European Perspectives on Social Work:
Models of Education and Professional Roles

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Introduction

Social work in England is currently subject to an unprecedented level of scrutiny and debate, with a government-appointed Social Work Task Force set up in January 2009 to help improve the profession's quality and status and boost recruitment and retention. This heightened focus is partly a result of the death of 17-month-old Baby Peter in Haringey in August 2007, despite his family having been seen sixty times by agencies including social workers from the council. It includes questions about the skills and competences needed to be a social worker in Britain today. It also reflects concerns about the negative image of social work in England; ongoing difficulties in recruiting and retaining social work staff especially to work in children's services (LGA, 2008); and a perception that social workers are constrained by an increasing level of government-imposed requirements which hinder rather than support them in their work.

Comparative cross-national research can contribute to this debate by providing a way of looking with 'fresh eyes' – offering new perspectives, and generating ideas. This briefing draws mainly on two studies of work with children and families in other European countries, which were funded by government and published in June 2009. The studies broadly aimed to explore good and well-developed practice in other European countries, and critically analyse the implications for policy and practice in the English context. The two studies are:

(1) Working at the 'edges' of care[1]
This research was conducted in England, Denmark, France and Germany, and was concerned with work with young people and their families, when placement away from home was being planned or considered. Expert reports were commissioned from academics in the three continental countries, and this was followed by interviews with over 100 professionals across the four countries

(including England). They included social care practitioners and managers, workers in related services such as mental health (CAMHS) and youth work, and national policy advisers in each country. Subsequently, some further scoping work was carried out to gather additional information about education for social care professions in Denmark, France and Germany.

(2) International perspectives on parenting support: non-English language sources[2]
The second study was based on expert reviews of parenting support in five European countries: Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. Because this work was focused on mainstream parenting support – rather than targeted social care services – it offered understandings of the work of social care professionals in universal services, such as schools. It also highlighted links between mainstream and targeted provision for children and families.

It is important to note that neither of these studies specifically aimed to consider social work roles and professional qualifications. Also, neither of them had a specific brief to compare social work education and roles across countries. The information here does not claim to provide a comprehensive overview of these topics. The studies did not aim to judge whether one country's practices are 'better' than another, or assume that services or models of work can simply be transplanted to an English context. Instead, the research set out to consider what could be learned from other ways of conceptualising and delivering support for children and families, and '*to question the historical inevitability of existing practices in our own country*' (Baistow and Wilford, 2000: 344).

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[1] http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RBX-09-07.pdf

[2] http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR114.pdf

It is hoped that this paper, based on observations grounded in research, will help to stimulate thinking about what social workers can and should be expected to do, and how this might be complemented by the work of other professionals. The focus is on social work with children and young people, but many of the issues are relevant to social work with adults too. The paper begins with a brief overview of the English context, providing evidence on how social workers in England spend their time and the qualifications and training required for social work in England. It then goes on to summarise key findings from the European research. Particular attention is paid to the European tradition of social pedagogy, and to the respective roles and training of social workers and social pedagogues and the other professionals who engage in tasks that are carried out by social workers in England.

How do social workers in England spend their time?

A key theme of the interim report of the Social Work Task Force was that social workers say they do not have enough time to devote directly to the people they want to help, and feel 'tied up in bureaucracy' (Social Work Task Force, 2009). This concern, that social work is too bureaucratic and insufficiently client-focused, is not new (Audit Commission, 2002; Munro, 2004). It predates the implementation of the Integrated Children's System (ICS), for example, which has been widely blamed for increasing the amount of time that social workers spend on form-filling and electronic recording of data. In these critiques, such indirect social work activities are contrasted with what is described as the 'real work' or 'primary activity' of face-to-face communication with families (Broadhurst et al., 2009; Peckover et al., 2008, 2009). Others have argued that the changes to children's services required by *Every Child Matters* have both legitimated and marginalised the role of social workers, giving them a clearer focus on safeguarding and on the most disadvantaged children and families, but transferring much of the more general support and early intervention function of social work to other professionals (Parton, 2009). A related concern is that para-professionals are increasingly carrying out much of what has traditionally been seen as the core task of social work (in particular direct work with children and families), leaving social workers to fulfil responsibilities such as care management and risk assessment which are seen as 'one step removed from their true role' (Asquith et al., 2005).

