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Research article

## A social pedagogical model for counselling immigrant students in non-formal adult education

Elina Nivala,<sup>1,\*</sup> Juha Hämäläinen,<sup>1</sup> Eine Pakarinen<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Eastern Finland, Kuopio, Finland; juha.hamalainen@uef.fi (J.H.); eine.pakarinen@uef.fi (E.P.)

\* Correspondence: elina.nivala@uef.fi

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## Abstract

This article describes a research and development project that aimed to create a social pedagogical model for counselling immigrant students. The setting for the project was the field of non-formal adult education, more precisely Finland's folk high schools and study centres. The starting point for the project was a concern for being able to support a meaningful integration of the immigrant students in the non-formal adult education institutions. These institutions see integration not only as a process of finding a place to study or work; they aim at supporting the immigrants' meaningful participation and sense of belonging in Finnish society. A collaborative development process was started, facilitated by a researcher from the University of Eastern Finland. People from about 20 organisations committed themselves to the process, where the values, aims and principles of counselling were reflected and best practices and methods shared mutually between

the participants. Methodologically, the process followed the basic ideas of participatory action research. This article describes the development process and makes an overview of the social pedagogical model for counselling. The model includes general principles that guide the work with immigrants, a description of intercultural counselling as a long-term process and a collection of methods that follow the principles. At the end of the article the model is reflected upon from the point of view of Herman Nohl's concept of pedagogical relationship.

**Keywords** non-formal adult education; pedagogical relationship; intercultural counselling; immigrant student

## Introduction

Finding one's place in a new society is hard. If you come to a society that is completely different from your own, with a foreign language, strange habits and a system of public institutions that is difficult to understand, you face tremendous challenges: you must learn the language and try to figure out the norms and values that guide social situations in everyday life. You must familiarise yourself with the society, its systems, institutions, laws and other structures. You also have to process your experiences, adapt to new knowledge, habits and ways of thinking, some of which might be in complete opposition to previously held worldviews. In the process, it is not only a question of learning something new and absorbing new impressions but also of treating the old in relation to the new. It is a whole process of building up a relationship between yourself and the new society. In addition to learning about the environment, you must process your self-understanding and the perception of your relationship to the social and cultural environment. You must create an understanding of who you are in this relationship. It is a process of personal and social growth, which could be described with social pedagogical concepts like personalisation and socialisation, or even *Bildung*.

This article is about a research and development project aimed at supporting this process of finding one's place in the new society from the perspective of immigrant students who are studying in non-formal adult education, namely folk high schools and study centres. The specific goal of the project was to create a social pedagogical model for counselling immigrant students in institutions of non-formal adult education. Counselling is a form of interaction which is understood as an important feature within adult education settings. Guidance and support is offered to the immigrant students in their everyday life to answer their questions about integrating into their new society. The social pedagogical model was aimed at helping the counsellors working in adult education institutions to develop their work based on a holistic understanding of intercultural counselling and which equipped them with concrete working methods for supporting the integration process of immigrant students.

At the heart of the project were joint discussions and reflection sessions, where counsellors from different non-formal adult education institutions participated and shared their expertise and thoughts. The process followed the basic ideas of participatory action research. As a result of this process, the social pedagogical model for counselling of immigrant students was created. Its main characteristics will be outlined in the latter part of the article.

The development of the social pedagogical model for counselling started from an understanding that social pedagogy does not have specific methods of its own. Thus, the process was not about creating specific methods and calling them social pedagogical, but it was about recognising a certain kind of approach based on social pedagogical concepts and ideals. The only meaningful basis for defining counselling (or indeed any other activity) as social pedagogical is reflecting it in a social pedagogical framework. In this article, we will reflect on the model from the point of view of Herman Nohl's theory on pedagogical relationship.

## **The setting: immigrant students in non-formal adult education in Finland**

Finland has received immigrants on a much smaller scale than, for example, Sweden. In recent years, especially during the two peak years of 2015 and 2016, the proportion of immigrants in the population has risen, but it is still significantly lower than in the other Scandinavian countries. However, Finland shares with its Nordic neighbours the same kind of problems in terms of the integration of immigrants: it is more common for people with an immigrant background than other members of society to interrupt their studies and suffer from unemployment (Nordic Council, 2018). Thus, the state is actively seeking new measures to support integration, especially in education and employment policies and related services.

