



Social Pedagogy: What Questions Can We Ask About Its Value and Effectiveness?

Claire Cameron

Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom

Social pedagogy is a field of professional practice associated with the care and education of young children, support of young people, and with family support that has an established place in many continental European countries. It has attracted attention in the United Kingdom (UK) for its potential relevance to the policy ambition of improving the generally poor educational and social outcomes for young people in public care. In this article, I discuss some issues arising from the task of establishing the value, or effectiveness, of the social pedagogic approach. Using findings from cross-national studies, I argue that there are various problems with measuring the 'effectiveness' of social pedagogy, but that in countries where social pedagogy is well established and supported by a policy and cultural context, its role in supporting children and families is highly valued. I conclude by considering some implications for the introduction of social pedagogy into the UK.

■ **Keywords:** social pedagogy, children in care, comparative studies, effectiveness

Social pedagogy is often, in the United Kingdom (UK), referred to as 'education in the broadest sense of that term' (Petrie, Boddy, Cameron, Wigfall, & Simon, 2006). Social pedagogy is a professional discipline that takes an educational approach to social problems or issues. It can also be seen as a 'perspective that throws light on the way social and political problems are transformed' into questions about educational practice (Vandenbroeck, Coussée, Bradt, & Roose, 2011). With a birthplace in fragmented 19th century Germany, and a presence in most European countries, social pedagogy has been characterised as both 'diverse' in its formulations across Europe and as a 'frequently misunderstood' member of the social professions (Lorenz, 2008). In continental European countries, social pedagogy informs policy, has a coherent training infrastructure, and is a key practice framework for working with children and young people. Social pedagogy is much less well known in English speaking countries but there is emerging interest in Australia (E. Rau, 2011, personal communication) and Canada (K. Gharabaghi, 2011, personal communication).

Fundamentally, social pedagogy is about the integration of citizens into society. It is about the cultural reproduction of society at both the level of collective values and norms and how they are articulated and put into practice, and at the level of individual socialisation (Lorenz, 2008). Social pedagogy is both about integration as sustaining societal

norms and also about fulfilling potential as human beings: promoting their sense of wellbeing, exercising rights, and through relationships with professionals that are nurtured as authentic, meaningful and formulated in a goal-oriented way (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011). A very important aspect of social pedagogues' work is their sense of self in relation to others, and in relation to their own development as a person (Jensen, 2011).



ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Professor Claire Cameron, Anglia Ruskin University, Department of Family and Community Studies, Webb Building, East Road, Cambridge CB1 IPT, United Kingdom. E-mail: Claire.cameron@anglia.ac.uk

In England, social pedagogy has attracted most attention for its potential relevance to work with children in public care, although in most countries, the field within which social pedagogues work is not so narrowly defined. In Denmark, for example, social pedagogy is one part of 'pædagog', a field of work for practice in services and settings as diverse as early childhood care and education services, out of school services, youth work, older people's day and residential services, drugs and alcohol services as well as schools, young people's residential care and supporting foster care. In the Danish case, the 'social' refers to the target groups — work carried out on behalf of society for its socially disadvantaged members.

This perspective on working with children and young people chimed with the last English government's policy to improve outcomes for young people in the public care (Labour Government 1997–2010). The *Every Child Matters* (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2003) and the subsequent *Care Matters* (DfES, 2007) policy agenda had as its focus a 'range of measures to reform and improve children's care ... and to improve their life chances' (DfES, 2003). Furthermore, 'the aspiration that the state has for [children in care] should be no less than each parent would have for their own child' (DfES, 2007). The policy focus on stability of care placements, training and support for carers, education for children in care, prolonged transitions to adulthood and working together across disciplinary boundaries had much in common with the policies and practices of European approaches to working with children in public care. Indeed, in *Care Matters* (DfES, 2007), the synergies with continental European approaches to working with children were recognised and the government committed itself to piloting a social pedagogic approach in residential children's homes in England.

The aim of this article is to focus attention on what is known about the value of the social pedagogic approach, particularly in relation to working with children and young people in three areas: general child welfare provision, residential care, and educational pathways for those who have been in public care. I will use Hetherington's (2006) framework of 'child protection' and 'family support' oriented welfare systems to indicate some rather different contexts in which children's services, and social pedagogues, operate. Child protection oriented systems are more narrowly focused than 'family support' oriented systems, and are those where children and families in disadvantaged circumstances have a more residual place, while in 'family service' oriented welfare systems professional action regarding children and families is seen as supporting, not replacing or threatening, the upbringing role of parents.

Questions about the value of a practice or service are often articulated in terms of its 'effectiveness'. The question of effectiveness is problematic (Shaw & Bryderup, 2008) not

least when using cross-national comparisons and this will be explored below. Having considered these, I will examine the findings of cross-national studies that shed light on the roles and responsibilities of the occupation of social pedagogue. I will draw some conclusions about the value of the role and how it maps onto the policy concerns of the English reform agenda. I will conclude by discussing some prospects for social pedagogy in the UK.

Issues of 'Effectiveness' in Cross-Country Comparisons

Shaw and Bryderup (2008) refer to a worldwide search to address questions about whether welfare systems deliver effective and cost-effective services. However, 'effectiveness' may have quite different interpretations across discipline, cultural and policy contexts. In some countries, disciplines and national policy frameworks, effectiveness refers to the impact of phenomena, such as an 'intervention' or service, on clearly specified populations, or features of populations, of concern. In these conditions, effectiveness, usually in a 'what works' or evidence-based paradigm, is considered a guide to recommended changes; it implies a certain direction for policy. 'Hard' outcomes are sought from reliable comparable statistics (Katz & Hetherington, 2006). This can lead to a privileging of certain types of research design, such as randomised controlled trials (Roberts, 2000), which prioritise the evaluation of outcome over process, and themselves lead to practical and ethical problems of delivery (Boddy, Statham, McQuail, Petrie, & Owen, 2008).