What does the evidence say about how social workers do in fact spend their time? A paper commissioned to inform the government's *Options for Excellence* review of the social care workforce (Statham et al., 2006) found that most time-use studies report that direct work with service users accounts for a relatively small proportion (between a quarter and a third) of social workers' time. However, the reliability of this information is affected by differences in how data on time use are collected, by the typically small sample sizes, and a lack of consistency in how activities are defined - for example, what counts as 'direct' and 'indirect' work. The 2001 Children in Need survey, which adopted a broad definition of direct work including activities such as writing reports for courts, liaising with other professionals and evaluating assessment information, found that two thirds of social workers' time was spent directly helping children, young people and their families (Bebbington et al., 2003). It has also been pointed out that case management activities (such as assessment, planning and review) are complex and skilled tasks which are a useful and necessary aspect of work with vulnerable children and families, even when they do not involve face-to-face contact (Horwarth, 2007; Holmes et al., 2009).

In order to assess the validity of claims that electronic recording systems such as ICS have caused social workers to spend less time working directly with families, the Centre for Child and Family Research was commissioned to compare data on the activity of child and family social workers collected as part of a costings study in 2001/2, with similar data (although from social workers in different local authorities) collected in 2007/8 (Holmes et al., 2009). At both time points, front-line social workers reported that they spent 80 to 90 per cent of their time on indirect activities, and felt that they had insufficient time for

direct work with children. The data from 2007/8 did show an increase in the number of hours spent on administrative tasks and indirect work for most social work processes. But time spent on direct work with children and families had also increased. For example, more visits were being made as part of planning and review processes. Increased use of placement panels and 'higher need' panels to ensure appropriate placements was also a factor in the increased time needed per case, as was greater liaison with other professionals, both of which could be expected to improve outcomes for children. The study also found that between 2001/2 and 2007/8 average case loads for field social workers fell by a third (from 21 to 14), although average case loads for those working in specialist social work teams (such as children with disabilities, leaving care and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children teams) increased over the same period, from 15 to 23. The main message appears to be that the balance of direct and indirect work has not changed, but the tasks required of children and family social workers within the *Every Child Matters* framework have become more time consuming.

Social work is increasingly taking place in multi-agency and multi-disciplinary team settings (General Social Care Council, 2008). The evidence suggests that such arrangements work best when there is clarity about the particular contribution of each agency or service and respect for each other's specific expertise, rather than an attempt to do away with difference and blur professional boundaries (Statham et al., 2006). A model currently being tested in Hackney[3] is that of Social Work Units, which removes individual caseloads from social workers and replaces this with teams consisting of a consultant social worker, qualified social worker, children's practitioner (usually not a qualified social worker), half-time family therapist and an administrator, who work on cases together.

The team's progress is checked by senior managers and staff are offered training in skills such as family therapy. The model is currently being evaluated, and although results are not yet available, early indications are promising.

Although there has been much debate about the optimum balance of time between direct and indirect work with service users, there appears to be little hard evidence to demonstrate which aspects of the social work role are linked to better outcomes, and therefore how social workers *should* spend their time (Statham et al., 2006). Service users certainly emphasise the relational aspects of social work: they value workers who are able to develop and maintain relationships, who listen to and respect them, are accessible and reliable and able to view their lives as a whole rather than focus only on particular problems (Scottish Executive, 2006; Beresford, 2007). Service users have less to say about the specific aspects of the social worker's role that they find most helpful. This is perhaps not surprising, as users of services are unlikely to be aware of the different tasks that social workers perform as part of their job. From their perspective, social workers typically have insufficient time to engage with their clients. Yet social workers consistently report that it is not possible to complete their work within their contracted hours, and that they work on average at least 10 hours a week more than they are paid for (Holmes et al., 2009). The tension between the demands of case management, having an overview and fulfilling administrative responsibility on the one hand; and the users' appreciation of relationships developed through face-to-face contact on the other, is a common thread in much of the UK literature on social work. Other countries have addressed this tension in different ways, and the main aim of this briefing paper is to consider if there are lessons that could be learned from these experiences.

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[3] www.hackney.gov.uk/reclaimingsocialwork.htm

The qualifications and training of social workers and related staff in England

Since 2003, all social workers in England have been required to hold a degree in social work, replacing the previous professional qualification of a two-year Diploma in Social Work at sub-degree level. The new degree can be obtained either as a three-year undergraduate Honours degree or a two-year postgraduate Masters degree. The content of the degree is stipulated in the Subject Benchmark Statement, published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA, 2008), which states that graduates should acquire, critically evaluate, apply and integrate knowledge and understanding in five core areas of study:

i.   social work services, service users, and carers;
ii. the service delivery context;
iii. values and ethics;
iv. social work theory; and
v.   the nature of social work practice.

