

EU Leonardo Mobility project 'Social Pedagogy - Learning in practice'

Participants report by Edwin Greenhalgh, Lancashire County Council

Preparation:

I wanted to take part in the Mobility Project because I felt it was important for me and the young people I care for that I develop my knowledge and understanding of implementing a pedagogic approach. Through taking part in this project and experiencing it first-hand within other cultures I may discover fresh and new ideas that can be developed within our staff team and help the service move forward in providing the best for our young people.

My preparation started by taking part in an eight-day course on Social Pedagogy run by Lancashire County Council. Our tutors were Alexander Borchert and Anthony Moorcroft, with whom we explored the origins of Social Pedagogy's basic humanist values and its fundamental concept of children as equal human beings with rich and extraordinary potential.

The content of the course included the history of English care and social Pedagogy on the basis of the views of six key thinkers Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Jan Amos Comenius, Friedrich Wilhelm Fröbel, Maria Montessori, Janusz Korczak on psychology, cognitive development, motivation and social skills.

We learnt some new concepts and strategies for dealing appropriately with frictions that arise in shared living space, through the understanding of Social Pedagogy terms "Head, Heart, Hands", "Challenge by Choice", "Common Third", "Comfort Zone" and the "three P's, Personal, Private and Professional".

The teaching method was interactive through the use of games, exercises, case studies and interviews. Throughout the course we had to produce a diary to assess the success or failure of the methods we had used. I chose to use words and pictures. The diaries were to be judged by a panel which could include young people. The idea behind my diary format was that it could be understood by anyone irrespective of age or ability.

Part 2's format: We are currently part of a service that has a variety of homes which look after children with and without disabilities. We currently have over three hundred children accessing our services and these children's ages range from eight to eighteen.

Our new project is to create a book that any child, regardless of age or ability, can pick up and learn about food, how it's sown, grown and nurtured; its history; and the different cultures which cook and enjoy eating it.

Together with a young person (or persons) we want you to create a recipe book.

The recipe Apple and Cheshire cheese cobbler.



I involved several young people with and without disabilities in this project. Using the chosen recipe I sought their views and ideas and aimed to make it interesting visually and interactively by using quizzes, photos and by “having a go”. The young people participated in every stage, contributing their ideas on how to approach it. This challenged my expectations of what the young people could achieve, by embracing positive thinking and a ‘can do’ attitude. I was impressed by their success. We soon discovered the task was endless-as we explored different aspects e.g. Stories and the significance of apples in different cultures. Cultivating and growing different plants was just the beginning of exploring many enjoyable activities and a great learning opportunity to motivate and encourage, stretch and challenge myself and the young people.



Every interaction, task, experience and activity we share with the young people should be underpinned by the same ideas and values and respect for each other. Having fun together, both learning new skills and knowledge that stretches our boundaries and challenges our expectations of each other.

I presented my project to the panel and subsequently I was chosen to take part on the second phase of the EU Leonardo project to visit Denmark in March 2013. However imagine my surprise when, six weeks before the 2012 project was due to take place, I was given the chance to take part earlier than I anticipated. So armed with the itinerary, placement information, two travel guides and a language CD off I went. How hard can it be?

Mobility:

The 4th March 2012, Manchester Airport, 10am, first person there, great! Next to arrive was Gabriel who I had met for five minutes two weeks ago. The rest of the group arrived shortly after. We all got introduced, checked in and got to know each other a little better while waiting in the departure lounge. Apart from myself and Dougie the rest of the group had had two days in Lockerbie which was essentially designed to familiarise the participants with each other and begin to form relationships and give you a chance to learn about social pedagogy in a Danish context. Gabriel had forwarded me all the relevant information so I had had chance to read through it before we left. We all boarded the easyJet to Copenhagen and off we went. 15:15 "Copenhagen here we come"! We met Charlotte at the airport and after a ride on the train and short walk we arrived at our hotel and check in. After finding our apartments and settling in we all met up at Gabriel and Danny's apartment (which was going to be the base) for a joint evening meal to bring the group back together. We had this at a local restaurant.