Non-formal adult education institutions have a long history as educators of immigrant students in Finland. Non-formal adult education (called also liberal adult education in Finland) denotes educational institutions for adults, where studies do not generally lead to a qualification. Instead, the studies aim at promoting active citizenship, democracy and well-being of the adult population through offering possibilities for personal growth, lifelong learning and participation. Popular study areas include language and art studies, humanities and social subjects. In many of these institutions it is possible to study open university subjects as well as participate in preparatory courses that develop skills needed to be able to study in a vocational school, upper secondary school and university. Some of the non-formal adult education institutions also offer formal lines of study, where it is possible to complete the entire syllabus of basic education, upper secondary school or vocational education. These lines of study lead to a qualification and confer eligibility for further studies (see, for example, Nordic Co-operation, n.d.).

There is a large number of immigrant students studying in non-formal adult education institutions. They come from all kinds of backgrounds: there are people seeking asylum or with a refugee status, and people who have moved to Finland because of marriage or work. Some of them have a university degree from their home country, while others are illiterate. Many of them have come from neighbouring countries, such as Russia, but there are also those who have travelled from far and wide and encounter a totally different social and cultural reality in Finland. Non-formal education that does not aim for degrees is by its nature flexible and can take into account the students' heterogeneity and their varying study skills and opportunities. There have been many projects and programmes developing ways to support immigrant students in their studies and in their transition from non-formal adult education to formal educational institutions and to working life. Attention has been paid, for example, to supporting teachers' skills to meet the needs of and take into account the diversity of students and to identify their pedagogical age and plan the teaching accordingly. Thanks to all development work, there is a broad intercultural competence and cultural awareness among employees in non-formal adult education (Suoraniemi and Pansar, 2013).

Two kinds of non-formal adult education institution took part in this research and development project: folk high schools and study centres. Folk high schools offer a selection of full-time and long-term study programmes that last for a whole semester or longer, but they also have shorter courses available, such as summer and weekend courses. An important characteristic of folk high schools is that they have traditionally required that the students live on the campus. However, live-in study is no longer expected. Study centres, for their part, concentrate on shorter courses and training in different themes, such as environmental awareness, civic participation or creative writing. They are run by various non-governmental organisations, political parties and trade unions. Both folk high schools and study centres offer study programmes and courses that are aimed specifically at immigrant students, including language and literacy education, Finnish culture and society, and courses on everyday knowledge and skills that support integration into Finnish society. There are at times courses developed for a particular group of immigrants, for example, for asylum seekers, but in general the courses can have a very heterogeneous student body. Moreover, there are also opportunities for immigrant students for formal studies at folk high schools, such as basic education for adults, education that prepares for upper secondary education, as well as preparatory education for vocational education. In addition to education aimed specifically at immigrant students, those students with good language skills can participate in all education offered by these institutions.

Previous research and development projects in non-formal adult education institutions have highlighted the importance of finding ways to support immigrant students in their transition from language education to vocational education and working life. The success of these transitions has

been seen as key to their integration into Finnish society (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). In folk high schools and study centres, however, integration is understood more broadly. Non-formal adult education seeks not only to promote immigrants' skills for further education and working life, but strives 'to promote people's versatile development, wellbeing and democracy' holistically and 'to provide education that supports the cohesion of society, equality and active citizenship based on the principle of lifelong learning'. This is how the Act on Liberal Adult Education (1998) determines the goal of these institutions. Traditionally, non-formal adult education institutions have highlighted work in and with communities and support for critical thinking as their central principles.

## **Theoretical framework**

The research and development project described in this article is about counselling of immigrant students in non-formal adult education institutions. From a theoretical point of view, counselling of immigrant students fits easily to the framework of intercultural counselling. Broadly defined, counselling is a process of cooperation and mentoring and of strengthening the counsellee's ability to act (see, for example, Peavy, 1999; Vehviläinen, 2014). Understanding the special conditions for counselling when the student comes from a different cultural background to the counsellor is an important starting point for working with immigrant students. From a social pedagogical perspective, counselling can be seen as a pedagogical activity happening in a relationship between a counsellor and a student, and aiming at supporting the development of a relationship between the student and the new society. Thus, counselling can be understood as a pedagogical relationship that seeks to supporting integration.

## **Intercultural counselling**

Counselling can be defined as a form of vocational discussion that aims at supporting an individual's study, career and life planning. Counselling includes identifying and reflecting on the capacities, skills and interests of the individual and supporting the making of decisions concerning future education, occupation and other areas of interest. It supports the making of plans on the individual pathway to achieve the goals through learning new abilities and skills (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2011). In counselling, the overall situation of the counsellee is considered in dialogue between the counsellor and the counsellee. It is about jointly exploring the counsellee's values, personal strengths and opportunities to personal, social and occupational growth (Muotka and Koivumäki, 2011).