The requirement for practice learning has been increased to 200 days, for both undergraduate and Masters degree, and the minimum age for qualification as a social worker (previously 22) has been removed. This has resulted in a marked change in the age profile of new students, with the proportion aged 24 or under almost doubling from 20% in 2003/4 to 39% in 2007/8 (including 15% aged under 20), whilst those aged over 35 fell from nearly a half to less than a third of entrants over the same period (GSCC, 2009).

Evaluation of the new degree has suggested that students appear to be developing analytical and critical skills but often do not feel well prepared when they start the job (Blewett and Tunstill, 2008; McNay, 2008). In 2005, a new post-qualifying framework was introduced, with five specialist courses (one of them focusing on work with children and families) awarded by Higher Education Institutions.

Other staff working alongside social workers in social work teams tend not to have a professional social work qualification. They include social work assistants, family support workers and sessional workers (paid at an hourly rate for work such as 'befriending' young people). These less qualified staff often undertake much of the direct work with children and families, overseen by social workers who retain responsibility for the case (Biehal, 2005). Data on the characteristics and qualifications of this wider social care workforce are limited (CWDC, 2008). However, research studies that have included family support workers in their investigations have noted the variety of their backgrounds and the fact that they usually draw on tacit or functional knowledge, acquired through practical experience of work with children and young people and/or on vocational competency-based qualifications. For example, nearly half of family support workers in one study had no relevant childcare or social work qualification, although they were often carrying out similar tasks to qualified social workers (Brannen et al., 2007). In another study, fewer than a quarter of family support workers were qualified social workers, and the researchers suggested that one reason they could find little evidence for the effectiveness of the therapeutic family support services provided was that neither family support workers nor qualified social workers had adequate training for the complex work required (Carpenter et al., 2007).

Social care professions in continental Europe

Lorenz (2008a: 7), writing about European social work, commented that *'one of the central characteristics of social work in Europe is the diversity of titles with which it presents itself.'* And, as Meeuwisse and Sward (2007, p 491) warned:

> *'Even if we stick to the terms 'social work' and 'social workers', they can have different meanings in different countries, making comparisons difficult.'*

Social work may be pursued in totally different sectors and by people in different professions, with different roles and responsibilities. Whilst this variability makes formal comparisons difficult, it is useful as an aid to

reflection and can offer insights into different ways of understanding and constructing the social work task, and social work professions.

One of the core differences between English and continental European approaches to social work relates to the conceptual and professional framework of social pedagogy. This term is unfamiliar in England, where the term 'pedagogy' tends to be used in the context of the classroom and formal education. In continental Europe, however, pedagogy is a broad theoretical discipline dating back to the mid-19th century. It is a core qualification for direct work with children, young people and families across the children's sector – including such diverse provision as childcare, youth work, family support, youth justice services, secure units, residential care, and play work. In line with Germanic and Nordic countries, we refer to this theoretical discipline and area of working as *social* pedagogy, in order to distinguish it clearly from pedagogy in the English sense of formal education.

Box 1. What is social pedagogy?

A useful working definition of social pedagogy is **'education in the broadest sense of the word'**. Lorenz (2008b, p 633) wrote that it *'is always more than schooling, is always the totality of lifelong educational processes that take place in society'*. In French and other languages with a Latin base (such as Italian and Spanish), terms like *l'éducation* convey this broader sense, and are used to describe the theory and professions of pedagogy.

Theory and practice are focused on participants' everyday lives, working through relationships, and emphasising individual rights and participation in decision-making, and the development of the *whole* child: body, mind, feelings, spirit and creativity. Crucially, the child is seen as a social being, connected to others and with their own distinctive experiences and knowledge.

The Oxford English Dictionary allows for three ways of pronouncing 'pedagogy', although it is often anglicised with a soft 'g', as in 'psychology' (**ped-a-go-jee**).

Source: Petrie et al. (2009)

Over the last ten years, a series of government funded studies at the Thomas Coram Research Unit (TCRU) has explored the concept of social pedagogy, as a basis for policy development and as a professional qualification for work in the children's sector (e.g. Boddy et al., 2006; Petrie et al., 2006; Cameron et al., 2007; Petrie et al., 2009). Across the European countries studied, there are variations in the way that social pedagogy has developed, as well as similarities. Social pedagogy functions as an organic system, consisting of policy, practice, theory and research, and the training and education of the workforce. It thus operates as:

- an academic discipline, studied to higher degree level and beyond within universities;
- a professional qualification, usually to Bachelors-degree level, and based on at least three years of full-time study (incorporating practice placements);
- a field for professional practice in the children's workforce, both in mainstream services and in child and family welfare;
- a conceptual basis for policy for children and families.