The problem with such a focus on effectiveness is that it is often seen in a simplistic way that fails to take into account the complexity of the context. Simplistic approaches can result in misleading causal links between phenomena (Goldstein & Woodhouse, 2000). One example of this within one of the studies to be discussed in this paper is to infer that young women get pregnant less often in residential children's homes in Denmark and Germany than in England because of a single factor, such as professional practice, rather than seeing the young person, and the residential care practice, as part of a complex set of cultural and societal norms and values around pregnancy, age and the quality of life for young people. Professional practice plays a role, but the tag of 'effective' practice is unlikely to reflect the whole picture.

A second problem is to consider the relevance of 'effective practice' in one cultural context to that in another. This is one of the challenges of cross-national research. Are we, in fact, comparing 'apples and oranges' which have very little in common beyond a general category of 'fruit'? Child welfare statistics are a good example, as they are often drawn up with criteria that vary by country, limiting meaningful comparability (Katz & Hetherington, 2006). What, then, can we learn from such a very different set of circumstances? Hantrais (1999) argued that contextualisa-

tion is a major component of cross-national studies and that any comparative study requires an in-depth understanding of the sociocultural, economic and political contexts in which a social phenomenon takes place. This 'societal' approach rejects the search for comparing 'like with like' and instead examines the relationship between the macro (context) and the micro (phenomena). Hantrais (1999, p. 97) argued that 'international comparisons aim to demonstrate the effect of the national context on the object of study, with the purpose of determining the extent to which generalisations can be made with the theoretical models and the hypothesis being tested'. Such an approach makes comparisons possible as each unit of observation has a systematic coherence, rooted in national specificity.

Third, comparative studies can be conducted in different ways. A distinction can be drawn between those that focus on one country's aim to compare their own situation with that in other countries, and multicountry studies that investigate the same question in each country. In each case, the characteristics of the comparative and analytical strategy differ. In the first, the concern is to find data that sheds light on the initiating country's questions, which might not have arisen at all in the researched countries. An example might be the rate of teenage pregnancies in children's homes in Denmark and Germany, an issue of national policy concern in England, but perhaps not considered of relevance in the other countries. The first country's research partner then has to ensure that the interpretation of the question in the researched countries is the same as its own, while the second and third countries might find they have information they cannot use.

In the second case, the relationship between research partners is more equal, as they jointly agree the research question but only one or two research partners may 'own' the comparative work who, in turn, will not be able to access the raw data, but will compare the already analysed work of the national partners in their reports. Strategies can be put in place to anticipate potential analytic difficulties, and these centre on researcher communication and consultation throughout the design and analysis process. Nevertheless, however structured in approach to analysis and writing, disciplinary differences can manifest themselves in the selection and presentation of material at quite late stages of the process with the result that different facets of the raw data are given priority by research partners in different countries. Qualitative cross-national studies, then, aim for conceptual equivalence, and have to interrogate each partner's research and disciplinary based interpretations and understandings in order to achieve it, ensuring that the wider context is fully taken into account. They also aim for a structured approach to analysis, while acknowledging that they may have to work with compromise.

The dominance of 'effectiveness' and 'what works' paradigms are most clearly associated with a particular set of

values that may not travel well across country contexts (Boddy, Smith, & Statham, in press). The values of cost-effectiveness and instrumentalism may be to the fore rather than more general humanistic values of children's wellbeing, or prioritising 'a good life' for children. This is particularly pertinent to investigating the role of social pedagogy in children's services, as social pedagogy is highly values based and works within a social context. Countries where social pedagogy has a well-established place in policy and practice tend to be those where there is a humanist tradition that values children and childhood, and family life. Comparing approaches to parenting support programs in Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands, Boddy and colleagues (in press) concluded that aspects of the ways such services were organised and delivered in these countries meant they were not readily amendable to the kinds of quasi-experimental evaluation designs favoured by those seeking universally applicable lessons in 'effectiveness'.

In seeking to address the question of the effectiveness of social pedagogic practice, these issues about the importance of variation in context, not just in the organisation of services, but also in societal values about working with children and young people and their families, are highly significant. It is questionable whether, in fact, it is possible or ethical to 'measure' social pedagogical practice in one country and transfer it to another. It is, however, possible to describe what we know about children's lives away from home, and in the care of the state, and to point out the policy and professional practice contributions to that, including the role of social pedagogues.

Comparing Welfare States and Children's Lives In Care

In this section I will draw on data from comparative studies that took place in Denmark, Germany, Sweden, France, Hungary, Spain and the UK between 2003 and 2010. The data comes from studies of three points of intersection between children's lives and children's services: (1) early childhood and family support prior to entry to public care (Boddy et al., 2008; Oberhuemer, Schreyer, & Nuemann, 2010); (2) young people's lives in residential care settings (Petrie et al., 2006); and (3) post-compulsory educational pathways for young people who had been in public care as children (Jackson & Cameron, 2011). All the studies adopted mixed method approaches, combining analysis of national statistics and literature with interviews with key actors from the fields of policy and practice. The latter two studies included interviews with young people.

