



International Journal of Social Pedagogy

Editorial

Developing the International Social Pedagogy Discourse

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Editorial: Developing the International Social Pedagogy Discourse

Pat Petrie & Gabriel Eichsteller, editors-in-chief

Dear reader,

Welcome to the very first issue of the *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, a new open access journal aiming to further the discourse around social pedagogy in the United Kingdom and at an international level.

Whilst social pedagogy is a term that is still relatively new to the UK, over recent years some impressive progress has been made in developing social pedagogic approaches at a micro-level, within practice and within some organisational cultures, including residential and foster care. Starting with this first issue, some of these developments will be the subject of this journal.

In spite of local developments in the UK, at a societal-political level adopting social pedagogy is challenged by an ongoing erosion of the welfare state and by increasing social inequalities. This is also true of countries that, unlike the UK, have a vibrant tradition of social pedagogy. Whilst this situation in many ways makes it difficult to develop social pedagogy as a practical and theoretical field, paradoxically it also strengthens the case for social pedagogy across the interconnected domains of policy, theory and practice, and that is why we are establishing the *International Journal of Social Pedagogy (IJSP)*. Both the difficulties faced by social pedagogy and its increasing significance lead us to believe that the UK interest in social pedagogy has relevance beyond its borders and can allow theoreticians and practitioners in other countries to re-evaluate, and perhaps re-appraise, their own traditions.

Why an international journal?

In our globalised world the international exchange of ideas has a fundamental role in addressing social issues *pedagogically*. Experience from abroad can be inspiring, offering benefits for the development of practice, providing outside perspectives and consequently an opportunity to reflect upon the social context for work at home. For those who wish to write for the *IJSP* there is the chance to describe and analyse practice in its relationship to national policy, in a way that takes outside perspectives into account. At a theoretical level, international discourse based in many different perspectives is essential for generating knowledge about social issues as the basis for analysis and theory and for identifying ways forward. With an emphasis on the connection between theory and practice, the articles in the *International Journal of Social Pedagogy* will reflect cross-cultural perspectives from a wide range of social pedagogical traditions and provide a greater understanding of social pedagogy in ways that are relevant for practice and contribute to developing existing theory and research. Our ambition to connect theory and practice through the journal is reflected in our editorial board, for which we have sought to bring together individuals who have both a highly regarded academic background and a thorough understanding of practice.

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Why open access?

IJSP provides open access to all its articles, because we believe that access to knowledge and participation in the discourse around social pedagogy should not be limited to academic circles but open to practitioners. As Jan Storø argues in his paper, dialogue between scholars and practitioners is essential for achieving a close and meaningful connection between theory and practice. This is one of the prime aims of the Journal and our reason for providing easy and free access to its articles. Further, the limited literature on social pedagogy available in English-speaking countries has somewhat restricted the discourse necessary for a better understanding of its complexities. At the same time the ways in which relevant work has been published has also been limited a wide access to it. By providing free online access to the *IJSP* we hope to contribute to meaning-making processes in ways that are relevant at both an academic and a practice level.

For the first issue of the *International Journal of Social Pedagogy* we have sought to explore especially the relationship between theory and practice in order to outline what makes this relationship so relevant to social pedagogy. Juha Hämäläinen's paper on 'social-pedagogic eyes in the midst of diverse understandings, conceptualisations and activities' discusses discrepancies in the concept of social pedagogy, with a particular focus on the term 'social'.

Jan Storø explores 'the difficult connection between theory and practice in social pedagogy' and argues that, whilst we might sometimes feel that theory and practice are two different dimensions of the social pedagogic field and have little to do with each other, there is no professional practice without theory and that perhaps theory and practice are not as dissimilar as we may believe them to be.

'The art of being a social pedagogue', Gabriel Eichsteller and Sylvia Holthoff's article about a 3-year social pedagogy project with Essex County Council's children's homes, provides some practical insights into how residential child care workers related the principles, values and theories of social pedagogy to their own practice and the difference this made to the cultures in the participating children's homes.

Mark Smith then provides a 'Scottish perspective of social pedagogy', exploring Scottish traditions that could be termed social pedagogical and outlining Scotland's current interest in social pedagogy as well as the potential of social pedagogy to transform children's and adult social care.

In future issues of the *International Journal of Social Pedagogy* we hope to provide a range of different national perspectives on social pedagogy that highlight its dynamic and constantly evolving character as well as its reflexive relationship with society.

As Hämäläinen argues in his article, there is not just one definition of social pedagogy but a diverse range of understandings. For professionals who have never heard of the term 'social pedagogy' until now, this can be initially confusing, perhaps even alienating, and therefore the temptation to provide a neat definition of social pedagogy is great. This is of course true of other academic fields, which develop and change. We believe that there is value in letting readers explore and develop their own understanding of social pedagogy. This requires an ongoing process of meaning-making, of dialogue with others and of re-thinking one's own understanding. We hope that the *IJSP* can make a meaningful contribution to this process and that you will enjoy reading our first issue.

With best wishes,

Pat Petrie and Gabriel Eichsteller

We wish to thank all who have, with their contributions, helped us found the *International Journal of Social Pedagogy* and hope that we will continue to have the support needed to develop the journal's profile. If you would like to be involved please contact us.