogy more widely in Scotland.

2. Evaluations and lessons from experience to date

In 2007, Care Matters signalled government interest in exploring the potential of social pedagogy to improve practice, and outcomes for young people, in England. A pilot programme for residential care was introduced. This programme focused its activity on working with employers to recruit social pedagogues trained overseas who would work alongside staff as social pedagogues, introducing their approaches to practice as they did so. The evaluation of the programme will become available in late 2011. Initial indications from the development and implementation team are that in some cases the social pedagogues have been very successful in working with existing staff and management to reflect on practice and in so doing have often challenged and changed current practice. Conditions for such success included having: highly supportive managers who are ‘hands on’, responsive, locally based and empowered to take decisions; the same managers throughout the project period; highly thoughtful and effective social pedagogues; a stable staff group, who are open to change and development; and a well connected employer organisation within their local area, which assists inter-professional working and raising awareness about social pedagogy. Some employers simultaneously introduced in-house training, usually around 6 – 9 days duration over a period of months, supported by a combination of awareness raising days, champions, mentors and critical reflection groups in order to sustain momentum.

However, some of the residential care pilot sites were not so successful, and some of the factors to be aware of in planning new pilots include the sensitivity of new ideas as an affront to the competence of practitioners, a perception of things ‘foreign’ as suspicious, and the perceived insensitivity of new knowledge and practice at a time of severe financial difficulty and job insecurity. There is also an issue about expecting dramatic changes in a short period of time, and what change, exactly, is reasonable to expect both in staff practice and in outcomes for young people.

In this section we will set out the perspectives of scoping paper informants on social pedagogy and what they had done or were in the middle of doing as regards models of training for fostering carers. We will then conclude with a discussion of two aspects of training. The first is the place of foster carers in the context of a 'team around the child' and consider whether training should be focused on a broader range of occupations, and the second aspect is informants views on whether in fact training is the best way forward given the diverse constituency of foster carers.

Views about social pedagogy

Informants from the field of foster care held a range of views about social pedagogy, and these had an impact on the approaches to introduction of social pedagogy that they could envisage in foster care. Some thought social pedagogy was a philosophy or a disposition, a way of being that signalled an ethic of practice about working with children. One said that 'social pedagogy feels like the most holistic and wholesome way to bring up children' but it was not necessary to train foster carers to get a diploma in social pedagogy. Rather, action was needed at other levels, such as training the trainers and the supervising social workers so that they had a social pedagogic framework for their practice, and this would 'transfer to the carers' through the training they offered. For example, she said carers have got better at understanding attachment, but they need to look at the whole system around the child. A social pedagogic framework would help with that.

Another informant, a local authority manager in an area that had been exploring the potential for social pedagogy for around a year, first in residential care services and subsequently with their specialist 'contract' carers, saw the benefits of social pedagogy as providing an 'ethos to the support the work in contract care'. For the residential care workers, she had seen a positive change in terms of generating a less adversarial context for practice, that workers felt listened to and better support, and more confident about their practice. In particular, the residential care workers had benefited from working with creative arts and developing their reflective practice. The contract carers would be having six days of training, coupled with mentors and follow up reflective practice groups, later in 2011. However, the informant said that the process of getting involved with social pedagogy had been 'extraordinarily time consuming', with a 'lot of development work for yourself' and 'not everyone is up for it'.

For other informants, social pedagogy was a profession and the danger of offering short courses in social pedagogy was to reduce it to a series of methods or instruments that bore little resemblance to the continental profession of social pedagogy. One informant said that 'social pedagogy is not just a concept for the disadvantaged in society, it's an overarching concept relevant to all services'. By focusing most

attention on work with the most disadvantaged was to risk losing a focus on the central concern of social pedagogy, to 'use creativity with young people, understanding the child as the middle of their attention' ... and 'working with the right to develop one's own life'. For this informant, foster carers should ideally be offered a minimum of a Level 3 training in social pedagogy, and with opportunities to continue learning beyond this at foundation degree (Level 5), BA and MA. This informant stressed how important it was to have a thorough grounding for practice, through training, and that 'it takes time to develop your personality' through training. She thought higher expectations of training would make foster care more attractive and would give them more professional credibility.