Given the prominence of social pedagogy as a qualification for direct work with children and families, it is not surprising that the TCRU research showed that pedagogues are commonly employed in social care professions. But what is their role and education? How do pedagogues fit alongside other social care professionals? Are they equivalent to social workers in England?

Qualifications for work with young people and families in Europe

As noted earlier, social work in England now requires a Bachelors degree-level qualification, whilst those who work alongside social workers (family support workers, youth workers etc.) tend not to have degree-level qualifications. In contrast, workers in similar support roles in Denmark, Germany and France were usually qualified to at least Bachelors-degree level. Most strikingly, psychologists and social pedagogues were

routinely employed within social work practice in Denmark, France and Germany. These graduate professionals provided a workforce alongside social workers that was specifically qualified for therapeutic work, and their qualifications base informed the everyday practice of direct work with young people and families.

In all three continental countries, social pedagogues were seen as the specialists in direct work with children and families, intervening with relationships and with everyday lives. For example, a manager in a German voluntary organisation that was providing support services for children and families said her organisation employed social pedagogues because the theoretical basis of their education enabled them to analyse the family as a whole system, to take account of factors contributing to the family situation, and thus, to identify what can be changed.

The need for a therapeutic emphasis in work with young people and families was also highlighted by interviewees in England. However, several argued that the English social work degree fails to prepare workers for a therapeutic approach to work with children and families and child protection work. For example, one manager observed:

> 'It's a very English thing; our social workers are not therapeutically trained. We work very well with the legal and protection [aspects of the role], but we don't work very well with the emotional... touchy feely services are not seen as social work, they're seen as youth and community work. That's what I would say from working in the field.'

These criticisms need to be viewed in the context of the wide scope and responsibilities of the social work role in England today, and the risk-averse climate in which such work is carried out. In other European countries, the social work role is often shared between a range of professionals qualified to at least Bachelors-degree level – notably between social pedagogues and social workers, with workers qualified in psychology and allied disciplines (such as family therapy) also playing a key therapeutic role in provision. Without further comparative work it is not possible to draw any firm conclusions about the advantages or disadvantages of such a differentiated approach. But it does raise the question of whether too much is expected of social workers in England, having to 'do it all'.

Social pedagogy and social work

In the three European countries studied, social pedagogy was not seen as an alternative to or substitute for social work, but instead as a complementary profession. Each had its distinct professional knowledge base. Social pedagogues were more likely than social workers to be engaged in everyday intervention with families. Their work had some similarities to the family support worker role in English social services teams. However, in contrast with the diverse and lower-level qualifications base of English family support work, the social pedagogues' theoretical and professional knowledge informed their approach to intervention. Social workers spent less time working directly with children and families, but their role was not merely bureaucratic. Rather, they held an overview of the case. The social worker was responsible for assessment, for making the care plan with the family and pulling together the different perspectives of those involved with the case. They needed to know the law and what was possible within the law.

In Denmark, social workers were commonly responsible for 30 or occasionally even more cases, with varying levels of need and input. Their direct work with children and families therefore tended to be focused on specific case management tasks, such as assessment and case planning. Social pedagogues, by contrast, were more likely to be engaged in direct day-to-day work with children and families. They provided intervention and support that focused on working with relationships and the everyday worlds of the clients. Several interviewees observed that this distinction in roles meant that, within child welfare, students could choose to specialise in the type of work that suited them. This was said to offer a *'creative tension'* between the professions, as was observed by a Danish social pedagogue who

worked in a mixed team of pedagogues and social workers:

> There is a different way of thinking. Those who study social pedagogy focus on care, [social workers] on the law and what is possible within the law. It's important to have mutual respect. … We become very competent together.

Similarly, a senior social work manager in Denmark commented on the different, and complementary, competences of the two professional formations:

> Pedagogues know a lot about children and their development – that's not social workers' highest competence so they complement each other. That's easier said than done but when it's done it works well. At the time they take the decision to become a social worker or a social pedagogue that gives a different perspective. Some are very good to write, some better at intervention with families. The social worker is the one who usually writes the plan of action and coordinates – that's what they're trained for, pedagogues are more [trained] for intervention.

France has a complex and highly differentiated social care workforce. Beynier et al. (2005) distinguished between four broad categories of qualification in social work, and, within these categories, twelve distinct professional roles, each with its own professional qualification. Social work (*assistance sociale*) and social pedagogy (*éducation spécialisé*) are distinct Bachelors-degree-level qualifications. Interviewees in the TCRU study emphasised the distinct and complementary skills of the two professions. For example, one service manager observed:

> 'We have some people in the team who are pedagogues (éducateurs)[4] and some [who are] generic social workers (assistants sociaux). The complementarity enriches the team.'

