

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

*How a Haven Copes in Copenhagen: Participant report by James Duck*

### PREPARATION:

I became aware of the Leonardo Mobility during some inhouse (Lancashire County Council) training on Social Pedagogy, during the summer of 2011. This was performed by Alexander Borchert, a German Pedagogue, at the time working for Lancashire County Council, and another, Lancastrian worker, Anthony Moorcroft. This training enlightened me to a paradigm of understanding which bases itself within my ongoing work with children; opening up the extensive body of work that seeks to explain good practice, ethics and skills in child care i.e. Social Pedagogy. It also showed to me that exploring a synthesis between foreign understandings of child care, be it German, French or Danish, and native, allows for a dialectic process towards a greater understanding of “what is good child care?”. The principle of seeking to improve standards is one which inherently should not be refuted; from the the viewpoint of a child it is imperative to their self worth, their present and their future, and as a worker it is a necessary prerequisite for employment; in fact, in UK legal terms, child welfare may be deemed by those to be ‘in charge’ of children to be of *‘paramount’* importance.

So, the opportunity to explore Social Pedagogy as a discipline and to see it in practice, in this case in Denmark, via the E.U. Leonardo Mobility project, was and is a fantastic opportunity for exploring various viewpoints and structures for supporting ethics and standards in child care, as much as it is for simply exploring another culture itself. It is not for me, however, and as many others have said, ‘a once in a lifetime experience’, albeit it highly exclusive, and which I am most fortunate to have been a part of, but rather, has proven to me a method or *‘pathway’* (as is the Greek etymological derivation) for cross cultural learning and an impetus towards a longterm study of children, their development, socialisation and education, which is a far greater product.

A prerequisite for finding such a drive, towards a particular aim, i.e. understanding Social Pedagogy, is to have had experience within this/these fields before, or at least a sense of that experience. Prior to the prospect of the mobility project I had spent many years working for the Local Government as a residential worker, frustrated that there didn’t seem to be an academic, underlying set of ideas or scientific explanations for working with, and explicitly, nurturing children towards a better social future. This was admittedly through my own naivety, however, this in itself is backed by a far greater, ongoing naivety of the British public and child care professionals. Social Pedagogy is seriously under-supported in the UK and very little understood. Thankfully I have been able to begin to understand the importance of the topic area having previously fulfilled higher level qualifications: at B.A. level in Social Sciences, furthered by a Professional Graduate Certificate in Education. As a qualified teacher I have therefore studied pedagogy, as it is recognised in the UK, as a purely educational pursuit, without reference to social education as Petrie, 2001, confirms.

When I entered residential work I did so with a particular mindset; expecting a parallel level of professionalism, training and knowledge sets for working with children as had been apparent within teaching. Sadly, I have come to learn that this is not necessarily the case; whilst the physical infrastructure and legal definitions of care are pronounced and longstanding within the UK and staff often work with the best of intentions, something I would never be wholly critical of, the training of 'shop floor' staff, however, is piecemeal, bite sized and prescriptive. Entry to employment is based around a basic interviewing process where only very simplistic knowledge, usually of working Laws, is required. Previous experience is only beneficial in regards to securing a place over and above someone else, rather than as a fundamental requirement for effective practice. In my own experience I have often seen staff feeling totally disempowered. Either unaware or fearful of using techniques where they are the main operants of activity and relationship building, such as team games, sustainable work with young people has suffered. Sadly this has come from a failure to understand this as an empowering and credible aim in itself.

Workers look towards the structure of the system in order to be told what to do rather than to believe in themselves to be doing the right thing. Without the knowledge of relevant theories to support them this is understandable; Francis Bacon's often cited premise, in it's simplicity, that "*knowledge is power*", is incredibly relevant as a basis for personal empowerment. For instance, I have often heard an incredibly motivated, reliable and dedicated member of staff, when building up to offering their viewpoint in a meeting, regarding a child, state, '*Well I'm not a professional but.....*', as if to excuse the others at the table for having to listen to her, and yet she will then go on to give a highly reflective and child centred account of the care of that child, stemming from the fact that she is 'by nature' a reflective practitioner. It is disappointing then that the training and value of the role in the UK allows for her to feel like she is not a professional, amongst other more recognised professions, such as social workers, teachers or counsellors, despite the fact that she has a particular gift for working with children in the day-to-day role.

It is my belief that this self concept is endemic within the U.K care system; I myself have been queried on numerous occasions by the inspecting body for children's homes, in a quizical fashion, as to: '*why I do not teach?*' (knowing that I have the capacity too), as if my line of work is inferior, and again, this is from a government inspector, there to value and assess standards within the home!

My recent study into Social Pedagogy has lead me to understand some intrinsic differences in the approaches of national ideals regarding social education, and the mobility has allowed for me to then see these in concrete terms. The distinction between the neo-liberal model, supported in the UK, and the socio-democratic model, utilised in much of Europe, (Cameron & Moss, 2011) and the further distinction of a 'pathological deficit' (Smith and Whyte) contained within the former approach, has opened my eyes to the need to explore these models. Having worked within the neo-liberal model, where supposedly *social* action can be undertaken within often *insular* units, and offers case based work to individual children, I was keen to explore the opportunity to see a system defined by it's holism.

It has often saddened me to have my working practice recognised by the general public as 'dealing with naughty children', or of 'naughty children', as I can vouch through personal experience is

almost always how others express it to me in conversation. It was my hope, in taking part in the Mobility to see whether this may have stemmed from intellectually failing to support the integrity of the worker in the UK by failing to define true social education? With almost all workers in the UK seemingly unaware even of the meaning of Social Pedagogy, let alone the vast body of empirically supported theories, it seems only logical that this is the case; the sad consequence of which, from the outset, is to perpetuate in failing to support the integrity of the child by allowing them to be described as 'naughty' or 'problematic'!

The great benefit of the project then was to seek to understand a truly holistic approach to child care, as a comparison to the UK and various questions implicitly stem from this such as: Could the staff really be as motivated and empowered as I originally thought? How difficult is it to provide for politically? What does it look like? Is it effective? Are there actually any tangible differences between each culture? Do the young people, in their abilities, reflect a greater standard of provision? Are there any similarities between the cultures? Just what is 'Social Pedagogy'? And, why does the Danish culture have a vested and long-standing tradition in it? Not to mention; just how good are their pastries?