The point about duration of training was also made by an informant, a therapist, responsible for a therapeutic training course delivered to residential care workers and foster carers in the North East that she considered a their model to be 'more full and more directly therapeutic than social pedagogy'. This was called Holding the Space, and, for foster carers took place on 24 days over a year. She assessed the length of time of the training as an important part of the carer's development, so that they can practice the skills they learn and develop their own capacities during the training period. Quite uniquely, she thought, the programme had been able to 'skill up carers who don't have a formal education themselves, to address complex issues'. In the eyes of this therapist, most carers need to have the skills to therapeutically 'hold' young people, particularly important where residential facilities were under threat of closure and local authorities would be increasingly reliant on foster carers to look after very psychologically damaged young people. The Holding the Space programme had proved its worth in bringing about 'a radical change of culture' about the possibilities within care settings, for a more 'healthy and fulfilled future' for young people, and for young people to 'define their own outcomes'. Using the Way of Council, a group based method inspired by Quaker practices, and those of indigenous peoples from various parts of the world, the programme teaches respect, listening, mutuality and reflective practice. Through this foster carers and young people gain self confidence and foster healthier relationships. There are clearly a number of overlaps with social pedagogy in this programme including the importance of building caring, warm and also boundaried relationships within which young people can develop (Stevens 2010). An evaluation of Holding the Space within residential care showed a dramatic fall in numbers of incidents such as physical restraint, aggression, failure to return and an increase in educational engagement (Stevens 2010).

Overall, there were two main views about social pedagogy: one that it was a philosophy or disposition, a way of being that was humanist, ethical and respectful. Developing a social pedagogical

approach required a commitment to self-development through critical reflection, engagement in everyday activities but not everybody is up for it. The second main view was that social pedagogy was a profession requiring extensive formal training and introducing it via short courses would be of limited benefit compared to continental European expectations of knowledge and skills. Other respondents either did not know enough to comment or, in one case, thought social pedagogy did not offer sufficiently in-depth therapeutic methods to address the needs of young people in care.

Training models and how social pedagogy might fit into them

Most commonly, fostering providers interviewed offered the introductory Skills to Foster course over three or four days to those intending to register as foster carers. The Skills to Foster course was satisfactory to meet the CWDC standards and was sometimes adapted to a local area or a particular therapeutic perspective. Once approved foster carers would then have access to a range of short training courses, that: a) met the agencies needs or those of external bodies, such as health and safety or child protection; b) met the carers needs, such as courses aimed at specialist topics or settings; and c) sustained the carers interest in learning as they got more experienced. After this, the only courses leading to a qualification mentioned were:

- A Level 3 Diploma in social pedagogy, being offered by Break Charity and Norfolk County Council to three foster carers for the first time in 2011. A Foundation Degree was also being developed that would potentially be open to foster carers.
- The Holding the Space programme by Action for Children which had been accredited at Level 4 when delivered for residential care workers, but had a shortened form for delivery to foster carers and was not accredited for them.
- A six day in-house training led by Jacaranda, but the Level and accreditation for this was not clear to the informant. Subsequent information is that this module is at Level 4, accredited by the University of the West of England.
- A seven day training for foster carers and supervising social workers together, led by ThemPra.

Access to training and qualifications was reported as becoming increasingly difficult in the current financial climate. In one authority, the fact that foster carers were not employees of the authority was being used to suggest there was no responsibility to train them at all. The implication was that trainers time was not to be used for training foster carers. Feedback from one course, one year on, was that while the experience of training in social pedagogical concepts and methods was highly valued, some of it was in conflict with policy and procedure and this made it difficult to implement. Furthermore, to take social pedagogy further, foster carers and supervising social workers believed that children's social workers would also have to be on board, and included in training, as well as other professionals the fostering service worked with. In a large local authority under extreme financial pressure, the scale of this exercise proved difficult to surmount and the social pedagogy in foster care part of the project had faltered. In this local authority the direction of training overall was to offer a range of options including a level 3 diploma, 'hands on' training and distance learning options.