The pedagogue's role was described by respondents as more practical than that of the social worker. It was about *doing*, and doing *with* someone (*'c'est le faire avec'*) and about working with relationships (*'travailler avec des relations'*). For example, one pedagogue described helping with children's homework on a weekly basis. The social worker's knowledge was described as more administrative, focused on understanding child welfare systems and making sure that families received the support to which they were entitled. The difference between the roles was described by one social worker who had spent 17 years working in the field of child protection as follows:

> The education of social workers is more generalist [than the education for social pedagogues]. [As a social worker] I know [about] social security, financial benefits. … I studied administration and financial systems, systems of health and of financial benefits; I did more on law. It's very, very general.

Interviewees' observations and expectations about the qualities necessary for the work reflected the context of the highly professionalised French child welfare workforce, whereby it was usual for team members to have degree-level or post-graduate qualifications. One service manager described the characteristics his organisation sought when employing a pedagogue:

> We need the right kind of people; flexible and adaptable, disponible[5]. It's not just the training and qualifications, we need people who can work with and within the family. [They] need to support and work alongside the family[6], and above all start where they are at and go at their pace. The pedagogues must be willing to do this work where the walls of the institution do not

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[4] This team included *éducateurs spécialisés* (social pedagogues) and *éducateurs de jeunes enfants,* a distinct profession which qualifies for work with children aged 0-6 years, in a variety of settings.

[5] *Disponible* literally means 'available'. In this context, it should be understood as a personal characteristic of openness and willingness.

[6] Literally, *soutenir et accompagner* – support and accompany, but the idea of *'accompagnement'* translates as something rather more than providing support, suggesting the idea of 'going alongside' the family – for example to restore links between the child and key services such as school.

protect you. They need to respect families and the children but also to work within the judicial framework and understand protection and risk; to help parents to understand the needs of their children; to take the work step by step; to work out with the family achievable steps; and to work through the difficult periods.

Germany has greater differentiation in levels of qualification for social work and social pedagogy than is the case in Denmark or France. As in Denmark and France, there are Bachelors-degree-level Diplomas in social work and social pedagogy, but also a lower-level *Erzieher*[7] training (based on three years of full-time study, but with less emphasis on theory and more time spent in practice placement than for the degree-level qualification). Discussion of the distinction between social pedagogy and social work in Germany is complicated by the fact that – while the two have distinct (albeit related) professional educations – social pedagogy is, as in France, often referred to as 'social work' (Chowanietz 2007). However, interviewees in all three areas of Germany visited in the *Edge of Care* study described a clear distinction in professional roles between staff in local authority social services offices, who held overall responsibility for cases, and the more direct role of workers in voluntary sector organisations. The former were responsible for tasks such as assessment, planning and decision-making, while the voluntary organisations (as is customary in the German system) delivered direct services to children and families, including preventative interventions and residential and foster care.

With one exception (a manager with a qualification in social work) all the social workers and social work managers interviewed in Germany held an initial qualification in social pedagogy, as did all the workers doing preventive work with young people and families. *Erzieher*-qualified workers also carried out direct work with families, but these less qualified workers were not engaged in the most specialist forms of work such as *Sozialpädagogischefamilienhilfe* – intensive social pedagogic family support.

This intervention could take varying forms depending on individual needs, but usually entailed intensive therapeutic work with the family for at least six hours a week. In addition, it was very common for workers to have additional specialist qualifications – for example, in family therapy – that corresponded to the specific services they offered. In all three areas in Germany, social services offices increasingly specified social pedagogic qualifications for preventative work, along with additional qualifications such as psychology or family therapy.

Several interviewees commented on the value of the social pedagogy degree as a foundation for work with children and families. One worker summed up the principles of social pedagogy as follows: being professional; knowing how to conduct a counselling or advice meeting with a family; knowing how to build up relationships; and understanding (and managing) appropriate distance and closeness. Similarly, another practitioner said that social pedagogy gave her the means *'to work with myself, and [teaches] constructivism – how people construct themselves – and how to keep a distance'*, in other words to deflect the temptation for families to think of the worker as their friend. A service manager in another area observed that her organisation employed social pedagogues because the theoretical basis of their education enabled them to analyse the family situation rather than to 'just see a problem child'. A key characteristic of social pedagogy is that it is not primarily 'deficit-oriented', as social work may be (Lorenz, 2008).

In the three European countries studied, the difference in focus of social pedagogy and social work is reflected in the content of the degrees. While it is beyond the scope of this briefing paper to discuss the degrees in any detail, Box 2 presents a summary of the Danish model, as an illustrative example.