Counselling is a form of interaction that by its principles and practices differs from other forms of interaction, like teaching, guidance (Pasanen, 2003) or therapy (Sinisalo, 2002). It is important to understand the difference between counselling and guidance. Counselling is based on an attempt to get to know the counsellee's life situation in a deep and comprehensive sense, while guidance usually proceeds in a quicker and more straightforward way to find concrete solutions to the counsellee's questions (Puukari and Korhonen, 2013). Thus, counselling aims not at giving advice (Sinisalo, 2002) but at understanding the situation and possibilities of the counsellee better.

In intercultural counselling the cultural differences between the counsellor and the counsellee are seen as a central starting point for counselling. In every phase, the challenges that arise from cultural differences need to be taken into account (Puukari and Korhonen, 2013). By 'culture' we refer to a set of shared values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, practices and other characteristic features of everyday existence that shape the way of life of a given group of people and affect interaction and social relationships, and that is both tradition and in the making at the same time. People both maintain and create culture in their everyday communication, which means that cultures are not static monoliths that would define people in a certain permanent way (Kurki, 2000). However, cultures do give people frameworks through which they can understand the world around them and interpret other people's behaviour. When two people from different cultural backgrounds meet, not only are two individuals encountering one another – two different understandings of the world, with all its nuances, are coming together. Thus, to be conscious of the existence of differing cultural frameworks is important in counselling and especially in the counselling of people from immigrant backgrounds. With regard to immigration, the cultural differences are not only between the counsellor and the counsellee, but also in the counsellee's relation to the surrounding society.

Intercultural counselling can be viewed by its distinctive features as an interdisciplinary and rather broad framework for counselling. Thus, in intercultural counselling, methodological elements from other theoretical approaches of counselling can be applied with critical consideration (Puukari, 2013). Moreover, in counselling with immigrants, there is no fixed set of methods to be used. The heterogeneity of their backgrounds, situations and personalities require flexibility, individuality and use of variety of methods (Matswetu, 2017; Pakarinen, 2020).

The fact that the counsellor and the counsellee represent different cultural backgrounds brings its own challenges. The meaning of different cultural backgrounds needs to be considered, when, for example, life goals are discussed. Different value systems and ways of living can make it hard for each party to understand the other. In many cases, there is no shared language, which means that an interpreter needs to be used, and it makes interaction even more complex. Other factors that may have an effect on intercultural counselling include cultural preconceptions, misunderstandings, attitudes towards counselling, poor timing of counselling, adverse previous counselling experiences, available resources and feelings of insecurity (Hammar-Suutari, 2006; Pakarinen, 2018, 2020).

Intercultural counselling aims at supporting the immigrant in their personal growth in relation to the society and helping them to find a personal path in life as a member of that society. One feature of counselling is sharing information about the society and its social, cultural and legal rules and norms, about possibilities to study, about working life and about other areas of life that might interest the counsellee. This kind of information sharing is intended to help the immigrant to develop a capability to act in society. Counselling can also support the development of learning skills. It supports the development of an understanding of the consequences of one's own choices and actions in a given environment and thus strengthens the ability to make decisions concerning one's future (Luukkainen, 2005).

Intercultural counselling can be illustrated as a process in which the immigrant counsellee is supported in transferring into a new society with new cultural frameworks and in learning how to navigate it (Pakarinen, 2018; Peavy, 1999). The process needs to start from the individual situation of the immigrant – their personality, background, competences, needs, hopes and dreams – in order to enable a meaningful integration and facilitate the development of agency in the new society. The counsellor needs to have sensitivity to recognise the phase of integration that the counsellee is in. In addition, the immigrant status of the counsellee affects the process. Those who have immigrated as refugees often have more challenges at the beginning of their integration than those who have immigrated because of family- or work-related reasons. The early phase of counselling is crucial for the development of a relationship of trust between the counsellor and the counsellee and for the counsellor to form an understanding of the needs for support the counsellee has. It is also a phase where each party begins to identify their competences, experiences, wishes, hopes and goals for the future. The goals for counselling should be determined together, based on the needs and hopes of the counsellee, not of the counsellor (Pakarinen, 2018).

## **Herman Nohl on pedagogical relationship**

In the project, the development of the model of social pedagogical counselling was based on the idea of counselling as pedagogical work and, accordingly, the counselling relationship as a pedagogical relationship. Thus, individual counselling based on the interaction between the counsellor and the counsellee was highlighted, though the importance of working with groups and of peer counselling was also considered. We will reflect the model theoretically through the Nohlian tradition of German social pedagogy, in which the pedagogical relationship has been viewed specifically as an individual-level interaction. To be able to do that, we look at the basic ideas embedded in the concept of pedagogical relationship.

