Pedagogy – a holistic, personal approach to work with children and young people, across services

European models for practice, training, education and qualification

Pat Petrie, Janet Boddy, Claire Cameron, Ellen Heptinstall, Susan McQuail, Antonia Simon, and Valerie Wigfall

Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London

Today, provision for children and young people is developing rapidly at the level of policy, organisation, training, education, and qualification.

Much of the research carried out at the Thomas Coram Research Unit is about the children’s and young people’s sector. It includes studies of the experience of children and parents and their use of care, education, leisure and health services. Work has been undertaken on staffing issues: the daily practice of staff, their training, education and qualification, their recruitment and retention. These studies have often been carried out cross nationally, especially looking at European models of provision and staffing.

Recent studies, since 2000, have concentrated on what, in continental Europe, is often called ‘pedagogy’, a distinctive way of working with children and the basis for policy development. A strong focus of our research for the Department of Health has been on children in the residential care system in five European countries. Research findings have been presented at three national seminars for senior academics, influential representatives of the voluntary sector and members of government departments. This paper draws on the research and on the views expressed during the seminars.

Why consider pedagogy?

This is an appropriate time to look at what pedagogy might have to offer children’s services in England, because it seems to make a good fit with policy developments. Until recently, local and national policy in England, was mostly based on clear boundaries between the fields of education, childcare and social care. These divisions were apparent at many levels: conceptual, professional, organisational and in relation to training and education. However, over the last seven years there has been an administrative reorganisation of responsibility for children’s services and a shift in how we envisage provision for children and young people:

- Childcare (for working parents) and social care (for children ‘at risk’ or ‘in need’) have moved from the Department of Health to the Department for Education and Skills. As a result, most matters concerning children, whether early years and childcare, out-of-school care, child protection or schooling are now the remit of Education, with structural links to other departments.
- A Minister of Children was appointed in 2003.
- Recent government policy, culminating in the Green Paper ‘Every Child Matters’, has emphasised that services for children – child welfare, childcare, education, health – should work more closely, and that the different occupations involved should be more interconnected.
New integrated organisational structures such as Children’s Trusts, and local authority Children’s Departments, to replace education and children’s social services, are either envisaged or have already been brought into being.

More comprehensive forms of provision have been planned and legislated for, including Children’s Centres and Extended Schools.

There is a newly formed DfES Unit, looking at the workforce across the children’s sector.

Since the Children Act, 1989 and the UK becoming a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, there is an increasing emphasis on listening to children – currently most apparent in initiatives such as Quality Protects, Choice Protects and in the appointment of a Children’s Commissioner.

This is a time when the borders and relations between different types of services are changing, workforce issues are to the fore, and there is a desire to find new approaches. Not least, children are being seen as people in their own right, rather than problems to be managed. With these changing directions comes the opportunity to seek fresh options and to identify the best possibilities for realising government’s intentions. One model for work in the children’s sector is that of pedagogy, with workers, whatever their job titles, seen primarily as pedagogues.

What is pedagogy?

In England, we do not often use the term ‘pedagogy’ except in the context of the classroom and formal education. Our European neighbours often apply it to a much broader set of services, covering for example, childcare and early years, youth work, family support services, secure units for young offenders, residential care and play work. A consideration of pedagogic policy and practice in continental Europe could help to clarify the challenges and opportunities inherent in the developing English situation.

As used in continental Europe, the word ‘pedagogy’ relates to the overall support for children’s development. In pedagogy, care and education meet. To put it another way, pedagogy is ‘education’ in the broadest sense of that word. Indeed, in French and other languages with a Latin base (such as Italian and Spanish) words like ‘éducation’ convey this broader sense and are interchangeable with pedagogy as used in Germanic and Nordic countries.

Parents are sometimes referred to as the first pedagogues, but pedagogy is also a foundation concept that informs many sorts of services, providing a distinctive approach to practice, training and policy. In continental Europe, the use of the terms ‘éducation’ and ‘pedagogy’ imply work with the whole child: body, mind, feelings, spirit and creativity. Crucially, the child is seen as a social being, connected to others and at the same time with their own distinctive experiences and knowledge.

In Sweden, the employment of pedagogues in schools has been central to recent educational reforms. Policy addresses the whole child, rather than the child conceived in narrow educational terms. Around one third of school heads have a background in pedagogy, rather than teaching.

(Cohen, Moss, Petrie and Wallace, in press)

What is meant by social pedagogy?

Social pedagogy is sometimes used to mean pedagogy conducted on behalf of society, rather than the more private pedagogy performed by parents. But it can also denote work with more vulnerable groups in society. Different countries have different emphases and use slightly different terms.
In the countries which we studied, a pedagogic system could be identified. The system's components consisted of policy and practice, theory and research and the training and education of the work force, with each component feeding into, and drawing from, the others.

‘Pedagogic theory is specially about relationships, child rearing relationships’
(Dutch academic, interviewed as part of TCRU’s Social Pedagogy Study, Petrie et al 2003, Petrie et al, forthcoming.)