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[7] The term *Erzieher* literally translates as 'upbringer'.

Box 2. Social work and pedagogy: professional Bachelors degrees in Denmark

Both the social work and pedagogy degrees include theoretical tuition and practice placements, with a dissertation in the final semester. However, the degrees differ in legal requirements for their content, as follows.

Social work graduates must be qualified to:
i.   practise and co-ordinate social work and plan social measures as well as providing guidance and counselling and implementing preventive measures;
ii.   obtain critical and analytic competence with a view to identifying, describing and evaluating social problems in their entirety and choosing relevant methods and measures in relation to the actual situation;
iii.   transfer theories and methods into practical measures and create changes in cooperation with the users and other involved parties;
iv.   establish professional relations with users and be able to enter into dialogue with users and to see their strengths and support them in utilising their resources;
v.   participate in organisational processes with a view to influencing and changing the framework and conditions, and being able to act and negotiate in relation to conflicting requirements and expectations;
vi.   carry out regulatory functions and make decisions while taking into account legal requirements, the actual situation of the users and the practice of the public administration as well as being able to act according to the decisions made;
vii.   develop social work on the basis of documentation and evaluation, implement quality control and to follow, apply and participate in research within the field of social work; and
viii. continue post-graduate studies on completion of the programme.
The social work degree includes:
•   Theoretical/academic content in relation to social work; psychology and psychiatry; law; and applied social sciences (e.g. political and economic science)
•   Practice-focused education in social work methods
•   Two practice placements, totalling six months of the three-year degree.

Pedagogy is a generalist education, for work with clients aged from birth to old age. The degree sets out to provide students with:
i.   the theoretical and practical competences for social pedagogic work with children, young people and adults, including children, young people and adults with special needs;
ii.   the competences for maintaining, communicating and developing cultural values - not least in relation to people with other linguistic and cultural backgrounds;
iii.   the competences for cooperation, including cooperation with colleagues and other professional groups;
iv.   a basis for developing their pedagogic practice and for contributing to innovation in the field, including research and development.
The Ministry of Education stipulates that the pedagogy degree must include the following:
•   Pedagogic theory and practice (drawing on a wide disciplinary base, including pedagogy, psychology and sociology)
•   Danish culture and communication
•   Individual, institution and society
•   Practical study in one of the following areas (chosen by the student): health, the body and exercise; expression, music and drama; arts and crafts, or science and technology
•   Three practice placements, totalling 15 months of the three-and-a-half year full-time degree.
•   Specialisation within one of the following fields: children and young people; people with 'reduced functionality'; or people with social problems.

Both social work and social pedagogy degrees have course requirements stipulated in law[8]. Both are delivered through state-recognised specialist institutions, but the degrees differ in their emphasis and content, in line with the accounts of practice given above. While both combine theory and practice, the social work degree includes more emphasis on case management responsibilities than the pedagogy degree, which in turn emphasises direct practical work through relationships and everyday activities. Thus, for example, creative and practical subjects such as art, sport, and drama form an important component of the pedagogy curriculum, providing media through which the social pedagogue can relate to clients. These subjects are also valued for their general therapeutic value, in helping clients to enjoy life and feel good about themselves (see Boddy et al. 2006 for a more detailed discussion of the social pedagogue role).

The role of psychologists alongside social workers

In Denmark, France and Germany, psychologists also played a role in child welfare teams. Their role differed from that which forms the remit of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in England as a specialist intervention service for children and young people with high levels of need, often with long waiting lists and high thresholds of need to access the service (Ofsted, 2008). In the other European countries studied, psychologists were routinely based within multi-disciplinary social services teams, and it appeared that this embedded their disciplinary perspective within the practice of child welfare.

In France, for example, we interviewed a psychologist who had worked in a neighbourhood social services (*circonscription*) team for 20 years. She had a caseload of about 30 families, whom she described as the cases causing most concern, and described her role as more therapeutic

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https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=25288

than that of the pedagogue or social worker. Her role was not equivalent to the function of psychologists in CAMHS in England – it was not a substitute for specialist psychiatric or psychological intervention. She noted that children or young people in need of intensive treatment would be referred to a specialist medico-psychiatric centre, or could be referred to a private clinic. Rather, the role she described was concerned with protecting the child, and *'helping restore them'*. Similarly, work with parents was, she said, indispensable, so that they could improve their *'interior lives'*, enabling them to reflect and develop their identity as a parent and thus re-establish their relationships with their children.

