



EU Leonardo Mobility project 'Social Pedagogy – Learning in Practice'

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PREPARATION

I first heard about Social Pedagogy (SP) through a work colleague who had heard a little about it but seemed unclear as to what it actually was and explained it to be how Europe delivers their care.

I attended an 8 day course on SP and by the end of the first day was excited about its concepts and even though I was still confused as to the meaning of it I had heard enough to at least get me interested. As the course unfolded I began to gain a good understanding of the different concepts and the ways in which Social Pedagogues work. I found it hard at first to relate what I had learnt to my work and constantly questioned my practice as to whether I was working in a Pedagogical way. I attended a further 2 day seminar/workshop where as a team of 12 we discussed how we could let other staff and other homes know about Social Pedagogy and from this we developed a book explaining SP which was a sort of quick reference guide that explained the concepts and different models that staff could use which was published and a copy sent to each children's home in Lancashire.

What made me want to go to Denmark was how excited talking about SP had made me and how I wanted to experience it firsthand. It was hard to recognise that I was already working in a SP way having not experienced it.

In order to gain a place to go on the mobility we had to present to a panel and compete for a chance to go. The idea was to prepare a book that any child regardless of age or ability could pick up and learn about food and how it's sewn, grown and nurtured; its history and the different cultures which cook it and enjoy eating it.

I chose to show a recipe about eating curry and how it was made. I chose this for 2 reasons

1. We were told that a Young Person who was moving in had displayed racist language and behaviour and so I thought it would be a good way to raise a conversation around different cultures and also tackle any racist behaviour in a different way. I set it up so that when the Young Person was coming to have his Tea at the home I would be cooking the curry. I arranged that an Asian work colleague and friend of mine would also be on shift to help answer any cultural questions that may arise. He is also a fantastic chef so this was an added bonus. I also borrowed some traditional Asian clothes off my friend and had these on when the YP arrived. The meal was a success and there were some good questions asked, and it turned the YP had been labelled racist and wasn't at all.

2. We ate the meal traditionally without the use of cutlery which was a great laugh and was certainly different.

I delivered this recipe along with a song about eating with your fingers and was offered my place to go Denmark.

After meeting up with the rest of the group who were going in Scotland and Matthew my buddy it soon became clear it was going to be a fantastic experience. I talked with Matthew on the build up to the mobility and got to know him a lot better which helped when we arrived in Copenhagen and made it easy and effortless to spend time with him.

I wish I could explain how close I felt to Matthew and how in such a short space of time a true bond of friendship developed and this made the whole experience not only more enjoyable due to our constant laughing and fun but also easier as I felt I had a real sense of closeness and understanding with him which blossomed as we experienced more and more amazing things over our time there together.

I attempted to learn to speak Danish through a couple of different ways: An app on my phone which proved very difficult and also through a Language CD which turned out to be German!!!

I ensured I had read up what I learned on the 8 day course and went back over the different concepts so that I would be able to hold decent conversations with the staff in Denmark and would understand which

models/concepts they were working with. I spent time looking at the city and watching you tube videos so I knew what to expect. I wanted to blend in and soak up the culture rather than looking like a tourist.

MOBILITY

It took a while to grasp what the Danish culture was like and at first I felt like a total outsider and tourist and felt that I really stood out. I would say it took the first 5 or 6 days to really start to get into the lifestyle and to get used to the practical aspects such as cycling and the safety rules around that. Luckily Gabriel had lived in Copenhagen and was an expert on the cycle lanes.

I felt like the staff I met on the mobility where really passionate about their Jobs and that this seemed to just be the normal view i.e. you didn't stand out for being enthusiastic and that they really did enjoy their work and where there 100% for the children they worked with and when I relate that back to some staff in England that doesn't always seem to be the case.

The big difference I noticed was the wealth of knowledge that the staff have about their profession and how this radiated through their practice and how they interacted with the children. This didn't always seem to be the correct or best practice as the staff at times seemed to be quite distant and this was hard to understand. As the mobility went on and I observed and talked to staff about how they had acted in certain situations it became clear that when the staff had appeared to be distant they were actually teaching the children vital independence skills, something which is started at a very young age.