## **THE MOBILITY:**

I went to two different institutions; firstly spending a week working in a kindergarten operated on the outer fringes of the city, in an area called Klampenborg, followed by a week in a teenage residential 'unit', named Rymarksvaenge.

The first of the placements, Stockholmsgave, was a 'forest kindergarten', nurturing young children, aged from 3-6 years old, all of which were resident in and collected daily from, an inner city suburb of Copenhagen, named Nørrebro.

Each day the majority of the children were collected from the kindergarten's base, on Jesper Brochmandsgade, by a large bus which would then drive them on to Stockholmsgave, some 10-15 minutes outside of the city centre. It was at Jesper Brochmandsgade that we first met the children, the pedagogues and the children's parents; each day we did this, all sharing in the pleasures of meeting, checking in, talking to each other and passing over any news necessary for that day.

Although the facilities here were very small, it was important for us to see that the kindergarten had a base in the area from which the children lived. This allowed for us to reflect on their nature and socio-economic background, something which the pedagogues also reflected on, to us; they felt it was necessary to understand the background of the children, to see where they have come from in order to better see where they were going to, already showing a developmentally active stance towards the child. This wasn't simply an analysis of the journey they physically took each day, from a built up, sometimes violent but culturally diverse and happening inner city suburb, to a rural, leafy and open natural oasis, but showed the training of the pedagogues to reflect, to use hermeneutic principles and social awareness as a tool for improving the developmental well being of the children they were 'to lead'.

From this point on, each and every day was an absolute delight, being surrounded by invigorated and happy children, not to mention thoroughly enthusiastic parents waving, pulling faces and chasing the bus off into the distance, bringing many a smile to mine and my co-participant's face, no matter how tired we felt before! The continuation of this throughout the placement was no coincidence and, I feel, strongly reflects the subtle but affirmed orchestration of creating 'well being', and of happiness, and of freedom, of learning and expression, as created by those with the means to do so; trained pedagogues, not simply adults, with a parentally minded function to safeguard or protect but instead professionals who were easy going, informative and purely child centred.

This orchestration, other than clearly having been seen through the eyes of the pedagogues in their knowledge and training was seen as a rhythm for all present at the kindergarten, throughout the day. This rhythm would regularly be referred to as the 'flow' of the day; supporting a subtlety of movement. Coincidentally the notion of 'flow' is a defined element of positive psychology, seen to be the expression of happiness and/or the free release of energy self. So, without creating any resistance to rhythm, such as specified times for activity, communicative rules such as 'speak when spoken to' or formal/rote based learning, as is the backbone of much educational practice, children were allowed a platform for self expression, a key orchestration at a time when this is most relevant to their biology and subsequent psychology as young investigative creatures.

For instance, from my point of view, to initially see children as young as three and above, spending time alone in a room, with the DOOR SHUT (!) effectively distanced from any adult is something which initially seemed abhorrent, as if the pedagogues had forgotten that child. In fact the reverse is true, the pedagogues were so trusting in their relationship with that child or children, that they allowed them this distance, they knew the room was safe, they had after all provided it for them, and key to the responsibility of allowing this trust was the fact that the pedagogue WAS aware they were in there; out of sight is not out of mind and does not relinquish an obvious need to safeguard any child, as it is also their duty to do. For anyone who wasn't there, hearing the initial explanation of a child in a room by themselves has invoked the same fears, indicative of the seemingly pathological approach in the UK. However, in hearing the noises stemming from the room, of laughing, giggling children it would be hard pressed, as rational human beings, to continue thinking negatively! The ability to recognise and respect the child, in this situation, to not push them, to sense their space and freedom, is further testament to the ability of the pedagogues in constructing an environment which allows for personal well being.

It was from these small but meaningful interactions, and further observations within the mobility including the placement with teenagers, that I began to build an idea of how this form of approach, of implicit trust and respect, perpetuates itself through the makeup of each child, defining the Danish society as very much more socialist/socialised and has brought about better welfare, topping a recent United Nations report as the happiest in the world. (<https://theguardian/world/2012/apr/07/copenhagen-really-wonderful-reasons>)

John Paul Satre, in discussing existentialism, gives us a credible, modern and humanistic basis for understanding the expression of existence, by stating that 'existence precedes essence', such that we are born or exist but that through our experience we derive our 'essence'. Why I mention this is due to two reasons: firstly, the process of experience is immediate, from birth and therefore, when

tied in with the second point, being that our ensuing experiences help to define who we are as a character, it is then critical that the quality of experience is also immediate. Seeing here then, in Denmark, that children as young as 3 received excellent care, within moments of being there myself, affirmed the idea that the child, and the inherent respect for them, is paramount and that child care was thoughtful and well delivered, which is a pleasure to have seen. Seeing a child as young as three politely handing out dinner to the rest of his cohort, or waiting patiently for their turn to paint and not crying after falling over, I will never forget.

Further to the notion of the pedagogue providing for the child in experience, is another well noted American sociologist, George Herbert Mead, working in the early 20th Century, whose ideas about the socialisation of people I find both fascinating and pertinent to any carer's role. Mead discussed the fact that the social psyche of the person goes through a three stage process: The I, The Self and The Me. Contact with other humans, usually the parent, but which he defined as any 'significant other', in this case the pedagogue, elicits a process of reflection or 'symbolic interactionism', effectively reflecting their nature onto them. If you will, and he used the analogy himself, the person acts as a mirror, so you come to see yourself, to some extent, as others see you. So the person, or child, initially has only their physical reactions, such as a sense of hot or cold etc, which define them as an 'I' (easily remembered as an I for instinct), however, they then begin to become conscious, to learn to think, using words and experiences that are learnt through social experience with 'significant others'; at this point the concept of 'The Self' forms, being the notion of existence within the child. In turn, once this has developed and is explored the child will then be able to extend the concept of the self to outside of their body, that is, they will begin to understand that they exist in the minds of others, in effect that others are talking about 'Me'.