In both Germany and Denmark, psychologists also worked in 'family houses' (called *Beratungsstellen,* or counselling services, in Germany). For example, one Danish city ran a number of neighbourhood-based family houses, staffed by pedagogues, social workers, and psychologists, some of whom had additional qualifications in family therapy. These workers offered intensive counselling and support for families referred by social services, but they also offered open-access provision, such as a group for children of alcoholic parents, and drop-in parenting support sessions.

The examples above relate to the involvement of psychologists in *direct* work with children and families, but these professionals were also involved in managing and supervising social services teams. A psychologist who managed a local authority fostering team in France, for example, described how the whole team met every month with a psychotherapist:

> *This is compulsory and very important. It's the idea of the team together because the worker is alone [when working] with the family. We might discuss a particular theme or present a case and the analyst encourages us to reflect on the family and what its behaviour may relate to.*

The interim report from the Social Work Task Force in England highlighted the need to improve supervision in English social work

teams, and the use of professionals with other types of expertise in this role in other countries may be of particular interest. The experience of other countries implies there may be potential for psychologists in England to have a role within children's social care that goes beyond CAMHS and educational psychology services, to work *embedded* within social services teams. In other countries, their role may include supervision and support of colleagues within the team; direct therapeutic work with young people and/or families at times of stress such as family breakdown; and preparation for placing children away from home. Currently, in English social work, this wide range of responsibilities is met by social workers or by staff such as family support workers.

Professional differentiation

In the European countries studied, the role of social pedagogues and psychologists, working alongside social workers in social services teams, reflected a perception that the demands of the social work task require specialist multi-disciplinary teams. In the words of a Danish social services team manager, *'you can't work alone with these heavy problems. It's not fair to the family only to have one set of eyes'.* Professional differentiation was evident in all the countries studied, but France presented perhaps the most striking example. The term *'travail social'* (literally 'social work') encompasses a considerable number of specialist professions, which include the role of *assistant social* (social worker) and that of the *éducateur spécialisé* (social pedagogue).

In France, the teams that organised and provided services for children and families commonly included social workers, social pedagogues, psychologists (as discussed above) and specialists in child and family law. Legal professionals were often employed in the role of *inspecteur,* a distinctive professional role, with the power to make decisions about the services that can be offered to the child and family. A key element of the *inspecteur's* role was to determine whether the needs of the case could be met through a voluntary agreement or whether the

case should be referred to the public prosecutor for referral to the children's judge – and legal knowledge was seen as valuable in this role.

Although social workers in England are increasingly working in multi-professional teams, a key difference between England and the other countries is in the level of professional qualification of the other workers in the core children's services team. This arguably increases the pressure on social workers to 'do it all', or else delegate what is seen as a key element of the role (direct work with families) to less qualified staff.

Social work professions in mainstream parenting and family support services

The *Edges of Care* study illuminated the role of social work professions within specialist services for young people and families where placement away from home was being planned or considered. The other study on which this briefing paper draws is of parenting support in five European countries in more mainstream settings, well below the threshold for considering placements away from home. Findings from this study indicated that social work professionals also play an important role in the delivery of these mainstream services, often working within integrated multi-professional teams. As in the *Edges of Care* study, the multi-disciplinarity of these teams was striking. Specialist professionals, including social pedagogues, social workers, psychologists, lawyers and family mediators were all employed in the provision of mainstream parenting and family support, and were often based within universal (or universally accessible) settings, such as schools and family centres.

In France, for example, a national initiative called the *Programme de Réussite Educative* (PRE, Educational Success Programme) gives specialist school social workers a key role in early identification and intervention. In this context, the notion of 'educational success' refers not only to success in the school curriculum, but also to positive development more broadly.

An extended role for social work in mainstream settings is also evident in English initiatives such as the deployment of social workers in Sure Start Children's Centres and schools (e.g. Boddy and Wigfall 2007; Wilkin et al., 2008). However, high thresholds for children's social services mean that it remains unusual in England for social workers to have a regular role in mainstream provision for children and families. This is despite the fact that those engaged in supporting parents in England tend to have lower levels of formal qualification than their European counterparts, and may be *'taking on work that is too challenging for their level of training and experience'* (Lindsay et al., 2008). As the *Social Work Taskforce* considers the future of social work in England, it may be worth reflecting upon the potential role for community social work in parenting support services – perhaps alongside other professions such as psychology and social pedagogy.