THE FOREST KINDERGARTEN

A Nursery based on the outskirts of Copenhagen that is split into 3 groups "The dolphins", "The Snails" & "The Swallows"

The children aged 3-5 who I worked with where taught very early on to be independent and taught to deal with the consequences of their actions. This was sometimes as simple as getting them to look for things they had asked staff to find for them in the hope that next time they would know that they could find the items themselves. The staff's views were that this would set them up to be more independent and that from a young age they would learn this to be normal as well as gaining essential life skills. It seemed to work and I have never seen children so young doing so much for

themselves and others whilst having a good understanding of consequences for their own actions. This practice was reinforced by all staff and they worked well as a team as a result of this.

I went out with the children into a local forest where they were given time to play and take safe risks within a controlled environment. The staff observed from the top of a hill whilst the children played and didn't really interact that much until it was needed. They explained that they did this as there was no need for the staff to be constantly around the children as they knew where they were allowed to play and the boundaries of the area as they came here a lot. They explained that this helped build relationships within the group of children but also that all the children knew that if they needed the staff's attention it was their ready to be given without a moment's hesitation. This stood out as this was my first day and at first it seemed the staff where not interested in playing with the children but on reflection this turned out to not be the case at all. All the pre-concepts I had of how I would cope with the language barrier became quite apparent within the first half hour as the looks on the children's faces was quite a picture as I attempted to talk to them in my broad Lancashire accent and they just smiled and laughed as I attempted to speak Danish.

At first I made a great effort to play and spend time with the children and they didn't seem to want to engage which was understandable as I was a complete stranger. It was hard to even get a reply hello. As the days went on I spent time sat with the children outside in the play area whittling wood and making whistles out of branches for them and this seemed to be the way they got to know me. As time went on the children became more interested and more affectionate toward me and wanted to hold my hand or come and sit with me at meal times. I was amazed that within such a short space of time I had developed such close relationships with the staff and children. On the last day the children were starting to look for me at break times and wanted to walk with me. A young girl even chose to come and sit with me whilst they had a story read. She moved my arm to put it around her and cuddle up. It got to the point that when we were outside they had to each hold one of my fingers as they all wanted to hold my hand at once. I even pretended to be a train at one point and led them round the play area. By the time it was time to leave I could feel that I had made a real bond with some of the children and as a parting gift they sang a farewell

song to us which made me cry and I was genuinely sad to be leaving having only been able to spend 4 days with them. An experience I will never forget.

Rymarksvænge

Day1

On our first day we weren't really sure what to expect as we arrived at the home, it certainly didn't look like what I expected it too. As we rode up we weren't even sure we had the right place as it seemed nothing like the children's homes we were used to. The home was a big white building that was split up into a youth club, a residential home and also a separate supported living accommodation where 2 young people lived.

We talked about how the home ran and shared experiences, similarities and differences with our practice with Tina the homes manager. I found that there were more similarities than differences which was a good thing in my eyes.

We later met a woman named Sara who used to work in the residential side of the home but now worked in the supported living part. We again shared experiences and talked about how we worked in the U.K. we helped prepare a meal which we all sat down and ate together with the 2 girls who lived there. I remember feeling that it didn't feel awkward, I have an issue with eating in front of people I don't know which for me is quite hard to overcome at times but somehow in this setting it didn't even cross my mind until later. There seemed to be a real friendship with Sara and the 2 girls and they obviously knew each other well and had a mutual respect.

Later on we went out for a drive and Sara showed us around some other supported living flats which were in an old hospital grounds. A bit too creepy for my liking having watched too many horror films as a child but never the less very safe and secure.

It did seem very much like a prison inside to an extent, it was old fashioned and not really inviting at all. The rooms themselves had a bathroom and a single room which had some ladders going up to the bed area. A very simple flat which seemed suitable for 1 person living there despite not being homely at all.