To develop these concepts is key to developing socialisation, and, again I mention it here, as I believe that the early interactions seen at the kindergarten supported the use of reasoned questioning by the pedagogues, to the children. As I witnessed it they were successful in aiding the social and personal development of the children by clearly recognising the need to allow the children to reflect *for themselves*, an ability that transcends the kindergarten and carries through with them to adult social life. For instance, I witnessed a pedagogue, upon seeing a child of three, dressed in a superhero costume, running wildly down a tight corridor, say to that child something along the lines of "Lasse, at this speed this is the corridor of pain". The pedagogue did not shout, he did not stop the child, he did not take him to one side, control him or even go so far as to sanction him in any way, as may have been the case in the UK. Instead, he made the child, who, acting as a 'self', had chosen to run and to be a superhero, in which there is no specific problem, to then reflect on the consequences of his actions, or adopting, as Mead called it, 'an attitude of reflection'. This is an internal process which then belongs to that child, forever, and in the few seconds it took to understand the pedagogue's meaning the child, Lasse, chose, as if by himself, to act in a more socially aware manner, slowing down and looking after the others in the corridor (like a real superhero should!). When I asked the pedagogue, Rasmus, what would have happened if Lasse had not chosen to slow down, meaning 'What action would he, the pedagogue, have taken?', he said, in effect: "I have already taken the action. If Lasse hurts himself, or others, he must then deal with the consequences", again learning through his own action. The simple truth of which is wonderful and insightful.

Throughout the whole four days there was an abundance of these types of interactions, and it was clear that much about the pedagogues' training allowed them to feel confident in knowing when to keep away from interfering as much as it was about knowing when to step in. Knowing that pedagogues are trained in this as a theoretical proposition, as initially espoused by Vygotsky, who defined the metaphorical distances of relationships and instruction, gives further supporting evidence to the high level of orchestration by Danish pedagogues. The 'Zone of Proximal Development', or 'Learning Zone', is well understood in the UK by educationalists, but this has failed to transcend into the working practices, as I have seen them, of care workers, and equally very little is understood or thought about of the times in which young people are then subsequently acting within this zone or indeed the subsequent zones of 'comfort' or 'panic'.

In fact, it would be very interesting to look into the respective proximal or distal relationships between the main 'significant other' and the child, as a result of having seen this in action in two differing cultures. In Denmark, children and, later on in the mobility, teenagers, were allowed to keep much more distance between themselves and the pedagogue or 'significant other' than I feel occurs in the UK I strongly believe that the trusting relationship of allowing children to explore, unhindered by workers' fears and a culture of risk aversion, strongly influences the ability of the children to effectively socialise and to develop self confidence.

One of the reasons I had chosen to see the forest kindergarten was because of the use of outdoor space as a means to providing social and/or personal interaction, through exploration, freedom and, perhaps, distance from others. During my B.A. (Hons) Degree I wrote my dissertation on the use or need for outdoor space as a means to alleviate some of the stresses of the 'built environment', reflecting highly on the work of an Austrian humanist psychologist, Erich Fromm, as found in his book 'To Have or To Be'. This is a wonderful text outlining the differences of people operating in two opposing modes: those defined in capitalist and egocentric action, with an agenda 'of having' and those with more social, or altruistic agendas, defined by a philosophy 'of being'. Fromm makes clear that much about the focus of action 'for being', of wonder, of recognising the intrinsic value of things, rather than willfulness over an item, object or indeed other people, stems from time spent in nature. In many ways, Fromm's arguments or definitions correspond to that of the concepts in Social Pedagogy, of gardener vs sculptor, respectively seen as being vs having. Where the role of the Pedagogue is to allow a garden, or child, to grow, to flourish and 'be' themselves, rather than to contain, mould or sculpt a person into a definite form and say I 'have' done that, placing ownership in the adult.

I was very happy to see then that the setting allowed for exploration; as likened to the exploration of the self, in that the outdoor space at the kindergarten was vast. There was a large perimeter for them to be free to play in (although the need for fencing to ensure protection from catastrophic harm, such as the main road outside the building, was obvious). Within this space were numerous defined play areas, slides, swings, withy huts, sand pits, wooden houses and areas of more natural 'wilderness' such as mini woods.

With very little, if anything in the way of scheduled events, other than stopping to eat at roughly similar times each day, the children had the freedom to explore, which is itself a recognised form of, or innate quality, within play, recognised as 'being consciously outside "ordinary" life'. The freedom to allow such exploration is seldom seen in the U.K! We are notoriously known as a 'risk averse' nation and much of our working policy is geared to reflect this. For instance for me to take a young

person out on a trip, pretty much of any kind, be it cycling, swimming, or the like, I have to create a 'risk assessment'; this has to be checked, read and understood by all those going on the trip; it must be authorised by the manager, take into account every possible form of risk or situation deemed to carry with it danger; and all of this must be done at least 6 weeks prior to the trip!

In discussing this with the Danish Pedagogues, and the subsequent lack of bureaucracy of paperwork as seen throughout Denmark, I was met with abject questioning of our purpose with our young people and how we could effectively work with them? The simple answer to which was that I have to work to these constraints, legally bound to, so the best I can achieve is to make these occurrences happen, usually in spending time away from the child in order to complete paperwork which then allows me to later be with the child, a highly ironic and frustrating situation.

It became clearer to me then that serious questions must be asked regarding our culture, and I have taken the time since to read into the subject of both 'risk aversion' and as a counter argument 'risk competency'. The fact that most workers in the UK have an understanding that it is the main focus of their profession to safeguard a child, is not in itself abhorrent, far from it, but to not be able to counter the argument, to fail in questioning the reasoning and logic behind active based activity, surely is! The Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, gives a critical explanation of pure aversion to chance and risk, stating that: *"During the first period of a man's life the greatest danger is not to take the risk."* Without equipping children with the means to explore risk themselves we are surely setting them up for tragic failure when an immediate risk is presented to them. If this is the case then to avoid risk, as Kierkegaard expresses, carries with it more risk than actively seeking enjoy worldly experiences. Without a carer there to inform you of the risk, prescribing the dangers to them, they walk innocently and naively into their panic zone, action is frozen, the danger increased.