In the German tradition of social pedagogy, the hermeneutic orientation and the concept of pedagogical relationship, created by Herman Nohl, has played an important role (e.g., Blankertz, 1982; Dollinger, 2006, 2012; Gottschalk, 2004; Niemeyer, 1992, 2010; Rauschenbach, 1999; Schmidt, 1992; Thiersch, 1989; Wollenweber, 1983). The concept of pedagogical relationship concerns the question of human autonomy and how to support it, which, is in many ways, at the heart of all pedagogical theory and practice (Klika, 2000). Nohl saw human beings through a culturally oriented framework. He emphasised a cultural way of being a human and considered enabling this way of being as a central task of education.

He saw the pedagogical relationship as a mental process aimed at supporting growth into a mature, independent, consciously free-willed, morally responsible person (Nohl, 1938, 1949). Accordingly, the way we see a person determines how we treat them. The concept of pedagogical relationship as a special form of human interaction embodies a pedagogical view on humanity with emphasis on subjectivity (Bollnow, 1981; Hamburger, 2003; Schmidt, 1992).

An apt summary of the concept of the pedagogical relationship has been given in the spirit of Nohl by Wolfgang Klafki (1980), on basis of which Thomas Lockenvitz (n.d.) has described the following six basic elements<sup>1</sup> of the pedagogical relationship:

1. Orientation to the subjective being of the educated without subjecting the relationship to any outside interests: 'Not for the state or the party or the church, but for your unique individuality.'
2. The historical variability of a pedagogical relationship, in which key elements of the relationship, such as authority, obedience, and trust, take on different meanings at different times: 'Child and adult change, learn from each other and become more mature through shared experiences.'
3. Reciprocity of relationship: 'Instead of absolute obedience and surrender, we strive for independence and activity that culminates in moral autonomy.'
4. The possibility of failure: 'The educator ... must not forget that neither party to the relationship controls the irrational factors that affect the relationship, such as sympathy and antipathy, and should not blame the educated if the relationship fails.'
5. Termination of the relationship: 'Education ends when a person reaches maturity.' And 'The goal of education is to make oneself unnecessary.'
6. Present and future orientation: 'Education must at the same time take into account the child's being situation and develop a vision for the future.'

Nohl developed the concept of pedagogical relationship when, together with the law scholars of his time, he pondered the issue of child welfare, in particular juvenile delinquency (Nohl, 1927, 1935, 1938, 1949, 1965). In this context of work with young offenders, Nohl saw the pedagogical relationship as interaction that would enable self-education and self-help (Engelke, Borrmann and Spatscheck, 2018; Schmidt, 1992). He understood that young people cannot be forced not to commit crimes, and if change is desired, it must arise in the youth themselves, via the individual growth process. Nohl advocated for an educational approach to the treatment of young offenders: education instead of punishment. He spoke eloquently of the awakening of dormant humanity in young people, who are not yet aware of the potential for self-education that lies within themselves.

In Nohl's conception, the pedagogical relationship is based on mutual trust and operates on the principles of openness, flexibility, situationality, spontaneity and anti-manipulativeness (Nohl, 1949). In the relationship, two subjects meet, united by mutual love in a pedagogical sense; however, the relationship is characterised by a tension between the will of the educator and the will of the child or young person being educated (who is in the process of growing up into adulthood and full humanity; Klika, 2000). It is clear, even necessary, that the educator has their own perceptions and aspirations regarding the student's course of life and that they want to influence the development of the student's personality and life choices. However, in the pedagogical relationship, the educator has to balance their tendency to educate with allowing the student to self-cultivate. The educator must consciously avoid coercion, manipulation and indoctrination. The educator has a desire to educate, which tends to shape the student, and a desire to give space to the student's self-determination.

Nohl was significantly influenced by the youth movement of his time, generally characterised as a youth self-education movement (Blankertz, 1982; Flitner, 1968; Peukert, 1986). From an ethical point of view, the efforts to influence another person, although by means of education, may confront the student's potential opportunity for self-education and self-directed choices. Just as the suffix 'agogos' from the Greek word for pedagogy ('paidagogos'), refers to accompaniment in music theory, Nohl argued that the educator should follow pedagogical tact. This pedagogical tact prioritises the will and self-determination of the student over the will and aspirations of the educator. The educator has to refrain from carrying out their own will.

Prior to the actual development of the concept of pedagogical relationship, Nohl perceived education as an intergenerational relationship, in which the growing generation acquires valuable life experience from the retiring generation and at the same time creates its own interpretation of life. As a cultural institution, education secures the continuity of culture in two ways: by preserving cultural heritage on the one hand and by creating conditions for cultural renewal on the other.