There would appear to be two main options for introducing social pedagogy via the training models currently in existence. One is that the main preparation course, Skills to Foster, is re-written from a social pedagogical perspective. Several informants thought this would be a useful exercise as it would show up where any disjunctions may lie between the professional standards for fostering and the principles, practices, methods and expectations of social pedagogical practice. It would also enable new recruits to fostering to be educated in a social pedagogical perspective from the start. The second is that social pedagogy is seen as a Level 3 type qualification for 'advanced foster care practitioners', as part of their developing expertise, and giving them a sense of belonging to a children's workforce where their expertise counts. It would also give foster carers a springboard for further educational development via foundation degrees and beyond to BAs and MAs.

In either case, and they are not mutually exclusive, the requirements for continuing professional development, the curriculum and the topics available for ongoing training would also need to be scrutinised to ensure they were taught in a way that was in tune with social pedagogic principles and approaches.

Overall, there were few actual models of training in social pedagogy for foster carers. For the most part, training has been developed for residential care workers, and adapted and sometimes condensed for the purposes of delivery to foster carers. There is therefore little to go on in terms of modelling an existing training programme for an anticipated pilot in foster care. A central question is whether to direct training at new recruits (preparation training) or established carers, and this is

related to the level at which the training is pitched. It may be worth trying out both in demonstration sites.

The place of foster care in the team around the child

Foster care sits within a system of support for young people consisting of the carer, a supervising social worker, and sometimes an intermediate layer of support such as a family support worker, whose role is to offer practical help in supporting young people with activities, either directly or via the foster carers. Foster carers also have to engage with the children's social workers, and other professionals with a contribution to any particular case, such as psychologists, teachers, health workers and so on. Specific groups of carers may have more sustained contact with this wider group of professionals, such as contract carers or treatment foster carers who have a specific remit around young people with more serious traumas and/or challenging behaviour. The question arises as to whether it is possible to introduce social pedagogic approaches to foster carers without also introducing it to the wider group of professionals.

Informants thought supervising social workers were the most immediate group of professionals of relevance to foster carers. The purpose of the SSW role, all of whom were qualified and experienced social workers, was defined by the national minimum standards for foster care. For the most part, informants described their role as about 'support and performance, meeting the standards'. The scope for reflective work within this role varied. For some it had become overly bureaucratic because of the way performance was measured against targets and this meant less opportunity to analyse practice in a reflective way. In two, both independent, agencies, the role of the supervising social worker was described in a more holistic way. In one, the social worker had responsibility for training, mentoring and supporting the foster carer, dealt with payments, prepared a review report and made sure that development plans were implemented for foster carers. In the second, the social worker made weekly visits for a period after registration and then this reduced to fortnightly or perhaps less frequently. Supervision was about support, advice, thinking things through (discussing the attachment style of a young person was given as an example). The social workers in the team were described as varied in their approach, some task centred and some more therapeutic. The team also had support workers who offered practical help to foster carers, did group work with young people and carers, or they could do individual play therapy or art therapy or life story work with young people. Overall, there was a strong sense of a team of support for the carers rather than an accountability exercise.

In one local authority area, half the supervising social worker posts were under threat of deletion. Moreover, the informant from this area said that local foster carers complained about the social workers not offering enough support, not helping with decisions, and not having enough time to think through their concerns.

All informants thought that it would be important to include supervising social workers in the pilot activity in some way. There were mixed views about whether to include them in training with foster carers: in one case this approach had had difficulties due to social workers' higher level of background knowledge and use of 'jargon', which was off-putting for foster carers. There, they thought one should offer training for supervising social workers first and then offer it to foster carers. For another informant, if the 'learning' or activity was set up to be practical and applicable and 'fresh' to both parties, and in an organisation where innovation was demonstrable, it might be possible to engage both groups simultaneously.

Looking beyond supervising social workers, other social pedagogy projects around the UK have shown that a multi-disciplinary or 'whole service' approach seems to generate an enthusiasm and commitment to learning. It has to include all levels, from councillors and managers through to assistants of all kinds. It has to be driven by someone/a group and has to be 'championed' at middle management, who have access to senior managers and credibility with staff at all levels. In one example from the residential pilot, a respected and experienced children's home manager who recruited two social pedagogues, worked with them and then began to talk about his experience to other managers in the authority. His credibility meant the experience was taken seriously and council members and staff began to have some familiarity with social pedagogy.