I was keen to see then and two spring to mind. Firstly, children were allowed to use razor sharp knives to whittle sticks into shapes. This stimulated artistic qualities but as was seen by the pedagogues, furthered risk competency within the child. Again, it was the pedagogues' role to orchestrate a means by which this could be explored but with safety still considered; rules were therefore necessary, these are after all implements with the potential to kill or maim. However, with some very simple instruction and close guidance, safety was apparent. Children who wished to use a knife were to sit at a particular bench, where the pedagogue remained throughout, the bench sat inside a perimeter defined by rocks circling the bench, which all other children knew not to enter, the children had to point the cutting edge away from them at all times and, when finished, must place the knife back into a leather sheath. Beyond this the children were free to explore the use of knives, to come to a greater understanding of 'what is sharp?' and consequently the risk and effects in misusing an implement became an exploratory experience belonging to them.

In my line of work with teenagers, who by definition are capable of 10 extra years experience than these three year olds, knives are categorically locked away from them, even where they may be crucial implements in learning such necessary and basic life skills as cooking!

The second incident was of fire making, which was orchestrated on two occasions during my placement. Again the same simple but effect measures were put in place, children respecting a perimeter around the open log fire in which no one could go and then a second, larger outer perimeter whereby children had to walk, not run, or sit down, observing the fire and warming up. By allowing children near a large open flame they were able to understand the intensity of a heat that also has the capacity to cause serious harm. Instead they derived warmth on a cold spring day, watching flames and, as often happens around fires, engaged in conversation with the pedagogues, other children and myself (even if it was non-sensical rubbish).

Such experiences I truly believe transcend the 'there and then', instead forming internal percepts which follow you through life. The process of 'little and often' is one recognised in chemistry and I

feel is pertinent to development also. The notion is that it is better to experiment with mixing chemicals by adding small amounts, frequently, rather than a large amount once, as such we see a build up to a reaction rather than a possible and dangerous explosion. I feel the same is true with learning social situations, it is far better to be allowed to test interactions in small but frequent occurrences rather than wait until later life and be ill equipped to handle the situation! It is with this in mind that I saw the learning experiences at the kindergarten act as gentle but also challenging environment for the children, and I believe that this developing process was reflected in the skills of the teenagers I later worked with, as drawn out below.

Rymarksvange, where we spent our second week, is a facility in the Northern suburbs of Copenhagen, catering, in the main body of the home, for 6 young people, with an annexed facility for 3 other young people who live independently. Interestingly, the building also occupied various small offices for social workers or pedagogues who worked with other young people that had previously lived at Rymarksvange but who now occupied independent facilities or shared tenancy flats in and around Copenhagen. The home, therefore, was unlike any unit or residential school in which I have worked in the UK, in that an overarching and holistic physical structure, for progression, was in place. Otherwise, physically, the building was very similar to that seen within the UK and I immediately felt comfortable, working within 'my usual environment'.

During the four days at Rymarksvaenge it was of great advantage to see this structured development by effectively working through the developmental stages myself, spending two days at Rymarksvaenge, a third day shadowing a motivational pedagogue, meeting a resident of the semi-independent annexe and another in a semi-independent state-owned apartment in central Copenhagen to then, finally, on the fourth day, meeting two people who had moved into their own.

Without this type of experience, which the mobility was brought about to achieve, and for the Danish pedagogues to allow, I simply would never have been able to come to such a profound understanding of the qualities of serious investment and work in Social Pedagogy. I am unashamed to say that the experiences which ensued, especially in meeting such well developed people on the final few days, who had lived through some similar adversities as those I work with, brought me to tears in the realisation of their abilities and the system ability to create in them self worth, the likes of which I feel I have yet to achieve in working for seven years with the same end product in mind! The achievements, therefore, of an inclusive and holistic system are certainly worth reflecting on as, in enabling to provide the ability for otherwise struggling young people to become active and fruitful citizens of Copenhagen and of Denmark, comparisons must be sought, having seen this, through tangible, concrete and real experience.

On the first day, working within the unit, time was spent looking around the facility and getting to know the pedagogue on shift and the young people at the home. I was taken around the facility and began to see how it was organised, struck by the ingenuity of having clusters of task based offices on the unit.

Also of note was the fact that there was a small room filled with sporting equipment. This was not high tech, however, but the recognition of having and using the equipment by the pedagogue as a means for interaction, furthered by specific mention of the use of 'The Common Third' was insightful and refreshing, justifying its purpose. In fact, Pere (as I believe his name is spelt!), had just returned from a week long skiing holiday with some of the residents, showing the potential of utilising equipment for shared learning or enjoyment. This fact isn't necessarily new to UK ears, where activity is to a degree recognised as purposeful but the definition of 'The Common Third' as a concept is certainly transient. It struck me, when I was told by Pere that the equipment was there to support the use of the notion of 'The Common Third', that, being knowledgeable of it myself, no time was wasted in explaining it as an objective method. The understanding between the two of us was



immediate, even with a potential translation language barrier, the concept transcended into joint understanding, as it does between pedagogues.

In the UK I have spent almost all my working life attempting to explain the necessity of involvement of action to others. At times I have even been criticised for spending too much time being active with young people; with the backing of theory, with the positive elements of 'The Common Third' understood and therefore, a shared conceptual language, I fail to see how this could continue.

Later on in the evening I began to meet the young people on the unit, who had begun to help to cook with the pedagogue. Again, there was a type of 'flow' in this coming together as a shared experience. The young people had not wished to eat what had been previously arranged for them. Rather than reacting negatively to this, Pere challenged the young people through choice, allowing them to move away from what was previously expected i.e. the allocated meal for the night but only as long as they agreed to source the produce and to help in cooking it, taking on responsibility for this change. The potential for learning independence skills was now enhanced and so the young people went to the shop, trusted with money, selected and thought out how much was needed for everyone and therefore intrinsically, had to think about and consider others. It seems almost patronising in needing to explain this but by appropriately challenging the young people's negativity towards their meal, Pere opened up a creative social experience for us all; the young people's self esteem blossomed because of this and the evening was set up around this otherwise potentially ruinous conflict of wills.