## **Developing the social pedagogical model for counselling immigrant students**

Counselling is an integral part of the studies in non-formal adult education institutions. When working with immigrant students, counselling is understood to have an exceptionally important role in supporting not only the immigrant's studies and life within the institution, but also the process of integration into society, following the ideas of intercultural counselling. The approach for counselling in non-formal adult education institutions has been described as social pedagogical even before this research and development project (Suoraniemi and Pantsar, 2013). That idea was the starting point for the project: the initiative to develop a social pedagogical model for counselling of immigrant students came from the Finnish Folk High School Association. There was an assumption that counselling in this field is in many aspects social pedagogical by its nature, but making it explicit and building up a conceptual framework for it would help in developing the work further. A plan was made for a research and development project that would engage counsellors and other staff from folk high schools and study centres into a participatory process, facilitated by a researcher from the University of Eastern Finland. The social pedagogical model for counselling was developed during a two-year process following the basic principles of participatory action research.

### **About the project**

The project in question was called 'Social Pedagogical Counselling in Non-formal Adult Education Institutions: Towards Social Inclusion and a Meaningful Life'. It started in autumn 2018, and it was administered by the Finnish Folk High School Association. The partners in the project were the University of Eastern Finland, the Association of Study Centres, and Bildningsalliansen, which is the Swedish-speaking national association for the non-formal adult education institutions. The project was funded by the Finnish National Agency for Education.

At the beginning of the project, a researcher (one of the authors of this article) from the University of Eastern Finland conducted an initial study to identify the concrete needs concerning counselling of immigrant students in non-formal adult education institutions. The study included a digital survey for the employees at folk high schools and study centres, interviews with immigrant students on their experiences on counselling and a literature review on previous research concerning counselling of immigrants.

Simultaneously with the study, a collaborative development process was started, which was facilitated by another researcher (also one of the authors of this article) from the University of Eastern Finland. The process started in November 2018 with a kick-off seminar that gathered together employees from more than 20 folk high schools and study centres around Finland. The joint work continued in the spring and autumn of 2019 in three different workshop meetings, as well as in small group meetings between the workshops. Through various stages, a common understanding was created about what the social pedagogical counselling of immigrant students in the field of non-formal adult education could be. An initial model that combined the fruits of the collaborative process and the main findings of the initial study was created and piloted at six folk high schools and six study centres between October 2019 and March 2020. Based on the pilot reports and student and employee interviews conducted during these pilots, the model was modified and its description refined. The model has been thoroughly described both in Finnish and in Swedish on a website (Suomen Kansanopistoyhdistys Finlands Folkhögskolförening, n.d.a, n.d.b). A shorter description of the model can also be found in Finnish (Nivala, 2020) and a presentation of the project in Swedish (Nivala and Pakarinen, 2020).

### **Findings from the initial study**

According to the results of the initial study (Pakarinen, 2020), both employees and immigrant students thought that counselling was based on a relationship that should be long-lasting and confidential. There should be clear goals for counselling. According to employees, the biggest challenges in the counselling relationship are the lack of a common language and difficulties and misunderstandings that result from the different cultural frameworks of the counsellors and students. The students might also have

unrealistic goals in life that may cause challenges in the relationship. The immigrant students wanted counselling to provide them with more information about Finnish society in their mother tongue. They were also craving opportunities to build social relationships with Finnish people, not only with fellow immigrants. On a more general level, it was clear that more time and financial resources are needed for the counselling of immigrant students, as well as closer cooperation with the authorities and other institutions that have a role in the integration process.

Immigrant students in non-formal adult education institutions are not a homogeneous group; they have very diverse backgrounds, a variation of present life situations, and differing needs and hopes for the future, so their needs have to be met individually in counselling. There is no single trajectory for counselling – it takes a multitude of forms. Counselling of immigrant students must be understood as a longer, more flexible process that is formed following each student's individual situation and needs. The beginning of the counselling relationship is crucial. In this phase, the counsellor is figuring out what the student thinks about their life, what type of support they need, what skills, knowledge and hopes they have and so on. The goals of counselling need to be defined at an early stage through joint discussion. The student needs to be aware of what they are doing in the counselling process (and why), and that it is they who should set the goals.

The counselling process takes different paths following the needs of the students. If the immigrant student is in an early phase of the integration process, they may need a lot of help and support in handling practical things and learning everyday life skills in the new society, as well as in accessing public services and getting all the necessary paperwork done. Thus, the student might need a close relationship with the counsellor so that they receive real-time support, information and advice for everyday needs and problems. In these situations the counsellor may appear for the student as an authority figure and an expert on everything, and counselling may be a counsellor-driven, pragmatic, content-based and factual activity (see also Pakarinen, 2018). It is easy for the immigrant student to transfer responsibility of the counselling to the counsellor, especially if they lack a future orientation and have previous experiences of not being able to influence their own life (see also Metsänen, 2000). In addition to that, immigrant students who have a more collective cultural framework that values community over individual choices may find it difficult if the counsellor expects them to act independently and take responsibility for their actions and decisions. They might not have an individualistic self-image nor the ability or willingness to achieve self-direction. Finnish society expects a lot of self-direction from its members but learning how to do this takes a lot of time and support (see also Pakarinen, 2018). From a social pedagogical framework this kind of counselling relationship, whereby the counsellor has authority over the student, is not ideal. Attention needs to be given to opportunities for building a more equal relationship based on mutual trust and sharing.