Some contextual features of the welfare states in these countries provide an important backdrop to comparisons for children's lives in care. Table 1 provides an overview of spending and service provision and a rating of child wellbeing.

TABLE 1
Some Characteristics of Welfare States Relevant to Lives of Children and Families in Seven European Union Countries

	DK	SE	SP	FR	DE	HU	UK
% of GDP spent on social expenditure (gross), 2007 ¹	30.8	32.1	24.1	32.8	28.4	NI	23.3
% of GDP public spending on education ²	7	6	3.8	4.9	4	4.3	4.7
% of GDP spent on family benefits, 2007 ³	3.3	3.3	1.5	3.6	2.7	3.3	3.5
% of GDP spent on ECEC, 2005 ⁴	1.3	1	.4	1	NI	.7	.6
% of children in early childhood education (0-3yrs) ⁵	65	44	39	41	19	10	40
Child poverty ⁶	3	7	17	7	7	7	10
% of children in care ⁷	1	1	.8	.7	.6	.6	.5
OECD rating of child wellbeing on six dimensions, clustered by average, above average, or below average ⁸	4 above average, 2 average	5 above, average 1 average	4 above average, 2 average	4 average, 1 above 1 below	3 average, 2 above, 1 below	2 average, 2 above, 2 below	4 average, 1 above, 1 below

Sources: ¹ OECD Gross public social expenditure
² OECD Family Database, PF1 Public spending on education, 2010
³ OECD Family Database, PF1.1: Public spending on family benefits 2007
⁴ OECD Family Database, PF3.1: Public spending on childcare and early education
⁵ OECD family Database PF 3.2 Enrolment in childcare and preschools
⁶ OECD Family Database; CO2.2: Child poverty. Definition of child poverty: the share of all children living in households with an equivalised disposable income of less than 50% of the median for the total population.
⁷ Jackson and Cameron 2011; Boddy et al. 2008
⁸ OECD Doing Better for Children, 2009.

Some patterns are discernible from this comparison of national indicators. First, higher spending on social expenditure, in Denmark and Sweden, went along with the highest levels of services, such as education, family benefits, early childhood care and education (ECEC) and children in public care. It was also associated with the highest rates of child wellbeing. France had the highest rates of social expenditure, but oriented towards family benefits and slightly less on services, and lower rates on child wellbeing. All three of these would be family support oriented countries in Hetherington’s (2006) terms. The UK had the lowest social expenditure. Spending on education and family benefits were similar to that in France but less was spent by the UK on ECEC while enrolment rates in ECEC were similar. This, and the difference in child poverty rates suggests greater private spending on services and greater inequality in the UK compared to France. The UK, a child protection oriented country, also has the lowest rates of children in care, which, depending on the value attached to being in public care, might be considered a negative or a positive. The characteristics of those included within the category ‘in care’ differ across countries. In Denmark and Sweden, for example, young people who have come into care through the criminal justice system will be included and so enlarge the in-care population, compared to England, where most young offenders are considered under a separate system. Two more family support oriented countries would be Hungary, where spending was directed to family benefits with few children under three in services and few in poverty, and Spain, where spending on services and benefits is comparatively low, while enrolment rates of under 3s and child poverty is high. Again, this would indicate a reliance on family resources to access services and potential societal

inequality. According to Wilkinson and Pickett (2009), inequality correlates with lower rates of wellbeing.

Social Pedagogy In Services for Children and Families in Denmark, France and Germany

Social pedagogues are employed in a range of services that support children and families in Denmark, France and Germany. Exploring Denmark first, local authorities are obliged to provide a place in an ECEC service for every child aged 6 months to 6 years where their parents apply (Oberhuemer et al., 2010). Table 1 noted that 65% of children aged under 3 are in such services, as are nearly all those aged 3 to 5 (Oberhumer et al., 2010). The main occupation in ECEC is the pedagogue (*Pædagog*), who holds a ‘broad based social pedagogy professional qualification’ (Oberhuemer et al., 2010, p. 108). Pedagogues get to know almost all young children and families before they start compulsory schooling and their role encompasses supporting parents as well as supporting and stimulating children’s learning. These pedagogues, as well as pedagogues (and other professionals) working in other universal services, are required by law to notify the authorities where there are causes for concern about a child’s wellbeing and the problem cannot be resolved within the setting (Boddy et al., 2008).

Boddy et al. (2008) found that children and families who needed additional support in Denmark may use a range of family support services, including practical parent education, ‘family houses’, and youth contact services. In all three instances, social pedagogues worked alongside professionals from other backgrounds, such as social workers and psychologists, and offered different types of support or intervention. These could be family therapy, counselling, practical and emotional support, or

skills training. Another role that could be filled by a social pedagogue was working alongside a young person to form an enduring one to one relationship with a young person with the aim of steering them away from criminal activity and to maintain or improve their integration into mainstream society.

In France, approaching half of the very youngest children and virtually all children aged 3 to 5 attend an early childhood care and education service where the main purposes are to foster group communication and social relationships in children aged 0 to 3 and, in services for children aged 3 to 5 to follow a national curriculum focused on learning in terms of language, social relationships, expression through the body, discovering the world and creativity. The emphasis within the early childhood services is on teaching and teachers, although there are also educators (*éducatrice/éducateur de jeunes enfants*), health oriented professionals (*puéricultrice*) and leisure time workers (*animateur*; Oberhummer et al., 2010). The role of *éducateur* (and that of *animateur*) is related to the occupation of pedagogue in that they are concerned with the whole child, and have knowledge of working in groups, and of social conditions, as well as pedagogy and human relations and what is termed 'educational techniques' (Oberhummer et al., 2010, p. 161).