Monday started with the first of three reflective development seminars. The first seminar was to get the group together and prepare us for our placements. Charlotte and Christina welcomed us to Copenhagen with usual warm up interactive stuff. Then Gabriel went through how to use the learning circle which would help us with our diaries recording our thoughts, impressions, experiences and reflections during each of our placements. After lunch we met representatives from two of the placements who told us a little about each of their institutions.

Next we embarked on a tour of the city taking in the sights and culture on a canal tour, after which we picked up our hire bikes and endeavoured to make our way back through Copenhagen on the network of cycle lanes. Gabriel, our trusted leader, set off first showing us the cycle etiquette, do's and don't's in Denmark.

Danny and I spent four days working at each of our placements Allegården and Den grønne giraf (The green giraffe). We worked alongside the staff at both units with the young people and built up some great relationships. The first day at each unit we were introduced to the staff team and the young people. We spent time setting ourselves to work in kitchen as we consider it to be the hub of any unit and it turned we were right. Several of the young people wandered in to see what we were cooking – the great thing for us was that they could all speak some English as our Danish was not going well at all.

I was asked if I would like to support a member of staff doing some restorative work with two young people who had been doing 'graffiti art work' on canvas to be displayed in the unit. However they had decided that it would be a good idea to carry on the graffiti over the basement walls! They had "agreed" that they should put right the wrong. However on the day the work was to be carried out neither of them could be found! Each young person had a mobile phone to maintain two way contact with the unit. I was given the task of contacting them and persuading them to return and restore the basement to an acceptable condition. I was able to find one of them who completed the whole job!

We were also able to talk about and witness how the staff dealt with the issues that arise with the smoking of hash and drinking of alcohol. The method didn't involve the immediate reporting to the police. The young person was allowed to return to their senses and then the issue was discussed

rationally and the implication of the breakdown of health, social acceptance and legal problems faced and they were encouraged to understand the wider effects of their behaviour.

As part of our project we talked to the young people about English and Scottish food and asked if they would like us to cook for them. This we did and was agreed to be a great success. The hardest part was shopping for the ingredients!

I also got to work with a young girl who was planning to re-vamp her bedroom using a large wooden unit left behind by a former occupant. This needed some alteration using my joinery skills. It was a great opportunity to talk to her informally and get to know her through a shared activity.

We spent some time speaking to the staff from both units placements. At the Green Giraffe we personally worked with babies from ten months to two and a half years old.

Although both places were run on the same principles it was stressed to us the importance of early intervention and that the optimum effect could be obtained during these vital formative years.

We also had opportunities to speak to the staff of both units about their training and education. We conducted some video interviews which we could use on our return home. We had conversations with two trainee pedagogues who told us the length of the course and what it involved. It lasted 3 ½ years and included placements at three different institutions.

Allegården:



Allegården is made up of three divisions and provides residential care for young people aged 14-23 with psychosocial issues. One division provides an emergency residential, observation function. Another division is social pedagogical supervision of exposed/marginalised adolescents aged 15-23 years and there is a division for preventive work in cooperation with their parents. The objective is to give the young people an opportunity to develop independence and self-esteem and the ability to make and cope with relationships so that they can live successfully in the wider community.

Expectation:

The participants are expected to accept the precepts of freedom with responsibility to enable other to live in a pleasant environment. No drug abuse is tolerated, neither are bullying or violence, and the young people have to talk through any problems they have in these areas and be helped to realise the consequences of unsocial behaviour on the lives of others in a shared living situation.

Systemic perspective:

The whole system is based on the belief that the young person can change. This must be believed by the carers, the parents and the person themselves.

The young people were originally referred because of problems but it is important to discover their strengths by speaking with friends, teachers, coaches and neighbour who can contribute positive views of their abilities and attributes. The person's own views of their needs are also very important

and their opinions should always be considered and discussed with them. It is imperative that we all understand that behaviour is a form of communication and if it creates a problem or conflict it should be viewed as a cry for help or a change of surroundings

The system of special education in Denmark differs from what is currently available in our country and pupils can move freely between a variety of provisions without the constrictions of a set curriculum though there are some financial constraints.

Pedagogic task and practice: The holistic perspective is a value and the work is based on the strength of identity, social competencies, the academic, readjustment/change and ability to fend independently. As a pedagogical institution the residential division distinguishes between the domains of reflection or domains of production. Located in the domain of production are educative demands and boundaries, and a distinction between right and wrong according to the norms and values of society. In the domain of reflection nothing is more right than wrong. Through reflective dialogue the pedagogues help the young people and their families to find their way through life.