There are also immigrant students who do not expect the counsellor to lead them forward in the process. Those who are further along in their integration process or who have higher education qualifications from their home countries may not need or want such intense, information-oriented counselling. In this scenario, the relationship between the counsellor and the student can more easily and quickly develop into one of equal partners discussing and reflecting things together from a future-oriented perspective. It can be about reflecting on one's own strengths and skills, hopes and plans for the future, possible paths to education and chances to gain employment. The counsellor's role changes from being a motivator and helper into one of supporting the immigrant in a critical reflection of goals and of possibilities to make them real. The counsellor should aim to turn counselling into a dialogue where both parties are experts and no one is acting as an authority figure. Every counselling process should include such a dialogical phase, but sometimes more time is needed to develop the relationship in such a way (Pakarinen, 2020).

The two above examples of the nature of the counselling relationship represent the two extremes: the authoritative and the dialogical relationships. In reality, there are different combinations of counselling situations. Therefore, counselling of immigrant students can be seen as a process, in which the counsellors' role and methods vary according to the situation, the student's individual needs, competences and skills, as well as the phases of the integration process. The aim is that counselling will support the students in developing agency, including self-direction, in society. However, self-direction as an aim does not mean that the student should become totally self-sufficient and should not need any kind of counselling or help. Instead, self-direction means that the student is able to direct their life in such a way that they are able to take care of themselves in society. Through this, the student will also



develop skills to assess their own situation in order to seek help and ask for counselling if needed in the future (Pakarinen, 2020).

## **The development of the model as participatory action research**

The development of the social pedagogical model for counselling followed the basic principles of participatory action research (see, for example, Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon 2014; McIntyre, 2008). Participatory action research can be defined as 'practice-changing practice' that, with the help of theory, looks at the social world from a critically informed perspective and searches for ways to change social practice (Kemmis et al., 2014). For this project, the practice to be changed was counselling of immigrant students, the theoretical basis for looking at it critically was social pedagogical and the core for the whole process was the participation of the counsellors and other employees from non-formal adult education institutions. Even though the goal of the process was set from the beginning – 'to develop a social pedagogical model for counselling of immigrant students' – it did not mean that a ready-made model of social pedagogical thinking and action would have been implemented through some sort of a training process. Instead, it was a collaborative process that through a self-reflective spiral of joint discussions, individual and group reflections, shared tasks of information seeking, planning, acting and observing combined the counselling expertise of the participants and the social pedagogical framework represented by the researcher into a new, more reasonable, informed and intentional conceptualisation, 'the social pedagogical model', of counselling (Kemmis et al., 2014).

At the beginning of the process, there was a collective commitment among the participants of the development process (employees from folk high schools and study centres) to dig into questions about the counselling of immigrant students, and a desire to engage in reflection to understand better, or gain clarity about counselling, its principles and methods. There was also a joint decision to put energy and time into looking for a solution that benefits the people involved – in this case looking for a model for counselling which would support the counsellors in developing their own work. All this was created in an alliance between the researcher and the participants in a cyclical process of exploration, knowledge production, action and reflection (McIntyre, 2008).

One starting point for the development process was the assumption that counselling in non-formal adult education institutions is in many aspects social pedagogical in nature (see Suoraniemi and Panssar, 2013), even though one is not necessarily aware of it. Non-formal adult education in folk high schools and study centres in Finland follows the Nordic popular education tradition based on pedagogical ideas from N. F. S. Grundtvig, the Danish father of the folk high schools (see, for example, Niemelä, 2011). There are researchers who see Grundtvig as an ancestor also for Nordic social pedagogy (see, for example, Charfe and Gardner, 2019; Niemelä, 2011). Grundtvig's thoughts on shared responsibility for teaching in educational communities and the task of adult education to encourage people to improve society, for example, can be identified both in the field of non-formal adult education and in the social pedagogy tradition. In addition to Grundtvig, these two fields have other common roots, for example the ideas of Paulo Freire about dialogue, joint reflection and seeing other people as subjects and not objects. Thus, setting out together to look for a social pedagogical model for counselling in non-formal adult education institutions was not at all an arbitrary goal for the development process.