Day2

We arrived at the home and were greeted by Kristoff, an ex member of staff who had had an idea that involving sport with children was a good way of improving their lifestyles and also motivate them to be more independent and to gain more from life. Kristoff was given a grant by the government After doing some work in the prisons to develop a sports course involving Young People and putting them through a sports qualification. As part of this he works with the young people on their terms and does not push them to be involved but instead over long periods of time shows them that he is there for them whenever they are ready to be involved in the project which overall has positive outcomes and gets more young people involved.

We started with a bike ride to the other side of the city. Now bearing in mind that Kristoff spends 7 days a week doing something physical and riding his bike you can imagine it was a bit hard to try and keep up with him, something I think he realized after a while.

We met a young man called Magnus at the hospital where we had been to the night before and went to the gym with him. Magnus was quite distant at first which we were told to expect. He did however offer a firm handshake and an inviting hello which didn't seem false and didn't leave us feeling awkward. Magnus and Kristoff trained a lot together and Magnus explained that his training gave him something to focus on and that it prevented him getting into trouble which he had been in previously. He explained that it wasn't always easy to find the energy to go to the gym but that he knew that it was on his terms and that made him feel better as he didn't feel pressured to go and arranged the sessions himself.

During the gym session we told Magnus we were impressed by his attitude to his training and the way he held his head high, Magnus smiled and thanked us for the comments. I thought nothing more of this at the time until Kristoff later said that Magnus rarely smiles and that he must have genuinely appreciated the comments.

We then cycled back to the other side of the city to a pedagogue seminarium where we ate lunch and chatted with Kristoff about his work and the different struggles he had faced along the way. We then met up with Martin a volunteer for Kristoff's sports scheme who runs martial arts classes having trained in many different disciplines. Martin introduced us to a young man called Charlie who gave us a demonstration on Kung Fu and showed us some Kata's he had been learning. We spent an hour learning and practicing the different techniques and having a laugh at the same time which was refreshing and a good way to quickly get to know each other within such a short space of time. We then went with Martin again across

the city to another gym session where we met with Stina (a girl from the supported living at the home we were based) who we had met the night before and had tea with. Stina is currently working towards her personal trainer qualification on Kristoff's scheme and spent the next hour and a half putting us through a grueling gym workout and the fact that we had cycled 25 miles and already had 1 gym session and an hour's martial arts training didn't seem to matter as this was just a normal day for her!!!

It was great to see Stina be in control and to have so much confidence with the gym session she was delivering however broken and unconditioned our bodies felt.

After the gym session we cycled to Kristoff's house where we were invited to have an evening meal with him and his wife. To me this meant a great deal as we had only met him that morning and already it felt like we had been friends for a long while. A feeling that was seemingly became more and more common throughout our stay in Denmark.

I WANT TO BE DOING THIS!!!

This was my closing sentence in my diary that night.

Day 3

Today we worked with Briget who works as a leaving care worker. Briget took us to meet 2 young people, firstly Britta who seemed happy to share her experiences with going through the care system and how she had got to where she was now. She had a really inspiring sense of maturity and was confident that she knew what she wanted to get from how life and how she was going to get it. Something that was really refreshing to hear. It was the same with Jensine the second girl we met. Jensine had come from Uganda to live in Copenhagen to live with her father and was now living independently and attending college to become a chef, again something that she was really passionate about and seemingly knowing where she wanted to go with it and how she was going to get there.

Maybe this was Briget's influence as she seemed to have a really close relationship with the 2 girls and said that she hadn't always had this relationship but because she only looked after 6 young people at a time she could put the effort in to developing trustworthy and mutually respecting relationships and that she saw herself as having a mother's role as well as a professional role too and that it was this that over time had formed a strong bond between her and the young people she worked with.

Day 4

Today was our calmest day and we worked inside the residential home where we worked with Mark, a member of staff who had been there for 15 yrs and talked about how the home ran and he explained about the way that staff interacted with the young people in a way to help build independence skills and to also empower them by letting them make their own informed choices but to also be fully responsible for their actions at the same time. We didn't really see much of the children as they were busy doing their own things. We did sit down and eat a meal together which was apparently quite rare so it was nice that they had made the effort to do so. I was presented with a birthday cake which was a great surprise and was a nice way to end my time at the home.