Although not as widespread as the Danish pedagogue, the French *éducateur* works in a range of services for young children and in family support services (Oberhuemer et al., 2010). Such family support services included family mediation, practical educational assistance for young people such as helping with homework, and pedagogic and psychological interventions (Boddy et al., 2008). In many services, the *éducateur* played an important role in working alongside the social worker. While the social worker's area of responsibility was administrative and case work, the *éducateur* focused on relational work with young people and their family networks, organised around the pedagogic principle of *accompagnement*, or 'going alongside' the family. Going alongside could mean working to restore links between a young person and mainstream societal institutions such as school. An *éducateur* would also have the role of preparing a young person for a transition between a family home and a placement (Boddy et al., 2008).

In the third country, Germany, social pedagogy has an established place in child welfare legislation and among the occupations in ECEC and family support services. The organisation of services according to principles of minimal intervention in families' lives and seeking solutions at as local a level as possible means that there is great diversity of provision and providers, with delivery often through nonstatutory and nonprofit voluntary sector organisations. Less than a fifth of children aged 0 to 3 years and around 80% of children aged 3 to 6 attend some form of early childhood care and education, although

there are regional variations and more children in the eastern part of Germany attend than in the western (Oberhuemer et al., 2010). Around three quarters of the staff in centre based provision are social pedagogy educators (*Erzieherin*) or social pedagogues. A further 13% are early childhood professionals or child carers (*Kinderpflegerin*) who may gain a social pedagogy assistant award on completion of training. Both *Erzieherin* and *Kinderpflegerin* are qualified to work in pedagogic settings such as family support, advice and community centres, youth work and residential homes (Oberhuemer et al., 2010).

When families need help with the care and socialisation of children, or upbringing, this could be through support in family homes, in part- or full-time placements or community based support outside the school and could be via groups of young people or individual support. Social pedagogues and *Erzieherin* were employed to provide all forms of help with upbringing. Examples included intensive social pedagogical support services working with families in crisis that aimed to address practical concerns through a team of social pedagogues and *Erzieher* living with a family and offering training in parenting focused on small achievable steps (Boddy et al., 2008). Again, there was an individual relational role for pedagogues who worked with young people, often focused on difficult transitions, such as re-entering school or foster care, and on 'building social competences'. Once more, the social pedagogic notion of integration into society comes through.

Across all three countries there were some commonalities of approach to the organisation of family support and early childhood care and education. First, the principle of young children attending early childhood care and education services was well established and this was often the child's first encounter with social pedagogues (or variants on the term). The goals of services were often around developing social relationships, and helping children articulate their views and shape their surroundings, which were in keeping with a social pedagogic approach.

Second, there was a high degree of professionalisation among staff, reflecting a belief in the importance of professional education to address the needs of children and families. As one respondent in Boddy et al. (2008) stated:

We have a very high responsibility ... Our decision affects the whole life of the child. So this high responsibility needs people very well educated to know about what they do ... They must not know only one solution, you need a whole range. [You need to be] educated in talking to people, not just in work with children, [but] finding solutions for life, for development. So we need excellently educated people doing this job. (p. 124)

Third, the work was often carried out in multidisciplinary teams, with social pedagogues working alongside social workers, psychologists, health professionals, legal experts,

teachers and so on. Each was said to have an expert role, complementing those of other members of the team.

Fourth, a strengths perspective on getting help was predominant. Services were seen as a complementary support for children's and families' own competences, building their resources and networks, and working with them to secure their agreement where placement away from home appeared to be the option that was in the best interests of the child. There was little reported sense of stigma or shame in accessing support services.

Fifth, in all three countries, there were many possibilities for help, from support within universal services and neighbourhoods, to intensive social pedagogical help, family therapy, individual support persons to work alongside a young person or family, and options for accessing placements away from home on a short term, respite or emergency basis. Social pedagogues played an important part in all of the services, alongside their colleagues.

Katz and Hetherington (2006, pp. 437–438) similarly concluded that welfare systems were more successful at preventing escalation of family problems where there were good resources, strong communities, supported by professionals who engaged in trust based working together across agencies and maintained a focus on the family as a whole.

However, although the place of social pedagogy and its variants were well established, determining the specific value and/or effectiveness of the profession is much more difficult. First, as noted, working in multi-agency teams makes isolating the contribution of social pedagogy difficult. Second, social pedagogues in the three countries are embedded in a system of societal norms and values around childhood and family life, which they largely reflect and articulate, and so detecting the 'difference' they make is problematic. Boddy et al. (2008) found few reports of evaluation of particular family support programmes perhaps because it was so much a part of universal care and education services, but the authors (Boddy et al., 2008) did find that study respondents

consistently valued a holistic therapeutic approach to work with young people and families, informed by theories of family therapy and of social pedagogy. These approaches were embedded within multidisciplinary professional teams ... [including] ... at least one psychologist, and social pedagogy was the predominant professional formation for direct work with young people and families in all three continental European countries. (p. 162)

Life in Residential Care in Denmark, Germany and England

Turning to the role of social pedagogues in residential care, Petrie et al. (2006) investigated the quality of life and outcomes for young people in Denmark, Germany and England. With data from 49 establishments, interviews with 56 heads of establishment and 144 staff members, including their responses to hypothetical dilemmas, and with 302 resident young people, the study is an extensive

comparative study where social pedagogy framed practice in two countries, Denmark and Germany, but not in a third, England. Comparisons of policy and practice allow an assessment of the role and characteristics of the main occupational role in each country.