The process consisted of four phases, which all included questioning, reflecting, dialoguing and either investigation of the issue or action to implement the ideas (McIntyre, 2008). The first phase took place from late autumn 2018 to late spring 2019. The joint reflection on counselling, more specifically on its present strengths and weaknesses, started in small groups in the kick-off seminar. It continued in spring 2019 in two workshop meetings, for which the participants investigated their own organisations' values and principles, reflected on their own basic values that guide their work as counsellors and collected information about methods used in their organisations for counselling. Many of the participants had a long experience in non-formal adult education and in working with immigrant students. Thus, reflecting on the participants' experiences, thoughts and perceptions and examining together the different organisations' values and working methods were at the heart of the process of developing the model for counselling through questioning its present truisms and looking for ideal ways to fulfil the expectations based on the values. However, short introductions to social pedagogy were used as sources of inspiration for reflection. Discussions focused on issues that are central to social pedagogy: who should define the goals for counselling?, is it about integration or emancipation?, how

can you create a dialogical relationship? and how could the counsellor support the student in personal and social growth in a foreign society?

In the second phase, from late spring to autumn 2019, the participants worked in three small groups and processed further the ideas from the first phase, each group from its own perspective: (1) seeing the individual in counselling; (2) how to support social integration; and (3) how to support the finding of future paths concerning studies and working life. The first goal for each group was to define three principles that are the most important to follow in counselling of immigrant students from the group's perspective and the second goal was to collect and make choices of working methods for counselling that would first follow the principles and second help the counsellor to work with the students with important questions regarding personal growth, social integration and future paths. At the end of the second phase, a two-day workshop meeting was organised, at which each group introduced their principles, methods and tools to other groups through engaging them in action, so that everyone had a chance to experience the methods, and in a joint reflection after that. It also gave opportunities to question the principles chosen, to reflect on the choices that other groups had made on the principles and to reassess some parts of the definitions.

In the third phase, the researcher constructed an initial social pedagogical model of counselling based on the preceding process, its joint discussions and the work of the three small groups. In addition, the main findings of the initial study were considered. It was a process of analysis and interpretation that had started during the earlier phases, a process of building a relationship between theory and practice and articulating the new understanding of the practice in question, counselling of immigrant students (McIntyre, 2008). The model was presented and discussed with the participants in a webinar. The participants could then volunteer for a pilot phase where they would put the model into practice in their own work. There were six folk high schools and six study centres, and a couple of employees from each took part in the pilot phase between October 2019 and March 2020. It was the most intensive phase of action in the whole project, when the new framework or plan for counselling was developed through a joint process of investigation and reflection was implemented and reflected again (McIntyre, 2008). The participants were asked first to plan how they were going to implement the model in their organisation, and then during the process to reflect in a diary on their experiences and thoughts concerning the implementation of the model. At the end of the pilot phase they wrote a report on their reflections. In addition, the researcher with two research assistants conducted interviews with both counsellors and immigrant students that were involved in the pilot phase. Based on all this evaluation material, the model was refined and some parts of it were clarified when the final description of the model was written.

The fourth phase of the development process is ongoing at the time of writing this article. It is the phase of disseminating the results of the process and of discussing them with the participants and other interested parties. There are several ways how the social pedagogical model for counselling is presented: through its own website with texts and videos; in webinars; in a podcast series; in scientific articles; and in other texts closer to practice. The participants of the development process also took part in presenting and discussing the model by sharing their experiences and reflections both in the webinars, podcasts and some of the texts.

## **Social pedagogical model for counselling of immigrant students**

The social pedagogical model of counselling, which was created during the project, is a framework for thinking and action – not a strictly defined process pattern that should be implemented as is. The starting point for applying the model is getting familiar with the basic ideas of the model and then finding ways to develop one's own work, following them but applying them in meaningful ways to different situations. The model can be applied in work with students in different situations and in different forms of education. The model has three components: principles of counselling; the process of counselling; and working methods. A more detailed description of all the components can be found on the website of the model (Suomen Kansanopistoyhdistys Finlands Folkhögskolförening, n.d.a, n.d.b).

## **Principles of counselling**

The principles of counselling are at the heart of the model. They guide all the activities and the kind of relationship the counsellor seeks to build with the student. There are a total of five principles. The first

principle is *dialogical relationship*. The counsellor should see the student as a unique and valuable person, whom they would like to get to know. The relationship starts from a desire to understand the student as a whole person, and to hear about both their past experiences and future aspirations. Dialogical relationship is based on equality as people, mutual acceptance, respect and appreciation. Dialogue is a mutual sharing of realities that requires openness and trust, presence and time.

