



## Foreword

I remember crouching over the edge of a lake with my daughter who had just discovered that there were tiny creatures moving about under the water. Her excitement was almost as evident as her curiosity as she pointed out tadpoles, tiny fish, water beetles and myriad other tiny aquatic life forms. Together we wondered, we counted, we wrote a list of the names of those I could remember from my studies and we shared the contentment of discovery. We also got wet! Years later another exchange, this time with my father, focused on the knowledge we didn't share, but his care about what being a social worker meant for me was evident. His concern for me was about how I would find out what I needed to know in order to be safe in my work, which was then in the child protection field. My father's expertise lay in chemistry and his lack of knowledge of social work made me reflect more critically as we spoke together. In more recent times, I have realised the inexpressible depth of learning and relationship that comes with sharing a sense of curiosity, investigation, knowledge, conversations about myriad issues, mutual caring and maintaining a flexible, respectful approach to living. For me these experiences reflect the essence of social pedagogy.

'Social pedagogy' is not a term familiar in Australia in spite of this discipline having an extensive history, knowledge base and application in European countries. It has not been a familiar term in the United Kingdom (UK) either until a recent resurgence of interest highlighted that there have been many people there with an interest in, and knowledge of, social pedagogical approaches. I have wondered if Australia's lack of awareness has been due to postwar Australia maintaining its key relationships with allied countries — Britain and America — and the renewed links to Scandinavian and European countries in the late 1960s and 1970s ended up being dismissed as part of the 'left' movement and alternative lifestyles of that era. Certainly, the human services field has been singularly indifferent to developments in the European community in the last 30 years, focussing instead on those of the UK and United States (US) within a strongly neo-liberal and managerialist environment.

However, there is no reason why social pedagogy cannot make an important contribution in the Australian context as it has elsewhere in the world. *Children Australia* considers an array of issues associated with children and young people, and their families, who need care and support, one of which is ensuring they have educational opportunities. For this reason, we have chosen to devote a special issue to the topic of social pedagogy and invited Gabriel Eichsteller and Sylvia Holthoff of ThemPra Social Pedagogy in the UK to be guest editors. Gabriel and Sylvia have been closely involved with the application of social pedagogy in the UK since 2007 when the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) announced in its White Paper *Care Matters: Time for Change* (2007) that it would 'Fund a pilot programme to evaluate the effectiveness of social pedagogy in residential care' (p. 58). In 2009 they founded the Social Pedagogy Development Network (SPDN) together with key partners from the Thomas Coram Research Unit and Jacaranda Recruitment as a way to connect different developments associated with social pedagogy. This work has led to a re-emergence of training in social pedagogy for those caring for children in a range of care settings and a number of publications, including *Social Pedagogy and Working with Children and Young People: Where Care and Education Meet*, published in 2011, Claire Cameron and Peter Moss (Eds.).

In the UK, social pedagogy has become synonymous with many hopes about improving children's and young people's lives, especially those who are looked after. While some have argued that the foundations of social work practice reflect many similar aspirations for those in care, it is timely to reconsider what a social pedagogical approach offers across a variety of care and support contexts and its application to the Australian human services field. While there are apparent contradictions in the social pedagogy literature, depending on the country and era in which it has been written, these are usually matters of difference in perception. In addition, social pedagogy places a high degree of emphasis on the integration of the personal, the philosophical, the theoretical, the practice and reflection; a combination from which necessarily emerge differences. Add to this complex integration of human

factors the evolving nature of social pedagogy and the apparent differences are both understandable and likely to dissipate on closer examination. In becoming aware of the social pedagogical stance, perhaps we can learn new approaches to working with children and young people, more strongly integrate our knowledge and practice and break down the silos of disciplines that can so often be less than useful when endeavouring to achieve holistic interventions.

In introducing you to this special issue, I would like to thank David Lane of *Children Webmag* for putting *Children Australia* in contact with Gabriel and Sylvia and, of course, Gabriel and Sylvia themselves who have put an enormous amount of work into seeking contributions across the range of historical, theoretical and practical aspects of social pedagogy in the UK and Europe. This issue would not have been possible without their effort

over many months, together with those who put time into reviewing manuscripts.

ThemPra resources are available from <http://social-pedagogy.co.uk/index.htm> and Social Pedagogy Development Network resources and information are available from <http://www.socmag.net/?p=456>.

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## References

Cameron, C., & Moss, P. (Eds.). (2011). *Social pedagogy and working with children and young people: Where care and education meet*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Department for Education and Skills. (2007). White Paper. *Care matters: Time for change*. Under Crown Copyright. Retrieved from <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm71/7137/7137.pdf>



## Seasons Greetings from *Children Australia*

The Editors, Rachael and Jennifer, would like to take this opportunity to wish you a safe and happy Festive Season and to thank all our reviewers, authors, editorial consultants, the staff and Committee members at OzChild and others who have provided much-needed support and encouragement in the production of this journal throughout 2011.



*And best wishes for 2012*