The first finding to note is that the position of residential care differs between the countries. Young people who live away from their parents in Denmark and Germany are far more likely to be looked after in residential settings than their peers in England. About half of young people in care in Denmark and Germany are in residential care compared to about 14% in England. This had an impact on the study, as children's homes were smaller in England, with a narrower age range of young people; they were mostly aged 12 to 15 years. The children's homes in Denmark and Germany were larger, with more staff, but fewer staff per resident with only 2.5 (Denmark) and 2.1 (Germany) staff to young people compared with 3.7 in England. Nearly all those working with young people in Denmark and Germany had a social pedagogy qualification, either a bachelor's degree or *Erzieherin*. In the English homes, far fewer staff, just 20%, held a degree level qualification and over a third (36%) had no relevant or no qualification to work with children and young people at all. This means that in the Danish and German homes, the professional language employed among staff was derived from a body of knowledge around social pedagogy where concepts, goals and theoretical understandings were shared.

Staff in residential settings in all three countries had many and varied responsibilities for young people in their care but there were some cross-national differences. In Denmark and Germany, staff were more likely to be key workers for one or more young people, to work with parents, and to be responsible for particular arts and sports activities, than in England. All staff said they were responsible for emotional support of young people in relation to a wide range of phenomena such as criminal behaviour, family relationships, relationships with peers and other residents and difficulties in school. There were differences in the way staff carried this role out. Staff in the Danish homes were most likely to say they 'listened' to young people and 'put words to their feelings'. In Germany, staff said they would discuss or talk with young people first and listened second. Workers in the English homes gave the same first two responses as Germany, but far more staff indicated that the first response to emotional support was the more adult-centred 'discuss/talk' than the more young person-centred 'listen'. Taking all the responses together, Petrie et al. (2006) distinguished between an empathic approach, most common in Denmark, a discursive approach, most frequently mentioned in England, and procedural and organisational approaches, reported by around a fifth of staff, rather more in England than in the other two countries. In

Germany, responses were evenly divided between empathic and discursive.

There were also differences in the way the key worker role was carried out. Staff from Denmark and Germany explained that the emphasis on being a keyworker was clearly on the relational aspects, and also made reference to long term aims for the young person. In England, staff responded in terms of procedural responsibilities and short term behaviour management and gave less priority to the relational and the longer term aims. These differences reflect the social pedagogic approach to practice which puts relational work based on authenticity and trust to the fore. The strengths based approach of social pedagogy could also be seen in descriptions of young people given by Danish staff: three-quarters of staff described young people they knew best or were key workers for in personal and mainly positive terms.

Young people in this study were more likely to have been resident for longer in Denmark (24.7 months on average) and Germany (30.9 months) compared to England (11.1 months). The most common length of stay in England was in fact three months. Short and recurring placements were also found in Boddy et al. (2008) to be a particular feature of care lives in England for children aged 10 to 15 years while Jackson and Cameron (2011) found that young people in care in England were much more likely to have had multiple placements than those in other European countries. It is important to note that social pedagogues' practice was in the context of greater system stability and so longer term relational possibilities in Denmark and Germany, compared to staff working in the English residential homes.

Young people under the age of 16 in the Danish and German establishments were much more likely to be in school than in England. Subsequent detailed analysis showed that not attending school was associated with having staff with no qualifications and staff who were only recently in post. Young people over the age of 16 were similarly less likely to be in employment where they were resident in English homes, compared to their continental European peers. This was associated with having higher staff to young people ratios. Petrie et al. (2006) comment that having more staff in itself does not protect against poor outcomes for young people. Rather it is the way practice is carried out that is significant.

Practice, and the characteristics of staff, was also significant in the associations with the finding that young women in the English homes were more likely to have had a pregnancy than in the other two countries. In this case, lower rates of pregnancy were associated with higher rates of in-service training, staff who were more likely to respond to hypothetical dilemmas in terms of seeking factual information, and who intended to continue in post for longer.

Finally, rates of criminal offences reported for residents were examined. These were much higher in England, with an average of 1.73 per resident, compared with Denmark (0.158) and Germany (0.092). Factors associated with criminality were again related to staff, this time homes where there were more staff per young person was related to higher rates of offending as was having staff who looked to external sources of support in response to hypothetical dilemmas presented to them at interview.

The factors identified do not establish causality, but they do powerfully indicate a coherent orientation for practice under the social pedagogic frameworks in place in Denmark and Germany. Moreover, this orientation was more clearly aligned to the aspirations held in English policy for children in public care than was being achieved in the English children's homes studied. In particular, two aspects of practice were significantly related to 'outcomes'; fact seeking from young people when faced with a new situation (more common in Denmark and Germany) and seeking help from external agencies or professionals (more common in England). The former ties into a pedagogic approach, the latter speaks of less confidence about one's own professional resources.