Overall, the effectiveness of training appears dependent on supervising social workers, children's social workers and others working with foster carers having some familiarity with social pedagogy and being able to recognise its particular contribution to foster carers' practice. Ideally there would be whole organisation 'buy-in'. As one informant said 'it has to be right through the whole culture'.

Is training the best way forward?

While most of the informants were used to a model of initial and ongoing training for foster carers, there were some who questioned whether training by itself would meet the needs of the foster care workforce or whether practice changes would be sustained through training initiatives.

There is an example of specialised foster care training to learn from in England. Following development in the USA, the Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) project began as a pilot in 2003. It used a model of two days of training in Social Learning Theory and implementation of the model before a child was placed and after completion of the Skills to Foster training. The carers expected to have a child placed with them within a few weeks of the training, and were supported by daily contact with a clinical team, completed daily reports on the young person, and attended weekly meetings of the area foster carers for training and support. Within the same project there was also a KEEP (Keeping Foster and Kinship Parents Supported and Trained) programme, which was a 16 week training programme based on the same principles as MTFC. Again there is post training support, including weekly contact, the completion of regular reports on the young person and monthly groups which aim to be supportive and reinforce the KEEP components (National Implementation Team Annual Report 2010). These two programmes are reported to be highly effective in improving outcomes for young people (ibid.), although the generalisable evidence from the USA regarding these programmes is limited (Macdonald and Turner 2008).

In terms of engaging foster carers, this model of focused, formal and supported training was reported to be highly successful, although some local authorities had difficulty retaining the carers in the scheme – often they converted the placement into a long term one and left the scheme. This meant considerable effort went into recruitment and training on a rolling basis. All the carers who took part in the annual audit praised the training which they saw as a programme or ‘mind set’ (as one said) to follow, gave them confidence, and the results were ‘quick but long term’ (National Implementation Team 2010:68). These foster carers were not untypical of the foster care workforce in most respects: most had grown up children of their own, were in their late 40s and 50s, two thirds were married or cohabiting and three-quarters were white British. Their level of education might be slightly higher than is generally expected for foster carers: ‘almost half (45.8%) of the carers are educated to GCSE or A level standard, a smaller proportion (11.4%) to degree or postgraduate level and 37% have some other qualifications’ (National Implementation Team 2010: 66).

This experience, and that of the Holding the Space initiative described above, suggests that a tightly focused programme, with ongoing support, can successfully train foster carers to a high level of competence for working with young people with multiple difficulties in their lives.

However, three of our informants were quite cautious in recommending training programmes for the majority of foster carers as the principal means of their development. One, with an extensive

background in training from a range of perspectives, thought there was an immense diversity of carers. Some, she said, would go an extra 25 miles for a child, and others had difficulties with academic or literacy based training and the extent of their ambition for young people was to provide a roof over their heads. Some foster carers felt undervalued by social workers and other professionals, and she thought there was too often a culture of low expectations for young people in care. In this climate, there would need to be careful selection of foster carers who could make use of training. Some very experienced foster carers were perhaps not ideal candidates for training in new approaches because they emphasised their own tried and tested experience as against the 'bright new things with new ideas'.

Furthermore, there were often difficulties in scheduling training to maximise take up and in cooperation with existing training provided with by an employer. It would be important to avoid only the 'best' foster carers, or the same few, turning up for training each time and to extend participation to as many carers as possible. This informant thought that 'if you could get the right foster carer in their home and ask a few carers along', for some focused activity or 'learning sets' ... 'that could be very productive'. She said 'the good ones are very person centred, know a lot about relationships, they care, are knowledgeable about the everyday world of foster care and their heart is in the right place. But they tend to talk in terms of knowing what does not work, not framing things positively and reframing (by a trainer) is very hard in those circumstances'. She thought perhaps starting with new recruits would be the best way forward.