The knowledge base for social work

In considering challenges to social work and the nature of the professional role, it is useful to consider the extent to which the role relies on different forms of knowledge. Cameron and Boddy (2006) drew on a range of studies in discussing the knowledge and education required for care work, noting a distinction between three forms of knowledge:

(i) *tacit knowledge* or practice wisdom, derived from personal qualities and experience;

(ii) *functional knowledge,* of the sort that underpins the NVQ competency-based model of qualification, which is focused on the ability to perform defined tasks to agreed standards; and

(iii) *professional knowledge*, which combines professional skills (including specific competences) and practical experience with a strong theoretical underpinning.

Critical to professional knowledge is the ability to relate the three areas – experience and personal qualities, skills, and theory – a

theme that emerged in several countries. The argument is that this helps workers to do their job better, be more aware of the effects of interventions, and monitor their own behaviour more self-critically. The idea of using both the personal and professional is a key element of social pedagogic theory and practice. In earlier TCRU research (Petrie et al. 2006), pedagogues and pedagogy students spoke of having a *'professional heart',* of working professionally with a focus on relationships, and, in Denmark, of the psychoanalytic concept of *'rummelighed',* which literally means 'spaciousness', but which was described in the context of having *'room in your heart'* for the child (or client), even if you did not like them. In the continental European countries studied, professional knowledge was seen as essential for direct work with users of services, as well as for social work tasks such as assessment and case management.

Graduate-level qualification for social work is a relatively recent development in England, and it appears still to be accepted that social workers should be the only graduate-level professionals in social work teams. For example, the General Social Care Council (2008, p17) suggested that 'social work tasks with children and families and with adults may be shared between social workers and *assistants, support or care workers with the appropriate skills*' [our emphasis]. This statement implies a reliance on tacit and functional knowledge, particularly for the sort of direct work that is carried out by staff such as family support workers. This reliance on para-professionals to carry out what is seen as a core task for social work has been criticised (Asquith et al. 2005; Lymbery 2009). Such criticisms raise questions about the appropriate balance between qualified and unqualified staff and, fundamentally, about the kind of knowledge (as characterised above) necessary for such direct work. In the context of high service thresholds, and given the nature and complexity of the work, is it reasonable for social workers to be the only graduate-level professionals in the core social services team? Could there be benefits from embedding greater specialist expertise within those teams, as is the case in other European countries?

Conclusions

It would not be appropriate simply to transplant one method or theoretical approach (such as social pedagogy) to another country with a different context and tradition, without trial and adaptation to ensure transferability to that new context. In England, the family has traditionally been seen as a private domain (e.g., Cunningham 2006), and social work has been embedded in a different (less universalist) approach to family policy than is found elsewhere in Europe. This difference in context underpins Lorenz's (2008) argument that the difference between social work and social pedagogy is that social pedagogy is not primarily deficit-oriented. Social pedagogy is emancipatory in intent, with an emphasis on a collective societal responsibility for upbringing, or education-in-its-broadest-sense. The context of most current English social work practice – as a residual safeguarding service for children and families with very high levels of need – means that a focus on problems and risk is probably inevitable, and even necessary, from a child protection perspective.

However, differences in context do not preclude transferability. The rhetoric of much current government policy – through the Children's Plan and other key policy documents – is social pedagogic in tone, recognising society's responsibilities to support the upbringing of children. This shift, towards 'progressive universalism' and an overarching family policy for the 21st century, implies the need for a return to a broader conceptualisation of social work, with involvement in earlier intervention, and greater continuity between different tiers of provision than has been the case.

Although models of education and practice cannot be transferred wholesale from other countries with different welfare contexts and historical traditions, there may be potential for learning from other perspectives and ways of doing things. The cross-national work outlined in this briefing paper suggests that the question of whether social workers spend too much time on case management activities (such as assessment, planning and review) at the expense of face-to-face contact with children and families, is perhaps something of a red herring. Both aspects of the role are necessary. Workforce models in other countries suggest that both are complex and skilled tasks that are likely to need the theoretical knowledge and expertise of a highly-trained, graduate-level professional.

Perhaps a more relevant question might be whether, given the scope (and risks and pressures) of the social work task, it is reasonable to expect social workers in England to do a job, albeit with support from less qualified workers, that is shared among members of multi-professional graduate teams in other European countries. And can a single undergraduate degree hope to cover the complexity of all that is required of the social work task in England – the legal frameworks, the therapeutic and relational skills for direct work, alongside multi-disciplinary theoretical knowledge and the critical 200 days of practice experience? Research in other European countries suggests that the development of professionalisation, and of professional differentiation within social work teams, may offer a way of meeting some of these challenges. Although this could be seen as a threat to the integrity of the social work profession, it could also be viewed as an opportunity to broaden the scope of social professions, and in doing so, to ensure the development of a workforce that is sufficiently specialised for such a substantial, and high stakes task.

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