Overall, it appeared that life in residential care in the Danish and German homes studied was offering young people more stable placements, possibilities to integrate into mainstream institutions, to build their social competences through relational work and practical activities, to maintain connections with their families, in ways that were less often in place in the homes in England. The role of social pedagogues in this rather better picture in Denmark and Germany was clear: but there may also have been societal level factors at work that contributed to the better outcomes for young people. For example, Cameron, Petrie, Wigfall, Kleipoedszus, & Jasper (2011) refer to the existence, in Germany, of a social mandate regarding upbringing (*Erziehungsauftrag*) which conveys an overall vision of what society hopes to achieve for young people in general. This may also convey a level of cultural support for the work of social pedagogues on behalf of young people. In addition, the link between social pedagogic practice and the structural stability of the welfare system requires further exploration. Is it a consequence of social pedagogic practice or of organisational features of the system or some other factor?

Moving On From Public Care: Educational Pathways in Denmark, Sweden, Hungary, Spain and England

The third aspect of young people's lives and social pedagogy is the way in which public care prepares young people for life as independent adults through educational participation after leaving school. Jackson and Cameron (2011) was the first European comparative study on this theme¹. It included interviews with 36 managers, 372 tele-

phone screening interviews with young people, 170 biographical narrative interviews with young people who showed educational promise or motivation and were aged 18–24, plus 135 follow-up interviews a year later, 112 interviews with adults nominated by young people as having been important to their education, comparison of national and EU policies and secondary analysis of national statistics.

Although social pedagogy was not the focus of this study, in all the countries except England, a social pedagogic framework was in place, with a greater or lesser presence of social pedagogues (or its variants) among the occupations involved in working with young people growing up in public care. For the purposes of this article I will focus on the data from national statistics, and some of the responses from young people to the practitioners they were supported by, including social pedagogues.

Jackson and Cameron (2011) found that around 7% of young people from a public care background attend tertiary sector education in each of the five countries. This is compared to around 40% in four of the five study countries, and around 25% in Hungary, among young people (at aged 30–34) overall (Roth & Thum, 2010). The gap in educational participation between those who were in care as children and those who were not widens with age and there are some cross-national differences. National data from Spain and Hungary were not available so the following section is based on statistics from Denmark, Sweden and England.

Table 2 reveals that young people from a public care background were much more likely to have completed secondary education in Sweden and Denmark compared to England. Comparisons are difficult because the education systems differ, with more focus on externally validated and graded examinations (GCSEs) in England, whereas in the other countries completion is important for progression to the next stage of education. Moreover, in Table 2 it can be seen that young people from a public care background were much closer to the norm for all young people in Denmark and Sweden compared to young people in England.

TABLE 2

Percentage of Young People From Care Backgrounds Who Have Completed Compulsory Education in Denmark, Sweden and England, Compared With Those Not In Care, 2006

2006	Children in care/Not in care
Denmark	
Completed	79.1/96.2
Sweden	
Completed	87/97
England	
5 A*–G GCSEs	41.2/90.5
5 A*–C GCSEs	11.8/58.5

Source: Cameron, Hollingworth and Jackson (2011).

TABLE 3

Percentage of Young People From Public Care Background Completing or Participating in Post Compulsory Education in Denmark, Sweden and England, 2006

2006	Age group	Completed post compulsory education — not higher education — young people who had been in care	Completed post compulsory education — not higher education — young people who had not been in care
Denmark	18–22 years	2.5	37.6
	27–30 years	30.8	46.1
Sweden	Born 1989	38	85
England	19 years — in some form of education	23	24.1 (18 years)

Source: Cameron, Hollingworth and Jackson (2011).

It would appear that young people in the more social pedagogically oriented, and family support oriented, countries of Denmark and Sweden are keeping a far higher proportion of their young people in care within the compulsory education system than is the case in the nonsocial–pedagogic and child protection oriented England.

In all three countries, by far the majority of young people continue into upper secondary education once compulsory education finishes at the age of 16, but there is a range of options for the type of institution and focus of study. Tables 3 and 4 show the proportions of young people completing post compulsory education and higher education in Denmark, Sweden and England.

In Table 3 it can be seen that nearly all Swedish young people, a quarter of English and just over a third of Danish young people have completed or are in some form of post compulsory education in the age group 18 to 22 years. Among those who were in care as children, considerably fewer are in education in Denmark and Sweden, but about the same proportion in England (this may be to do with the definition of ‘some form of education’ employed in the data gathering or the slight age difference of the cohort examined). The inclusion of the older age group of 27 to 30 years in the Danish analysis showed that young people from public care were much more likely to complete post compulsory educational qualifications at later ages, and this was also the case for young people in general.

The proportion of young people participating in higher education is about one quarter to one fifth of those among young people overall (see Table 4). Moreover, in Denmark, this figure is not reached until the age of 30 years, and again reveals a trend for later participation among both those without a background in public care as well as those who had been in care.

The trend to delay educational careers is a significant contextual factor for analysing the educational pathways of young people from a care background. For young people who have not been in care, delay in entering higher educa-

TABLE 4

Percentage of Young People From a Public Care Background in Higher Education in Denmark, Sweden and England, 2006

2006	Age group	Participating in higher education — young people who had been in care	Participating in higher education — young people who had not been in care
Denmark	18–22 years	0	0.3
	27–30 years	7.3	34.7
Sweden	Born 1989	6	26
England	19 years	6	23.5 (18 year olds)

Source: Cameron, Hollingworth and Jackson (2011).