Instead when the young people returned they were tasked with preparing some of the food, which included the use of sharp and potentially dangerous knives, which they used freely, to great effect, preparing salad and sundries for everyone. The openness of the conversations which stemmed from this shared activity, and which continued right the way through into the meal itself and on into the evening, allowed me to get to know each young person, all of whom were a pleasure to spend time with and to talk to.

This continued on into the second afternoon/evening where we met another pedagogue and some other residents who hadn't been on the unit the night before. As the day progressed we were able to discuss in depth some of the differences with the pedagogue between the UK set up of an individual unit. The conversations came about not just because we were there to be inquisitive but as, and when, concrete examples happened.

For instance, one of the residents returned in the company of her boyfriend, she spoke with the pedagogue, checked in and then settled to her room where her boyfriend was. Naturally to me I queried why the boyfriend, a much older male, was allowed on the unit as this would not happen in the UK. Firstly, it was explained that young people were always allowed to have friends in the unit if they wished, it allowed for the pedagogue to learn about their relationships and increased the value of the life space. We also learnt that on the weekend friends could even remain overnight. In the UK this would never happen! It may be allowed, on some occasions for a friend to come and have dinner but this would not be common and to do so we would have to record their entry in the unit in a logbook, as we do with all people entering (further representing the pathology of trust within our society). Staying overnight is never allowed.

The pedagogue explained that he had discussed with her whether he boyfriend could stay that night, despite it being midweek and he said that he had granted her permission but had done so for one specific reason. The girl, when she had first come to the unit, months before had been a heavy drug user, she was now at a point where this had reduced and she was ready to go the next day to rehab; it was felt that having someone with her the night before would only benefit her to remain positive about this. He explained that understanding where a person is in their development was key to

allowing this to happen as he could see that it supported the best possible result for that young person, again, I find these subtleties of action highly credible.

Prior to arriving in Denmark, we had been told that this particular facility operated a model which sought to use exercise as a means for engagement and used behavioural philosophies widely based in the pedagogic principle, as I understand it, of 'Challenge by Choice' and more specifically looked towards forms of 'non-violent resistance'; as provided by Haim Omer, Professor of Psychology at Tel Aviv University. Again, I had chosen this placement as I have always been keen to utilise physical activity, as previously discussed, but also because I have always much preferred a style of behaviour management which does not use physical or vocal strength, preferring instead to use reason, discussion and reflection.

During my time as a trainee teacher I came across empirical evidence suggesting the value of such subtlety of action, at least in regards to vocal toning. O'Leary, Kaufman, Kass & Drabman's 1970 study found that soft reprimands were much more effective than loud reprimands when challenging disruptive behaviour. Furthermore, loud reprimands were actually found to reinforce disruptive behaviour. The fact then that during the entire time I was present in Copenhagen I never once heard a pedagogue raise their voice, is, I hope, due to an understanding of this principle. Whether or not it was done purposefully, which I strongly believe it was, it was stimulating to observe and very satisfying to see such solidarity of action across the whole network of care, including earlier in the kindergarten.

Both of the previous examples at Rymarksvaenge show elements of a non-violent but challenging behaviour strategy, of which there were many more examples, the results of which were tangible. As well as this reactionary form of pedagogy, needed to meet the day-to-day necessities of working with people, there were also other more practical differences. One of the main ones which I felt was redolent to independence was how the young people were in charge of their own cash flow.

In the UK money is administered through keyworkers and budgets set for certain requirements i.e. toiletries and clothing. In this unit, however, all of the young people were paid a month's allowance into their bank account. They had the freedom to spend it as they chose, unless of course they seriously misused this privilege, such as open drug use. They were therefore able to self-administer need and do so using a system that was fair to all. It is amazing how much time and miscommunication occurs in the UK between staff due to perceptions of money being misallocated, mis-spent or unfairly given out. This way of doing things handed that responsibility over to the young person and alleviated much, but not all I'm sure, of the time spent discussing this between adults.

During the third day at Rymarksvaenge we spent time shadowing a pedagogue named Christoph who came to be, as he was for the young people he works for, an inspiration. Christoph is instrumental in having developed a scheme for increasing personal motivation, using the physical, mental and instructional elements of sport to engage young people. The beauty, as a system, was not just of increasing the personal activity of the child but was to then acknowledge the need to relinquish involvement as and when the young person became motivated. Again, conferring with the widely accepted notion of knowing when to 'interfere' and when to allow the child to be agents for and of themselves, Christoph developed a scale which he explained to us and which, through shadowing him and later meeting particular young people, we came to understand.

Firstly, Christoph explained his own motivation in life and how and why he knew the system would work. Christoph is a trained personal fitness instructor and spent much of his youth as a basketball

coach. Incredibly, Christoph began coaching basketball at the age of 12, to an adult team, doing so after a sports teacher recognised that he needed an outlet for his otherwise unfocused energy. In giving Christoph this much responsibility, at such an early age, Christoph, as he explained to us, learned much about his own motivations, and that young people are inherently capable, are not and should not be seen as below or inferior in their experiences to an adult and ultimately that anyone can be successful at any age.

The scale he developed has 5 nodes ranging from complete lack of personal motivation, often linked with poor self esteem, social relations and family difficulties, scaled as 1, to almost entirely independent, scaled at 5. Christoph and/or some of his colleagues working out of the local Seminarium, a pedagogy academy, work with all the children at Rymarksvaenge and its associated facilities. Each young person is defined on the scale by their personal motivation and engagement. If a young person is new to the system, operating at node 1, then Christoph will arrange for them to meet, get them a gym membership or maybe even just visit a local sports centre and watch others, or maybe meet another young person on the project; whatever is the first step to seeing the young person begin to want to engage. His time will be directly invested in organising the opportunities for activity on their behalf, collecting them, transporting etc. However, and this is key throughout the whole project, he will never force them to do anything, his tone is always welcoming and the young person has the freedom to choose to be active or not. Christoph made it very clear that he is entering *their life space* and everything should be on *their terms*; if they are tired, have other plans, have been upset by some other event in their life, this is okay. He will simply shake their hand, thank them for allowing him even the opportunity to work with them and continue to arrange further chances of activity. By acknowledging the need to operate so openly, the ability to perpetuate an intention, of helping a young person, is greatly increased. It can be all too easy to fall at the first hurdle; where a person is struggling to be active, the initial steps towards motivation will be hard to achieve, which blocks further willing to attempt to engage. Understanding the potential of the 'Common Third' as a bridging agent for learning and the construction of positive relationships is crucial and implicit within the whole make up of this approach. Where this is shared by all of your colleagues the challenge is also shared and therefore reduced.