The research identified the following key principles of pedagogic practice:

• a focus on the child as a whole person, and support for the child's overall development;
• the practitioner should see herself/himself, as a person, in relationship with the child or young person;
• while they are together, children and staff are seen as inhabiting the same life space, not as existing in separate, hierarchical domains;
• as professionals, pedagogues are encouraged to constantly reflect on their work and to bring both theoretical understandings and self-knowledge to the process;
• pedagogues are also practical; their training prepares them to share in many aspects of children's daily lives, such as preparing meals and snacks, or making music and building kites;
• when working in group settings, children's associative life is seen as an important resource: workers should foster and make use of the group.
• pedagogy builds on an understanding of children's rights that is not limited to procedural matters or legislated requirements;
• there is an emphasis on team work and on valuing the contributions of other people: families, community and other professionals;

The work of the pedagogue is essentially personal. The students and staff interviewed for the research, often spoke of the work of the pedagogue in terms of the human person: head, hands and heart – all three being essential for the work of pedagogy. The personal, relational approach is emphasised in students' training and education where fostering sound pedagogic values and attitudes is seen as at least as important as the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

‘When you are holding a person in your hand, you are holding a bit of his life in your hand.’
(Principal, Danish training college, interviewed as part of TCRU's Social Pedagogy Study, Petrie et al 2003, Petrie et al, forthcoming.)
Pedagogic principles derive from a highly developed professional training and education, and relate to social policy that is conceived in terms of pedagogy; for example pedagogic principles can be brought to bear in cases where children are also a concern for youth justice systems.

**Education, training and qualification**

Some of those working directly with children have undertaken pedagogic studies in the last years of secondary school or colleges or in further education. These courses are not seen as an adequate qualification and many who have taken them go on to degrees in pedagogy, after working in the field.

Would-be pedagogues usually prepare for pedagogic work in universities and colleges, where first degrees take around 3 or 4 years. Courses involve the following:

- as an aid to becoming reflective practitioners, students take a range of theoretical subjects in the behavioural and social sciences;
- students are introduced to the skills needed for their work such as group work, working with conflict and challenging behaviour, and teamwork (which is much emphasised);
- students take courses in creative and practical subjects, such as art, drama, woodwork, music or gardening - interests and skills that they will bring to their work as media through which they can relate to children. Arts and practical subjects are also valued for their general therapeutic effect: they can help the children to enjoy life and feel good about themselves;
- there are often optional study modules and practice placements for specific settings, such as work with disabled children or in residential care.
- in some countries pedagogic courses are there as specialist options for work with adults (for example in mental health settings)

'It is a job where every day you must ask questions about yourself and your practice right to the end of your professional life.'

(French pedagogue working in a residential home, interviewed as part of TCRU’s Social Pedagogy Study, Petrie et al 2003, Petrie et al, forthcoming.)

In Germany, the Netherlands and Flanders, some students take an initial five-year course, including practice, resulting in the equivalent of an English masters degree. This prepares students for further academic work, for research and development posts in government and voluntary organisations, for management jobs, and consultancy and advisory positions in a range of provision. But some of those qualified in this way choose to work directly with children.

Once in employment, people with a background in pedagogy can have a variety of job titles relating to the work they undertake.

Since 1992, Danish pedagogues training for work in, for example, nurseries, out-of-school services, adult services, and children’s residential homes have a common education, with optional specialisms.

Petrie et al 2003, Petrie et al, forthcoming

Whatever the setting, educational, health, youth services, social services or nurseries, pedagogues usually work alongside other professionals and share the general aims of the establishment, but they bring their own distinctive principles, understandings and skills to bear.
What could a pedagogic approach offer England?

The possible benefits of a taking a pedagogic approach are to be found in the realms of policy development, training and workforce issues and with regard to the experience of children, directly.

Policy

a. Pedagogy is an overarching concept that could bring greater coherence to children’s services, as expressed in, e.g., Every Child Matters.

b. Pedagogy could also provide a framework for discussing aims for children and young people in society as a whole.

c. Many recent service developments sit well in a pedagogic framework. Full Service Schools and Children’s Centres are pedagogic provision in that they aim to support children's over-all development. They are both sites in which pedagogues could bring their own expertise and values for work alongside other professionals, such as nurses and teachers.

The research showed that, in England, children in residential care have more severe and disturbed backgrounds than in the other countries studied. Yet the training and education of staff in England is at a much lower level than in those countries.

Training, education and the children's workforce

a. Pedagogy degrees and careers are highly popular in the European countries studied, even though pedagogues are not especially well paid. Establishing pedagogy courses in this country could produce a well-equipped, flexible and stable workforce.

b. The breadth of pedagogic training qualifies staff for direct work with children and young people across a wide range of childcare, educational and welfare services. Whether in established or developing services the key pedagogic principals would hold, with workers sharing common values, theoretic understandings, skills and practice principles.

c. As well as their broader training, pedagogues can take specialist options such as those which would further the objectives of Quality Protects and Choice Protects. For example, the development of a trained body of pedagogues could meet the policy objectives for a professional workforce, trained in the skills and understandings required for residential settings. Pedagogical approaches may also have something to offer in the training of foster parents.

d. Positioning work in the children’s sector as pedagogy can provide a framework for rationalising existing qualifications and allowing for career development within the sector.