Overall my experiences within the home left me feeling that as part of a staff team quite new to Pedagogy we are doing a lot of similar work. The main difference being the way staff interact with the children. In this home the children were given more freedom about when they came in a night and also having friends and girlfriends/boyfriends stay over at night. It wasn't that they just did everything they wanted too with no boundaries it was more that there was a definite mutual respect between staff and the young people.

I was surprised to find that if a member of staff is assaulted that the child is expected to leave the home straight away and that the police are called. This is something that differs as in England although we have a zero tolerance on assaults we would work with the young person to get to the bottom of why they had felt the need to assault someone. This surprised Mark who couldn't understand this. He explained that the young people were told that this was the case when they moved into the home and that by breaching it they had chosen to do so themselves and as a result would have to suffer the consequences and move out of the home.

I felt I learned a lot by talking to Mark about how to develop my practice. I took on board their non restraint policy when dealing with a young person. I explained that 95% of our restraint system was de-escalation techniques and that the remaining 5% was only used when necessary.

There did seem to be more similarities than differences when talking with Mark which reinforced the good work me and my colleagues are doing.

I felt by the time the placement had come to an end I had gone into emotional and information overload. I believe this was result of a few thing like missing home, missing my son and girlfriend. I felt like I had seen so much good work that I would never be able to express how the people I had met had made me feel. I felt truly humbled and honored to have had

the chance to work with people who are so proud, passionate and motivated by their work and who also through their own values and beliefs are doing amazing things to help positively improve young people's lives.

Their enthusiasm was infectious and this seemed to make a strong staff team that consistently delivered a high level of support.

It's hard to list what I have taken from the Mobility as I'm sure I won't realize myself until I face a certain situation and how I will maybe deal with it in a different way. Since returning to work I have found a new energy regarding my work. I have been successful in securing the funding for a mountain bike project which I will be running with James another staff from Lancashire who went to Denmark and visited the same placements that I did.

I feel that the whole experience reinforced the fact that I am working in a pedagogical way. That is not to say that my practice cannot be improved as it will continue to develop throughout my life.

I felt like I could have easily worked in Copenhagen and that morally and ethically it really suited me. I would hope in the future to gain a qualification in Social Pedagogy and to carry on working in such a way.

I really gained a different perspective about how there is a lot more effort put in to the work they do with the younger children in Denmark. It's not that we don't specifically do this in England but there is a real emphasis on independent skills, teaching about consequences but also carrying them through, teaching about responsibilities and how to care for each other and take other people's feelings into consideration...something I have not seen in practice before. I believe that this effort put in early almost as a pro-active strategy helps the children to tackle any issue's that may arrive later on in life and to better deal with such issues.

In all it was a fantastic experience and it has taught me so much about my work and about life itself. I have gained experience with reflecting something I struggled with originally before the mobility. I have learned to take a step back from a situation and to fully assess it and think of other ways to deal with an incident through non confrontational talks with the young people I support.

I have been able to adopt this to my personal life and to not make rash decisions but to think about the outcomes through using informed choices.

I have learned to let my 5 year old son lead me more in how he wants to spend our time together and to not restrict him but to ensure I have more

than enough energy to give him all of my attention, something I may have let slip in recent times.

Whilst looking at my experiences I have learned to focus more on what I want to gain from certain situations and also to think out of the box to help achieve this.

I was involved in an incident at work recently where I was assaulted by a young person. The home I work in operates a zero tolerance on assaults and our policy is to contact the police on all occasions. My experiences in Denmark gave me the confidence and understanding to take a step back from the situation and reflect on what had really happened. By doing this I was able to sit and talk to the young person and to explain how he had made me feel by assaulting me and that I did not come to work to be assaulted. The young person apologized and showed emotions that he had not previously shown me. I felt after the incident I had a stronger bond with that person due to this and felt that I was justified in my actions when explaining it to the staff team and other professionals involved.

"There's only one thing that stops a dream coming true, and that's the fear of failing"