Building up along the scale, Christoph will then work with the young person, such that on say level 3, he will have helped them to develop their own training schedule, including specific weight or aerobic exercises, he will then schedule the next meeting and possibly collect them for it, if they don't wish to arrive on their own. At level 4, Christoph will allow them to schedule their own diary, might phone them the night before just to remind them that they are due to meet the next day and, once in the gym, will offer advice on how to create their very own training routine. We met with one such person, Magnus, who Christoph phoned early in the morning, an hour before their meeting at the gym. Magnus explained that he was struggling this morning, as shall we say, he had very much been enjoying himself the night before! Christoph agreed to meet him at his flat, bring some breakfast and support him in attending. He suggested that, for a level 4, it would not normally be needed for him to do this but as Magnus was today operating on a lower level, he could adapt to fit the need. This strategy allows for the pedagogue to be both reactive and proactive in achieving a goal.

Despite clearly being tired and having two foreigners presented to him, Magnus made it to the gym, walking with and sharing in conversation with Christoph, their relationship clear and valued. We got to the gym, changed and then began to train with Magnus, doing 10 minutes aerobic exercise followed by a weights session. It was within the weights session that it became clear Magnus was not focused; too tired to continue, Christoph asked Magnus if he would like to finish early, especially as he was aware of the importance for Magnus to catch up on his sleep since later that day he was to be doing a 6-hour course in first aid. For Christoph to challenge Magnus to still attend the session but then respect the other important elements of his day was an impeccable representation of the overall cause of the project, and indeed social pedagogy. Again, he did not show annoyance at

having cycled some 5 or 6 miles to see Magnus, to him it was a professional privilege just to have seen him that day!

To be focused like this and to be able to source reason in maintaining a relationship above and beyond anything else really is a powerful tool within social pedagogy. I would say, in between many other concepts including the Head, Heart and Hands analogy, The Common Third, reflection, The Zone of Proximal Development, Haltung, Lifeworld Orientation and so many more, that much of the integrity of action is derived from the notion of professionalism, as recognised in the 'three P's' definitions. Defining a professional attitude towards the task in hand against other necessities of social interaction i.e. having 'personal' qualities and 'private' thoughts, allows this to happen. A sense of achievement is established within the worker, who remains professional throughout, and thus the social objective consciousness remains positive. It would be all too easy to feel like your time had been wasted, as a person, perhaps privately be disappointed, but to remain professional and act positively towards the young person allows for further positive interaction in the future. Why waste this opportunity for the sake of expressing a fleeting moment of annoyance or disappointment?

As the time spent with Magnus had been cut short, Christoph jumped at the chance of showing us the Pedagogy Seminarium. I could not be more grateful. During my 10 month fulltime training to become a teacher, a sense of solidarity was apparent between all those on the course; we shared a common objective, were there by choice and previous hard work, developed together and thus shared a common projection of our futures and what it meant to be professional. To walk into an institution which provided this same atmosphere but specifically for social pedagogy really was a blessing. It made perfect sense from here on in that the system is holistic. I knew from study before the mobility (e.g. Petrie et al – Working with Children in Care: European Perspectives) that there were unique differences in the political system which allow for holism such as a uniform tax of 50% (which no one I met complained about whilst I was there, in fact it was celebrated), allowing for more money to be spent on pro-social institutions, facilities which are more broadly dispersed and, therefore, widely used by the majority of its citizens, not just those in immediate and dire straits. Culturally, you can see this in action throughout the city and a real vibe is already present at 'street level', however, one of the best moments of the mobility was to walk into an institution specifically for higher level education in social pedagogy, and feel the same sense of energy and shared professional ownership as I had done whilst on my P.G.C.E! It alleviated all previous feelings that I expressed in the introduction of feeling that I had my own idea of the professional qualities of care since a shared 'Haltung' was present. I was, however, also very jealous that this exists for Danish carers and now feel that this is our greatest source of driving through change in our society regarding standards.

The fact that earning the title of pedagogue comes through 3.5 years studying towards a diploma, both in practice and theory, is a massive gesture of social acceptance and professional quality. It is true that in the UK there is a very diverse make up of people who provide care for our young people, and the source of personal qualities is unmistakably valuable. However, entry into the role occurs without any specific prior training, as long as we have never committed a criminal act and show willing. For us training is then provided on the job, formally in the form of an N.V.Q. which is of a 'tick box' style of 'learning' and heavily minded towards learning the legal requirements of practice rather than of building relationships, self esteem and independence levels within our young people. The training lasts, realistically, for between 3-6 months; I did mine in 7 weeks. For us we then tend to go to infrequent half or full day training, often with workers we have never met before and will rarely meet again.

In meeting Danish professionals, we also met people with diverse histories and personal experience who had later decided to become pedagogues, yet everyone of these, and including those who had gone straight through the education system into the Seminarium, were backed by knowledge and

practice of child care, shared in the process by which this knowledge was formed and grew within themselves and then, as was seen, trusted in the use of it by others.

It was easy to see, therefore, why the professional motive is able to stand above all other actions in supporting the Danish youth, and its other citizens. There is a credible division of labour regarding child care which equals the respect for a similar or equal division in the UK regarding education and teaching. The entire population of the UK respectfully and openly hands over their children to the state to be educated, aware of its function and having experienced. This notion of an organic solidarity, which allows labour division to exist in Denmark regarding social education, is perhaps why it is incredibly difficult for the UK population to understand as we have not done as the Danes do and been brought through a system of social pedagogy, going to kindergartens when we were young. The integrity of social care in the UK falls down on this point where the same holism fails to exist as our eyes, ears and minds cannot grasp what is not presented to us. Without the mobility I would probably have remained one of them, never having experienced it firsthand.

