



International Journal of Social Pedagogy

Editorial

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How to cite: Petrie, P., Eichsteller, G. 'Editorial.' *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, 2014, 3(1): 1, pp. 1–3. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ijsp.2014.v3.1.005>.

Published: 01 January 2014

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the journal's standard Editorial review.

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Editorial

Pat Petrie & Gabriel Eichsteller, editors

Dear Reader,

This is an exciting edition of the journal, with papers reflecting national experiences and understandings from five different countries. The importance of the local context – the particularity of social pedagogy – may be inferred or is made explicit in several of the articles, with many of them relating how social pedagogy has developed or indeed changed with the twists and turns of history – whether the upheavals associated with war, the rise and fall of the eastern bloc or with the more recent influence of ‘neoliberalism’. At the same time all stem from a common interest in social pedagogy whether as a concept, a body of theory or as practice and whether it is a long-established or a new development.

In fact, the first paper adds a contribution from a sixth country: the USA. Daniel Schugurensky is based in Arizona State University and has recently edited a special issue of the *Education Policy Analysis Archives* devoted solely to social pedagogy¹. For us he has contributed a conversation he had with Hans Thiersch, Professor Emeritus of Education and Social Pedagogy at the University of Tübingen. Many readers may have first encountered Thiersch with his work in the area of *Lebensweltorientierung* (lifeworld orientation), which has been influential in both theoretical and practice domains in Germany and elsewhere. The interview is important for several reasons, not least because it opens up something of the history of German social pedagogy for readers who are unfamiliar with German. It presents an account of a scholar, with substantial experience of practice also, who has been highly involved in the theoretical development of German social pedagogy since 1970, in both its reformist and its radical, critical traditions. Indeed, as Schugurensky remarks, Thiersch can be considered one of the representatives of critical social pedagogy, and the interview recounts his connections with the Frankfurt School of critical social work from early in his career.

In the second paper, the issue continues to focus on theoretical matters from a German perspective: Philipp Sandermann & Sascha Neumann deconstruct various theories of social pedagogy (including much that is referred to in the Thiersch interview) and what the authors refer to as their ‘ontological mode of reification’. Their challenging conclusion is that this mode is associated with a normative and tautological approach based on what is seen as the core identity of social pedagogy and its purposes, thus lacking a more scientific approach to theory-building. Perhaps what lies at the root of this perceived reification is that the term social pedagogy may refer to practice and the provision of services as well as to a theory or body of theories. As such it requires professional education for social pedagogues and often calls for the evaluation of practice. It is difficult to distance either of these from a more normative approach, even where an openness towards other

¹ Volume 21, Issue 37, April 30th, 2013, ISSN 1068-2341; available online: <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/issue/view/21>

To cite this article: Petrie, P. & Eichsteller, G. (2014). Editorial. *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, 3(1), 1-3, DOI: 10.14324/111.444. *ijsp.2014.v3.1.005*. Available online at <http://www.internationaljournalsofsocialpedagogy.com>

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practice and theoretical perspectives holds the possibility of unforeseen developments. We would welcome further contributions to this debate.

We turn in next to Dana Knotová's account of social pedagogy in the Czech Republic from, mostly, the 19th century to the present day, which the author describes as 'non linear and very slow'. Again, as with the papers from Germany, the paper looks (in passing) at the profession's relationship with social work, with which it is often compared or, in the case of Germany, paired. Knotová sees the difference as lying in the therapeutic and social assistance approach of social work, with historical roots that align it with the English social work tradition, compared to social pedagogy's relationship to education. She distinguishes three focuses for social pedagogy in the Czech Republic, all of which she describes as a discipline. All of these are concerned to some extent with education (but in the broadest sense of that word rather than with schooling), and with processes of social cohesion. These differences are mainly expressed in the design of social pedagogy courses and the definition of the profession; over the last 25 years, social pedagogy has been taught within teacher education programmes at universities and has been established as an independent subject, with degrees at bachelor's and master's level. In conclusion Knotová states that social pedagogy is respected in the Czech Republic as an academic discipline whose status has risen particularly in the last decade. She outlines, broadly, the challenges faced by that social pedagogy today including in academic, practice and professional fields and calls for the development of basic and applied research to cast light on how they can be addressed.

The issue's fourth paper, by Jonas Ruškus & Irmantas Sujeta, turns from broader views of social pedagogy to present a study of participatory action research with school boys in Lithuania. It centres on one aspect of today's social context: the rise of online pornography, with analysis and research that shows a concomitant objectification of women and the perceived normalisation of sexual violence towards them. The authors' concern is the lack of an educational response to this. Their own response was based on the approaches of critical social pedagogy. They set up focus groups, led by a social pedagogue in order to enable the male adolescents to exchange experience and reflections from the perspective of their own life-worlds – rather than a 'top-down' awareness raising exercise. The intention was that the boys should develop their own critical consciousness and come to understand their own social agency, thus liberating them, in Freire's terms, from relationships of domination and victimization. The boys who took part were appreciative of the exercise and came up with ways of preventing or reducing the harm of online pornography which they themselves had identified. They thought the methods used in the research should be employed for other situations.

Our last two papers are from writers engaged in the exploration or development of social pedagogy at a local level. Both papers are from England where, as in the UK more generally, social pedagogy is in an early stage of development. A growing interest in the subject has given rise, over the last 20 years or so to: government-commissioned research into social pedagogy in Europe; a range of publications; pilot projects in children's foster and residential care; the recruitment of social pedagogues from continental Europe; the development of degrees and degree modules in higher education; the commissioning of training by local authorities and study visits to Denmark and Germany. The final papers in the journal draw on two examples of these activities. In the first, Nicole Chavaudra, Nicki Moore, John Marriott and Mohammed Jakhara describe the positive outcomes for Derbyshire County Council's children's services that followed workforce development based on a social pedagogic approach. This experience resulted to Derbyshire Children's Services commissioning further training and the development of a bespoke degree module at the University of Derby. These activities will be evaluated.

The last paper, *When the Penny Drops*, was written by Nivan Dulai, who works for Walsall Council in children's residential care and took part in an EU Leonardo da Vinci-funded study visit to Copenhagen. Initially, she had some difficulty in understanding how a social pedagogic approach might differ from practice that in England is conceptualised as social care. Over the course of the 17-day learning mobility, Dulai had two placements in Danish care settings. She was particularly impressed by the priority placed on children's actively learning from their environment compared with the safeguarding and risk averse approach which they would have met in England. Seeing pedagogues in action made a strong impression on her and made her realise what social pedagogy is about. This has already affected her own practice and led to an increased appreciation of social pedagogy.

We hope you will enjoy the articles and wish you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

Kind regards,

Pat & Gabriel