A second informant, from one of government offices in the regions, also thought that 'too much' training should be avoided. In her experience, foster carers complain about being expected to go on training, especially when it was timed before a child had been placed, or it was on topics they considered irrelevant. Rather, foster carers would benefit from multi-agency 'learning sessions' that help them feel part of a looked after children's team, have immediate relevance and practical application in everyday life. She thought social pedagogical concepts such using the arts, the common third, enjoying each others company, and sharing the living space were useful ways to think about the content of learning sessions/training. If social pedagogy training were to be offered, it should focus on the children's services as a whole, especially social workers, to broaden their focus away from protection issues and risk avoidance and onto participation and enjoyment.

The third informant in this group, a lecturer and researcher with a background in continental European practice, thought that the relationship between social pedagogy and the cultural climate of parenting was important for setting the expectations for foster care. The cultural climate in the UK was not

conducive for social pedagogy. She thought it important for foster carers to work with a strengths perspective, where carers understand a child's life experience and work from there, not imposing a standard developmental 'ages and stages' approach. Parenting support for issues such as challenging behaviour (via training programmes) was important, but at least as important was bringing them together through everyday enjoyable activities such as going bowling, and building training and development around social activities. Furthermore, foster carers needed support such as childcare, to enable participation in activities, residential and so on.

These three informants raised important questions about the homogeneity of foster carers, and the universality of learning models based on 'training'. In particular, it would appear important to recognise the diverse body of foster carers, their circumstances and learning needs and ambitions.

Overall, it would appear that a differentiated approach to training is necessary. For some foster carers, advanced training is appropriate and leads to an increase in competence and confidence in carrying out specific programmes (such as MTFC). This may be those with higher levels of general educational qualifications (but not necessarily). However, a substantial proportion of foster carers would not volunteer for advanced training and/or are suspicious of training as offering something over and above or perhaps competing with their experience as a source of knowledge. Engaging this group in social pedagogy (or other advanced) training would be difficult. Another social pedagogic option is to build up a culture of carers and young people engaging together in enjoyable everyday activities that are framed around pedagogic concepts and are facilitated in such a way as to enable subsequent reflection to take place.

3. Taking social pedagogy forward

In this final section we discuss some factors that need to be taken into account in designing demonstration sites for piloting social pedagogy in foster care drawing on the informants consulted, and the residential and MTFC pilots. These are: i) characteristics of the organisation; ii) characteristics of the learning environment and iii) characteristics of the carers – or what does a social pedagogic foster carer look like? It should be borne in mind that pilots in themselves have certain characteristics: they are time limited, with a project lifecycle; they tend to be innovative, requiring inspired people to be committed and drive them; they have failures as well as successes.

We then go on to float some ideas for the planned demonstration sites. This must be treated as ideas for discussion only.

Characteristics of the organisation

We discussed earlier some of the features of the more successful sites in the residential care pilot. These can be combined with those of the experience in Essex and with the MTFC:

- Stability of, and commitment from, higher management, including political leaders
- Integration of the idea of developing social pedagogy into the whole agencies' workforce development
- Openness to learning right through the organisation
- A longer-term approach to planning for children's services, resisting the call for short term financial savings
- Involvement of all agencies in a local area at some level – awareness among health and education as well as social care, of social pedagogy, helps. This usually depends on good working relationships between the agencies concerned

Characteristics of the learning environment

- Management and staff who want to learn about social pedagogy and recognise new approaches as having possibilities rather than threats which are to be dismissed
- Continuity of staff, particularly managers
- Staying faithful to the model or commitment made
- Openness to having the whole practice arena challenged – from documentation to interaction to the use of the physical space
- Being comfortable with the language of theory, critical reflection and allowing for doubt and dilemma
- Taking an educational rather than a protectionist approach means taking risks with activities, and self.

Characteristics of the carer or what does a competent social pedagogical foster carer look like?