Following on from the time at the Seminarium my colleague and I, as Christoph had left for other duties, then went on to meet a level 5 young person named Stina. In meeting her, which I shall explain, I was able to see just how well the rest of the development through Rymarksvaenge supports its residents, supported by the social will and understanding of the rest of Copenhagen and Denmark.

True to the notion of removing oneself professionally, to allow the child to develop, to grow or to be, Stina's only previous input in regard to meeting ourselves, as a level 5 operator, was to be told by Christoph the week before that she had an appointment to see us at a gym in the southern area of the city. After that it was down to her to facilitate her business with us as it would have been had she been meeting Christoph for one of their sessions together. Sure enough, after we cycled another 5 or so miles across this city, we met Stina, a 17 year old girl, at the foyer of the gym. From that point on she was in control of us, able enough to lead two foreigners through a high level gym session for just short of two hours!

I am and have been a regular gym user for the last decade, I have never had a personal trainer but have trained with friends, learnt about different muscle groups, watched others being trained and at times read into fitness regimes etc. I have never had a more thorough workout, toning my entire body, taking into account push vs pull techniques, aerobic exercise and a decent, structured warm down and stretch than I did here. Stina was far beyond the capabilities of any young person I have worked with, not just in her knowledge, but more notably in her confidence to provide this regime to two people she has never previously met, who are considerably older in relation to her and who don't even speak the same language. She really was a credit to herself and her abilities.

I must say that when we had finished and were outside of the gym I was completely taken aback and in awe of her ability. After she then apologised to us for her relative 'lack of ability', explaining that she had just performed this training in the backdrop of having broken up her longstanding relationship with her boyfriend, just before the session, I was completely taken aback. To explain this to us and then to explain that she would now be going to take her possessions from his flat and move back into her own, was a testament to her resilience and self worth, even remarking: '*well it's his loss*'. To me this is simply unbelievable. Set against the types of behaviour I have come to expect, showing this willing, towards others, is just unheard of.

In order to move the conversation on, whilst walking with her to the bus stop, I asked her, '*if she was looking forward to becoming a gym instructor?*', assuming her ability reflected a desire to take this up as a profession, which she would be capable of. Stina met this with ridicule, saying that she trains and has learnt to train others simply because she enjoys it! She is instead on an educational programme working to become a waitress and explained that she either was or is hoping to go to

New York for some work experience. I was left just speechless. Stina's limitless capacity and nonchalant attitude towards her ability, highly reflects the core values of social pedagogy to allow socialisation but, almost to the contrary, defines individuality and independence. From this point onwards I was, and am still, totally sold on the value of it as a productive enterprise; for young people, in this case Stina.

I must, however, also go on to say I also recognise some of its limitations! On the final day we shadowed a female pedagogue, who works out of the offices in Rymarksvaenge but whose role it is to support residents who have moved on to their own apartments. We met two such people, and one was seemingly more successful than the other, showing the relative contrasts. However, I hope that good reason can be offered.

The pedagogue explained that the first young person we were to meet was someone who had ongoing difficulties in his life having lost his parents to drugs; she then explained that, despite him being relatively old for having ongoing support, she continued to do so, seeing herself as the main carer or relation in his life. When we met outside a local shop, in order to assist him in buying some food, it became apparent that he was not ready to go through with this. Again, the pedagogue respected his wishes and allowed him to leave arranging to meet at another time. In discussion with us, she also made it clear the need to respect people's wishes, as Christoph and all the other pedagogues had done, in order to promote the longevity of a relationship and it was clear, just in the physical interaction we saw, unable to understand the conversation, that he very much respected her for this.

I highlight this since, in conversation with others in the UK, criticism seems to stem from ideas that social pedagogy is felt to be an all encompassing, almost perfect entity, but the reality is quite obviously not true, human nature simply doesn't allow for it to be. What it does provide is a method, a form of reflection, of purposeful action and a means to attempt to do the best one can, or indeed society can, to promote the welfare of others, seen here in the capacity for the pedagogue to continue to want to help beyond the legal need due to his age. This is admirable and, as I understand it, relevant to the notion espoused by Bronfenbrenner, that *'Every kid needs at least one adult who is crazy about him'* (1977). In fact the concept transcends adult-child relationships; as a professor of interpersonal relationships, my father's research suggests that, *'every person has a basic need for affiliation'* (Duck, 1988), with similar ideas present in Maslow's hierarchy of need. To have the opportunity to explore social affiliations with others is imperative, it is the inherent meaning of being social.

When we then went on to meet the second young person, Amir, we did so crossing the city to arrive at his flat, now owned by him having previously shared the tenancy agreement with Rymarksvaenge. After proving his responsibility towards the tenancy, over a 6 month period, he now became the legal occupant of the flat in its own right. This is of huge importance in proving independence, since to secure another place, as is true in the UK, there is a catch 22 situation where proof is necessary of a previously successful tenancy before being able to secure another. For the state to co-own the tenancy but then relinquish the right over to the young person is a master stroke of progressive welfare. For whatever reasons Amir had needed to enter Rymarksvaenge, yet only a few years later he was now living independently, save some relational support from a single pedagogue, having developed the skills to do so via the systems put in place by Rymarksvaenge.

When we entered Amir's property I recognised him from photos I had seen at the unit, which we discussed and instantly laughed about. His flat was small but tidy and provided him with his own space in central Copenhagen. He was well spoken, polite, friendly and incredibly affable. He told us about his passion in life; rap music, and showed us his work on youtube. The production is excellent, his skills obvious and I still regularly enjoy watching/listening to his music. It was a further pleasure to find that he shares a passion for American baseball caps. As a teenager spending my summers in

Iowa, America, I had well over 100. I promised him one from Iowa and have now sent it on via Rymarksvaenge. We later went to dinner with him, shared in conversation and then left him as he met friends in the street. It was clear he was well liked and, again, for whatever reasons he came into Rymarksvaenge, he had certainly left with unique qualities and talent, which he was furthering with fulltime education into music, not to mention touring Denmark sharing his music!