tion may be a positive lifestyle choice. What was clear from the interview data was that for many young people from public care, the post compulsory phase was a moment of particular vulnerability in their educational careers. Many study young people reported educational delay, for a variety of reasons, including having to repeat a year in secondary school, health problems and caring responsibilities, professional guidance that was wrong or sent them on a series of convoluted educational routes. Only 5 of the 32 young people interviewed in England did not have a delay in their post 16 educational pathway (Cameron, Jackson, Havari, & Hollingworth, 2011). In Denmark and Sweden, 4 and 7 young people respectively had a pathway described as ‘delayed’ (Bryderup & Trentel, 2010; Höjer, Johannsson, & Hill, 2010). Delay was also common among young people interviewed in Spain, with more than half of those interviewed completing their upper secondary education later than the norm (Casas, Montserrat, & Malo, 2010). In the Hungarian and Spanish cases, a major theme was a lack of educationally focused professional guidance and immense pressure to enter the labour market to survive economically. This pressure often contributed to delay in pursuing educational ambitions. One example of professional guidance from a social educator (or pedagogue) in the Spanish study was:

When she told us she wanted to do general upper secondary education and go to university we did tell her to keep her feet on the ground. We told her: ‘you’re going to leave here, who’s going to pay for your studies? How are you going to manage it? ... if you don’t want to go back to your family, you need to earn money to have a flat’ ... we talked to her and I saw the need for her to do some vocational training and work. (Casas et al., 2010, p. 149)

The social educator’s focus here was very much focused on the cultural reproduction of the mainstream expectations of young adults — to be economically self supporting — and less on realising potentially empowering educational ambitions. Assessing the value of social pedagogy might argue that the role of supporting young people to manage within existing societal structures is an important one. Another perspective would be that a social pedagogic perspective is

one that challenges an ‘educational’ solution to the existing order on behalf of disadvantaged young people (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011).

As with Petrie et al. (2006), there was evidence of more structural stability in the child welfare system in Denmark, Hungary, Spain and Sweden compared with England. Eighteen per cent of young people interviewed in England had had one placement, compared with 34% to 45% in the other four countries. In all countries, foster care was associated with greater educational support. Where foster care worked well, carers were involved in young people’s educational plans, young people were accepted on their own terms and were offered, in the words of the Danish report, ‘place and space to be on their own and with others’ (Bryderup & Trentel, 2010, p. 109). Moreover, supportive relations with foster carers outlasted the placement and prolonged the transition to adulthood. But there were exceptions. Half of the young people interviewed in England reported that at least one foster care placement had not been supportive of their education. Moreover, some residential care institutions in Spain and Hungary, and boarding schools in Denmark, which were staffed by social educators, teachers and social pedagogues were reported by young people to be a source of ongoing emotional support, including, in some cases, after the placement itself had ended. One Danish young man treasured his time in a residential care home because:

They (the staff) figured out what interested us and spend time with us. They made me trust them. Before that day I did not trust any adults. Not my grandmum or my granddad. And I learned to trust them. We spoke together. I came from being a crime offender and suddenly I was catching butterflies and studying them closer (Bryderup & Trentel 2010, p. 111)

This quotation illustrates the building of an authentic relationship valued within social pedagogy and the transformative potential of the approach, as the young man moved from crime to studying butterflies. The question remains, what can we learn about the role of social pedagogues and social pedagogy from this study of post 16 educational careers?

First, the data on completion of secondary education among those in public care showed that for young people in Sweden and Denmark, being in the education system was the norm. This was also the case in the Hungarian and Spanish research (Casas et al., 2010; Racz, Csák, & Korintus, 2011). This integration of young people in care into mainstream institutions is part of the normalisation approach of social pedagogy and that it was being largely achieved is perhaps an indicator of the success of the social pedagogic approach. However, it may also have to do with in-school practices and broader cultural values around inclusive education.

Second, the care system itself was more stable in the countries with a social pedagogic framework, with fewer placements for young people in care. Placement stability is important, but can also be associated with a lack of educational ambition for young people, as was the case in the

Hungarian study (Racz et al., 2011).

These two factors reveal a limited amount about the role of social pedagogues on their own, and perhaps more about the welfare system and the societal context in which social pedagogues work and the profession of social pedagogy flourishes. The advantages of a social pedagogic societal context did not ensure that young people from a public care background were entering higher education at any greater rate than those in England. One could conclude that this group of young people were suffering from 'normative neglect' as there were few special measures to compensate for the disadvantages of their upbringing (Cameron, Jackson, Hollingworth, & Havari, in press). That said, the young people interviewed in the five countries were, on the whole, appreciative of their relations with social pedagogic carers and educators, including foster carers working in a social pedagogic framework.

Discussion

There are, perhaps, inherent dilemmas or dangers in an approach that foregrounds societal 'integration' as social pedagogy does. For example, in a participatory democracy it is vital that a social pedagogic approach supports individual talents and pathways that may be nonnormative as well as the attainment of socially valued qualifications and credentials. So it would appear that integration has to be broadly conceptualised, as enabling young people and families to live their lives to their full potential. For social pedagogy this may also mean addressing the wider values and structures necessary for a socially cohesive society. There are overlaps in purpose with social work and radical education (Moss, 2011), but the emphasis, as noted in the studies discussed in this paper, on a professional education for a role equipped for 'being with' and 'accompanying' young people (or other 'target groups'), practical and creative activities, empathic compassion, combined with reflective practice, contextual and theoretical analysis of changing contexts, and working in and through groups, mark out social pedagogy as perhaps unique.