- Successful Danish foster carers, who are educated within a pedagogic framework, are those that focus on building a community around the fostered young person based on everyday activities and mutual enjoyment and engagement. Warmth of care, presence and reliability are all central. These carers are supported by skilled therapeutically oriented supervision offering opportunities to reflect, reframe and understand the strengths and life circumstances of the young person.
- Research on foster carers has found them to be most successful when they show an authoritative parenting style that combined clear boundaries with warmth and empathy, and responsiveness in action. They take part in enjoyable activities with the child, they respond to the child in relation to their emotional age rather than their chronological age. Foster carers with lower levels of stress, higher levels of social support, fewer children of the same age in the foster home and fewer children under five in the home also tend to be more successful (National Implementation Team 2010).
- Social pedagogues in the residential care pilot are valued for their practical engagement with children and young people through projects, the relationships they build through persistence, trial and error, using activities and an 'other' as a common third, building team work through a focus on communication, reflection and analysis of practice and documentation, and bringing theory to the attention of staff, for example around self-esteem or attachment.
- SCIE (2004) found that the following factors were important in keeping foster carers in practice and these might also be regarded as important support for the competent social pedagogic foster carer: frequent contact with social workers; feeling treated as colleagues; guaranteed respite care; having out of hours telephone support available; well managed payment systems; higher than average levels of pay; easy access to specialist help and advice; opportunities to take part in training with other foster carers as a means of developing informal social support networks.

In sum, a competent social pedagogic foster carer has as their baseline the characteristics of successful foster carers from US and UK research. In addition, they have access to supervision to make sense of

their practice, they understand the young person in terms of their own lives and not predetermined stages of development, and they see themselves as, and are valued as, members of a team around the child. They have 'a because' for their actions: it's not instinctive or instrumental.

Possibilities for demonstration sites

Taking the findings of this scoping paper together, we can suggest the following possibilities for demonstration sites. In all cases the whole employer organisation must feel they are part of the initiative in some way such as whole agency awareness raising days. For this reason it may be better to look for smaller (no of carers, as well as in size of geographic area covered) fostering agencies.

1. New Recruits

- Revise Skills to Foster using a social pedagogic lens
- Recruit a social pedagogue consultant to work with those delivering preparation training and with those supporting foster carers (supervising social workers)
- Offer and facilitate post training/registration support groups that include a training element, and this to include practical and creative activities
- Train supervising social workers and family support workers in social pedagogy
- Prepare written materials about social pedagogy and fostering for all children's social workers and include them in training offered. They should know what to expect from the foster carers when they request a placement
- Review foster carers annually through a social pedagogic lens – e.g., around mutual enjoyment, working with dilemma, own learning etc

2. Experienced foster carers with a thirst for learning

- Offer a Diploma in Social Pedagogy at Level 3, taught together so they can generate a mutual learning group, and with assessed assignments to include a log book of enjoyable activities and how they reflected on them. this to be taught by social pedagogue in conjunction with UK trainer.

- Ask them to commit to an agreed number of CPD days on social pedagogic themes, concepts and practice dilemmas. Supervising social workers and family support workers to attend these days also.
- Supervision of foster carers in therapeutic style (not just tick box competency standards driven)
- Prepare written materials about social pedagogy and fostering for all children's social workers and include them in training offered. They should know what to expect from the foster carers when they request a placement
- Facilitate a programme of creative and practical activities, events, workshops and attendance of looked after children at mainstream events.
- Encourage dialogue modes – email groups/telephone support/blogs/facebook between foster carers and encourage foster carers to talk to others eg new recruits, other professionals about their experiences.

3. Existing foster carers – no special characteristics

- An energetically focused and promoted programme of engagement with the arts/practical activities for all foster carers and the young people they care for in a specific area that brings them together, gives them opportunities to socialise and debate, increases their confidence and enjoyment of being together.
- Programme to be informed, and evaluated, by social pedagogic concepts.
- Foster carers should commit to an agreed number of days attendance per year and their supervising social workers should be aware of their attendance.

Conclusion

This scoping report has summarised current activity in relation to social pedagogy and foster care at one point in time but this situation is one that is in a state of flux as new development activity is commissioned and new experiences generate new knowledge.

Overall, the report has found that while there are very few if any distinctively foster care focused training programmes available in social pedagogy, there is some enthusiasm for developing a social pedagogically informed knowledge base for developing foster care.

Existing evidence on what social pedagogic competent foster carers look like shows that in addition to having the characteristics of successful foster carers known from UK and US research, and a supportive infrastructure, they should also be able to create and consistently provide a warmth of presence for young people in their care, practical and creative activities to enjoy together, and know how to make sense of their work in relation to the young people's life circumstances. As foster carers start at a range of different points on this learning journey, it would make sense to offer a range of different social pedagogic training and development activities.

Appendix One

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