As is testament to the idea to providing an inclusive welfare system, I felt that we could have simply picked him off the street, a regular citizen of Copenhagen and of Denmark, the product of the Danish investment in social pedagogy and in his innate abilities as a person.

## EVALUATION/CONCLUSIONS :

Reflecting on the entire, immersive experience has not been an easy task, so much so that I have not had time, on paper, to further reflect on the generic cultural differences between countries nor the beauty and vibrancy of the city of Copenhagen, in which it was a great pleasure to live and work for two weeks.

In touring the city via the water network, seeing the architecture, fashion and using bikes every day for transport in the security of well laid out and respected cycle lanes, eating in the restaurants, having an occasional beer and sharing in the family life of the host organiser, seeing 'The Mermaid', Soren Kierkegaard's and Niels Bohr's graves, the Tycho Brahe observatory, and many many other experiences , I have wonderful memories of Danish culture and life, not to mention, in answer to my earlier question, recognising that there is no finer Danish pastry than one eaten in Denmark!

However, the greatest experience for me was to be allowed to see a truly holistic approach to child welfare in action, the likes of which I could never have experienced to such a depth without the EU Leonardo mobility project, the organisers from ThemPra in the UK and Common View in Denmark, and especially for the host organisations in Copenhagen; of Stockholmsgave and Rymarksvaenge, whose insightful pedagogues massively credit their establishments and the overall welfare of the young people they work with. Without this I would never have been enlightened to the extent of the successes to be found within social pedagogy, its unification of theory, practice and experience.

Like Plato's simile of the cave, as found in '*The Republic*', I feel as if I have left my usual reality only to have my eyes burnt by the successes of a better system. However, given time, I can adjust and use this as a platform to bring these opportunities to others, and I am, therefore, again, eternally grateful for this experience.

In terms of bringing the skills found in social pedagogy to the UK, I have no doubt that the task is not an easy one; we have much to learn but by definition, as people who care, which *is* the common thread as practitioners between each nation, there is no reason that increased knowledge and awareness of the uses of social pedagogic theory is unachievable, in turn leading to greater use in practice. European cultures have not formulated their own forms of pedagogy through instantaneous means, rather, they have developed over a long and distinguished period. For the UK to get to a point, for instance, where there are institutions whose sole aim is to train pedagogues is not likely to be a quick process, such then is the need to propagate theoretical understanding and to allow this to develop, slowly but surely.

Part of my aim in this development is, 'simply', to use my experiences in social pedagogy to inform others of its existence. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis dictates that without a word to define a concept, giving form, taxonomy and a distinguishing set of elements which makes the concept or object unique, then it simply does not exist. That is, *"the names that make verbal distinctions also help you make conceptual distinctions rather than the other way around. The words that a person or culture uses will have direct influence on how the person or culture understands the world: The words make the world, rather than the opposite, as you may typically think"* (Duck & McMahan, 2010, p33). The Common Third analogy between myself and Pere is testament to this!

In the UK we have yet to unlock the door to social pedagogy and the vast subset of theories which underpin it. Ironically, it is interesting to think that we have independently come to a similar descriptor of the concept but failed to analyse the core philosophical values. In the UK our work is acknowledged as being with 'children looked after' yet pedagogy's literal or etymological derivation, from Greek, is of *Pais* meaning children, and *ago*, meaning 'to lead' or look after! The objective has been fundamentally unchanged, therefore, through the 3000 years of its existence. However, where we appear to share a common goal in 'looking after children' in the UK we fail to utilise one of the means to that end, ignoring the enlightened archaeology of knowledge which has formed over the last few centuries, bearing its name and seemingly its concept: [social] pedagogy. It is as if we are to entrust our medical lives to doctor's but refuse them the use of theories of biology, to me it makes no sense!

My aim then is to continue to use, to read and network the ideas and experiences through my work, propagating the idea through an expression of it within our home. Over and above this I have had the opportunity to lecture about social pedagogy to university students of social work.

Having previously been asked to lecture to students by a former social worker whom I know through work, regarding my experiences of children in care, from a residential perspective, I have been further allowed to use some of this to support pedagogic understandings, so far lecturing to her 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Year B.A. students and her M.A. students. In fact, I feel it is necessary to support the aim of the EU Leonardo Mobility to quote her full synopsis of the need for social pedagogy as seen through UK eyes, as she provided to the course administrators; being that: *"As part of the module SWUG6030 the students learn about the experiences of children in the care system..... One of the most important developments currently ongoing within this field is the piloting of a social pedagogical approach, which has been lobbied for by various children's rights organisations and charities. It is an approach that is popular and successful particularly in Scandanavia and there are indications that it may become a much more widely used model in the UK. However at present there are very few people working within the care system in the UK who are trained or experienced in this approach. James Duck is an experienced residential social worker working for Lancashire County Council....., however he is also experienced in the social pedagogy approach and has worked closely with social workers in Denmark who use this method. This is a rare opportunity for our students to be taught by someone with experience and knowledge of this approach which is likely to set them [her students] apart from others when they later apply for social work positions"*.

The specific reference to having worked with Danish pedagogue stems purely from the time on the EU Leonardo Mobility.



Further examples of 'bringing back' this culture has been to be able to develop a cycling scheme for children in the Lancashire care network, with the overriding aim of developing children's relationships to their immediate care giver, be it a fosterer or residential worker. This scheme was developed by a fellow participant of the mobility, Maelor Hughes, on the back of his experiences in Denmark, most notably those seen at Rymarksvaenge, whose residents are of the same age as those in our working practice. In reality this has been achievable since our enthusiasm on our return has convinced the respective 'gate keepers' i.e. the heads of residential services to release finances for funding the scheme. Included in the main provision of the project is another future participant of the EU Leonardo mobility, Shane Kipps, who intuitively understands the value of social pedagogy but has yet to have the same invaluable and affirming experience as we have.

With the backing of further investment in the Mobility I can only hope that more people can share in this wonderful experience; as a means to increased professionalism with our service, of sharing between cultures, of learning from each other and sharing in other people's lives, all with the aim of increased and holistic welfare for those in need, this experience has been second to none and I can only conclude by thanking again all those people who have been involved.

Thank You