Den Grønne Giraf: (The Green Giraffe)



Den grønne giraf is a day care facility for 150 children aged 0-10 years. Of these 48 are in early years nursery, 48 children are in kindergarten which has to be attended by law between the age of two and a half to six and a half after which they start school. The rest is in after school care. A great number of the children are bilingual and have another ethnical background than Danish. Their basis is to be caring, appreciative and professional in their work, conflicts must be solved at an equal level as regards children, staff, families and other collaborators. The conditions of the family have a special impact on the well-being of the child, so they aim to obtain a positive and close relationship with parents. Their task is to safeguard the children's needs and therefore they find it necessary to be well informed in a cultural and societal context.

Beliefs and values:

- We can make a difference and it matters.
- We work closely together with the families.
- Being well informed means we can work professionally.
- We encounter people from their perspective.
- Our professional competency creates results.
- All children have resources and competencies.
- All children must be seen and esteemed every day.
- Everybody has the possibility to influence their lives regardless of their age.

Danny and I were placed with the youngest group of twelve children aged one to two and a half years. The ethos of the entire unit is to assist in the development of each individual by providing a healthy environment in which they can advance at their own pace mentally, physically and socially. Our role is to observe, guide, prompt and encourage them.

All this needs to be carried out with the willing and understanding co-operation of their parents. The pedagogues are acting in partnership with them and they have regular access to the pedagogues to help and assist and share their knowledge of their child.



The children's basic physical needs are important. A sick, cold, tired or hungry child can not realise its full potential. The rooms of the nursery are bright and airy. There is a strong emphasis on time spent outside and outdoor physical exercise; large red prams are used for "nap times", strategically placed on a veranda (with shelter from rain or too strong sunlight). The children are well wrapped in warm blankets if necessary.



Outdoor adventure play is encouraged. The playground provides apparatus to climb on, up, over, under or through and there were carts, bikes, pushing toys and a large sand pit in the centre. It was a safe environment but gave scope for experimenting. Minor tumbles were inevitable but they were prompted to get up and try again and tears were usually averted.

Meals were taken together at tables and feeding and drinking skills were developed by using appropriate cutlery and little water jugs to help them to master pouring. The food was all healthy and organically grown and was served in suitable sized portions so it wasn't over facing; the menu was designed and prepared by a dietician. The mealtimes were quiet and pleasant social occasions.

The staff promoted independence and helpfulness amongst the children, sending them on small "errands" to find a toy or to fetch another child to join in an activity. The toys were chosen to develop fine motor skills, patience, and imagination and the children were invited or encouraged to participate rather than be "told" to take part in an activity.

All staff understood how each child needed to learn at its own rate and when to intervene positively. There was a happy atmosphere which enabled every child to feel a valued member of the group.

All communication was conducted simply and quietly, and this helped the children to understand that they didn't need to shout or scream to get attention themselves or attract their friends.

Evaluation:

I have learnt a lot from my experiences at the Green Giraffe and Allegården and would like to pass this on to the staff at our home placements and to help others to learn the concepts. By attending Denmark for two weeks it has allowed me to develop and explore my skill set. It has allowed me to develop more transferable skills which in turn has enhanced best practice in South Avenue and allowed me to develop new and innovative ways of working with children, young people and staff teams.

Building on my experience with social pedagogy I would like to use some of concepts I have learned on the mobility in Denmark and be able to filter these into current practice and influence future

training for a more consistent workforce. I found the practical applications of the theories we had learnt about clearly recognizable in the practices used in both units which we visited.

One of the most important features was the uniformity of approach to problems which are universal, and I felt that I would be comfortable transferring them to my own situation in England, bearing in mind the necessity for minor cultural adaptations. However because the fact that to be successful this method has to be applied consistently, the necessity of future staff training was obvious. I felt slightly apprehensive that some of my colleagues might struggle with the concepts of pedagogy and that tact and understanding might be needed with them as well as the young people I care for. I am hopeful that there is to be a supportive framework now beginning to establish in this country.