e. European Community legislation allows the freedom to work throughout EC member states. Adopting a pedagogic approach would allow for a greater harmonisation of professional training and practice with that of other European countries.
Children and parents

The research found that pedagogy, as practiced in the countries studied, had the potential to serve several aspects of government policy.

a. Pedagogy has the potential for an inclusive, normalising approach, with the main focus on children as children, but allowing for some children, at some times, to have additional needs. This normalising approach fits well with government’s aims for both looked-after children, disabled children and children with special needs.

b. While child protection issues are treated with all due seriousness, pedagogic approaches are child-focused, rather than procedure focused. Procedures are a necessary part of the work, but are not its basis. The professionalism of the worker, transparency of practice, a commitment to team work and accountability to others in the team, are seen as the best guarantee of child safety.

c. Pedagogues think in terms both of the individual child and of the group of children or young people. This allows for richer, more productive work with children, whether in play schemes, the nursery or a residential home.

d. Because they have some training in artistic and practical pursuits, workers can offer children activities that can enhance children’s self esteem.

e. Above all, pedagogy takes a holistic view of children and respects them as fellow human beings, each with a unique point of view and a distinctive contribution to make to whatever task is in hand. This stance would promote policy that requires the voice of the child to be heard and for children and young people to play their part in, e.g., devising care plans.

f. Working with parents has a high place in government policy, through objectives for children in care, to Sure Start, and to the Youth Justice System. Pedagogues see parents as partners, with whom they can dialogue about the development and well-being of individual children, as well as providing advice and counselling on parenting.

Problems regarding pedagogy

1. Sectional training interests may be threatened by the introduction of a more generalist approach.

   A survey across training settings in England revealed wide interest in European models of training, and some centres already had exchanges with pedagogic training establishments in Europe. There would also be the need to develop specialist training as optional or post qualifying courses.

2. Without publicly funded training opportunities of the duration and comprehensiveness of those to be found in Europe, a profession comparable to that of the pedagogue cannot be developed.

   Government policy is to increase the number of graduates, generally, and to make good staff shortages in childcare, early education and social care. These are settings that need the stimulation of new approaches. The European experience is that pedagogy degrees and careers are popular options.

3. There is no academic field defined as pedagogy (as used in this paper) in English universities.
Subjects studied in European departments of pedagogy are available in universities in this country, and research is undertaken that elsewhere would be seen as contributing to pedagogic theory. Also, existing courses are often influenced by pedagogic ideas (for example, the Masters Degree in Residential Care at the University of Strathclyde). In addition, there are across the country, first degrees in fields such as Early Years, Child Development, and Educational Studies that are theoretically relevant, although they do not have the practice placements, artistic or practical components, and the explicit base in pedagogic principles (see above), typical of pedagogy courses in Europe.

There are also first degree courses which are much closer to pedagogy, such as the BA in Informal Education at the George Williams College, London/University of Canterbury (a preparation for work in a variety of settings, including residential homes and youth work ), and the BA in Curative Education at the University of Aberdeen (a four year course leading to work with children and adults with complex needs).

4. The terms pedagogy can be mystifying for English language speakers and the Oxford English Dictionary allows for three ways of pronouncing it!

This is true – although using a soft g as in psychology may have a more English ring! There are existing alternatives, such as social education (but this may suggest lessons in citizenship). On the other hand, the relative strangeness of ‘pedagogy’ is one of its advantages, inviting enquiry, encouraging new thinking and suggesting new opportunities.

Pedagogy for children’s services in England: possible starting points

It is perhaps impossible to achieve, not to say undesirable to attempt, the transfer of whole systems of training, qualification and practice from one country to another. Nevertheless the research points to ways in which pedagogy, as a model, fits policy concerns for children, and the development of training and services in England. Currently, while these are areas that present many problems, there is also much evidence of a political will to effect change in how society serves its children and young people.

The following points need consideration:

1. Which existing course and qualifications are closest to those relating to pedagogy? In what ways do courses need to develop so as to educate students in the values, understandings and skills of pedagogy?

2. What would be needed to stimulate the development of a pilot degree in pedagogy?

3. How best to utilise ‘pedagogy’ as a framework for discussing the place of children and young people in society, addressing basic questions:
   • what do we want for our children?
   • what is a good childhood?
   • what relationship would we wish to promote between children and children, and children and adults?

These are pedagogic questions that cut across narrower professional interests and should accompany the various administrative reorganisations that are envisaged for children’s services and education.
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A first report on Social Pedagogy in Europe (Petrie, Boddy, Cameron, Heptinstall and McQuail, 2003) has been submitted to the Department of Health/Department for Education and Skills, and a report on the second phase is forthcoming. ‘Working with Children in Care: European Perspectives’, covering both phases of the research, will be published with the Open University Press in 2006. The work was directed by Professor Pat Petrie, and the research team includes Janet Boddy, Claire Cameron, Ellen Heptinstall, Susan McQuail, Antonia Simon, Valerie Wigfall, and research associates in universities in continental Europe. Please address enquiries arising from this paper to p.petrie@ioe.ac.uk

References and Bibliography