However, evaluating the effectiveness of social pedagogy across countries is a far from straightforward task. Social pedagogy and the services where social pedagogues are found are not formulated in ways that are amenable to strictly controlled evaluation designs. Indeed, it has been argued here that rather than try to evaluate how effective the field is, it is more fruitful to examine the ways in which the field of social pedagogy and the occupation of social pedagogue is valued. Throughout, attention has been drawn to the role of societal context in such a valuation of social pedagogy and social pedagogues using data from cross-national studies of early childhood care and education systems, family support, residential care and the educational careers of young people from public care backgrounds. The continental European countries selected all had 'family service orientations' to welfare practice and policy, although

the methods of delivery of services differed. The English case was an example of a 'child protection' orientation.

Summarising briefly, we can see that social pedagogy is an occupational model within a child welfare system and broader cultural norms that is evaluated in positive terms by study respondents in all the studies considered. It is largely 'successful' within its own contexts.

When young people and families seek help in family support oriented European countries, Boddy et al. (2008) found that principles of offering choice to families and involving them in decision making were to the fore, and that services available at this point in the 'care or pedagogic pathway' were staffed by highly qualified experts including social pedagogues, who sought to 'get alongside' the young person, forging meaningful and ongoing relationships.

Second, social pedagogy provides the policy and professional education framework for residential care in Denmark and Germany, where young people 'do better' than in similar institutions in England and the major factors in accounting for outcomes were characteristics of the staff and their approach to practice (Petrie et al., 2006).

Third, young people in Sweden and Denmark who are in public care are much more likely to be in education than their peers in England. Jackson and Cameron (2011) revealed that ongoing relations between professionals or carers and young people could be very effective in providing educational support, but in no country was this guaranteed to work after young people left care. Support was dependent on a voluntary commitment from carers over time. Indeed, study informants who had been in care and were trying to access education frequently discussed their position as 'doing it by themselves' (Cameron, Jackson, et al., 2011). However, social pedagogy appeared to make little difference to the proportion of young people who entered higher education as this was rather similar in all five countries studied and well below the norm for young people in each country. Moreover, the prominence of social pedagogy varied. In Sweden, for example, social pedagogy is not seen as a separate occupational field but a social pedagogic perspective is located within the universal education services, which offer a high degree of pastoral care and access to specialist services, while child welfare is led by the rather separate system of social work (Cameron et al., 2008).

Finally, however positively evaluated, social pedagogy as a professional field is not necessarily effective in offering equality of educational opportunity; as we saw, the realities of economic survival cut across professional practice in Hungary and Spain.

These caveats notwithstanding, returning to the English policy aspirations for young people in public care, as articulated in Care Matters (DfES, 2007) we can conclude that the social pedagogic practices and approaches discussed in this paper coincided with key policy ambitions. First, in the continental European examples there was more stability in care placements. Second, young children entering ECEC, and

young people and families seeking support, were more likely to meet with professionals who had undergone extensive professional preparation in the social pedagogic countries compared to England. Third, completion of secondary education was a normative practice for young people in public care. Fourth, young people did not leave care until at least 18 years of age, and often it was later than this. Lastly, working together across disciplinary boundaries was common as Boddy et al. (2008) and Katz and Hetherington (2006) concluded.

It would appear that social pedagogy, where developed as a multiagency and professionalised framework, and where there was a social mandate around valuing children and childhood, was a major contributor to the kinds of outcomes valued by English policy. In this sense, social pedagogy is an attractive approach to English policy for children in care. It offers a coherent theoretical framework that has much in common with recent policy concerns to provide well-supported stability and opportunity for children in care that more clearly match that available for young people living with their own families.

The question then arises as to whether the field of social pedagogy might be valued and effective in a different societal context, such as that of the child protection oriented UK. Since 2006 there have been a number of pilot and development studies bringing social pedagogy students and overseas trained social pedagogues into children's services and employing social pedagogues to train children's services workers in the UK countries of England and Scotland (Bengtsson, Chamberlain, Crimmens, & Stanley, 2008, 2006; Cameron, 2006; Cameron, Petrie, et al., 2011). Evaluations of social pedagogic development activity and training — both content and methods of training — have emphasised the resonance with existing traditions of social work and care practice (Cameron, Petrie, et al., 2011; Milligan, 2009). This suggests the professional context offers some common ground, although it may have become less visible in recent years. The challenge in most cases has been to embed and sustain social pedagogic perspectives and ethics into organisational structures, shared professional values and practices (Boyce, 2010; Cameron, Petrie, et al., 2011; Eichsteller & Holtoff, 2011). It may be that the societal context is a bigger impediment to translating social pedagogic approaches into practice in the UK, despite the congruence with policy ambitions. There are also some policy aims that potentially cut across pursuing social pedagogy, such as the performance focused agenda of schools and punitive youth justice policies (Cameron, 2011). ■

Conclusion

When considering whether social pedagogy might be valued in a 'child protection' oriented welfare system, Hetherington's (2006) analysis of the powerful role of culture and cultural norms in forming the societal context for child welfare practice in societies is telling. Although

social pedagogy has travelled from Germany to neighbouring countries (and beyond) over the past two centuries, it undoubtedly relied on sympathetic cultural values to grow and become accepted. Those cultural values, around trust in professionals to exercise judgments, a belief in supporting not stigmatising children and families in difficulty, in education as a broadly based development of communities and individuals, not just in examined performance, and fundamentally about having a social mandate around upbringing, are shared by many within the UK children's sector but, at present, far less within society as a whole. England's child protection oriented, residual and highly targeted approach to child welfare services probably means the process of culturally embedding the values of social pedagogy will take some time yet and realising the ambitions of English policy for children in care will require sustained professional action on behalf of supporting children, young people and families.

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Endnote

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