The second principle of counselling is *hope, faith in the future and courage*. The role of the counsellor is to support the student to see their opportunities and identify their wishes. This requires that a framework of hope is consciously created and maintained and that the counsellor believes in the student's opportunities for a meaningful life within society. Creating hope does not stem from daydreaming, though; it requires that the counsellor, together with the student, assesses the student's situation realistically and then identifies possible paths for the future. Hope is the basis for the student's agency, faith in the future and courage to act in their own life.

The third principle of counselling is *activity and agency*. The counselling process is based on the fact that the counsellor sees the student as an expert in their own life. The student is supported in seeing and understanding their own expertise. They are encouraged to be active in different situations, both in counselling and in other issues. The counsellor can support the student to take an active role, for example, when trying new things together and then reflecting the experiences. Helping the student to find information about things that they have an interest in and examining together different possibilities for action can also support the student to gain a sense of agency. The goal is for the student to grow towards agency over their own life.

The fourth principle of counselling is a *communal and holistic approach*. Counselling is seen as a matter for the whole community in non-formal adult education institutions. All employees act as counsellors when needed, that is, if they encounter situations where the student needs help, advice or joint reflection. Peer counselling is also seen as important, and opportunities for it are provided in the counselling process. Counselling is thus understood both as a formal process between a nominated counsellor and a student, and as informal support that can be given in any situation in everyday life. A communal approach as a principle of counselling also means that there are activities that seek to strengthen the students' sense of belonging in the study group and to the whole institution. One goal of counselling is to promote two-way integration, that is, to promote not only the students' learning of the norms and customs of the new culture but also the community's learning of new things when new members join. In addition, counselling is holistic in the sense that the student is seen as a whole person, not just as a student or a future employee. Thus, the counsellor is ready to support the student in all areas of life if needed. However, the counsellor does not have to know everything but they can guide the student to seek help from other services, if special support is needed.

The fifth principle of counselling is *knowledge of and ability to identify different opportunities*. This is a special requirement for a counselling relationship. It is important for a counsellor working with immigrant students to be aware of a wide range of further opportunities in the areas of education, working life and other activities such as volunteering and civic participation. The counsellor should also have time to find out about these possibilities jointly with the student. The aim is to identify the most meaningful future paths for the student.

## Counselling as a long-term process

Another component of the social pedagogical model for counselling is to understand counselling as a long-term process in which different steps can be identified. According to the model, there are three steps that overlap with each other so that to some extent they are all present throughout the process. In the identification of the steps of counselling, another approach was used as a frame of reference. It is called 'positive recognition' and it has been developed in the field of youth work in collaboration between youth work professionals and researchers (Häkli, Korkiamäki and Kallio, 2018). The theoretical bases for positive recognition are the so-called theories of recognition (for example, Honneth, 1995). Following the positive recognition framework, the steps in the counselling process are threefold: getting to know (each other); acknowledging; and providing support.

*Getting to know* is natural in the early stages of counselling, but it continues and deepens throughout the process. Getting to know each other requires open-minded encountering, seeing the student as a unique person. It is important to listen to and encourage the student to tell their life story.

This requires a long process of trust building. Getting to know is the basis for identifying the student's competences, goals, wishes and dreams. In addition it is always a mutual process – it is about getting to know each other and also each other's cultural backgrounds. The counsellor is present in the relationship as a unique person who shares things from their own background, experiences and thoughts.

*Acknowledging* is based on getting to know. It is about noticing and acknowledging things that are relevant to the student themselves, and it is not possible without knowing them, at least on some level. Acknowledging can be done verbally, for example, by giving feedback on successes or asking the student for their opinion on a topic that they view as important. Additionally, acknowledging is possible functionally, for example, through the assignment of responsibilities, as it communicates the counsellor's trust in the student. Showing confidence in the student's competence and the possibility of achieving their goals is also a form of acknowledging, and it is of special value because it strengthens the perspective of hope. Acknowledging is also reciprocal, meaning that the counsellor must be prepared not only to give but also to receive acknowledgement.

*Providing support* is based on the two previous steps. In order for the counsellor to be able to provide support to the student in matters relevant to them, the counsellor must get to know the student and learn to identify things that are relevant to them. Providing support happens often through acknowledgement. It aims at strengthening the social inclusion of the student, meaning supporting their sense of belonging to a community and opportunities to participate and influence as a member of that community. It is also about supporting inclusion in society. Providing support also aims at backing the student's agency – their ability to make choices and act accordingly in a particular environment. The aim is to support the student's agency both in studies and in life more broadly. It is essential to support the kind of agency that is relevant to the student, but supporting agency also seeks direct action. Essentially, counselling aims to strengthen critical agency that not only helps the student to cope as a member of society but also enables critical participation within society.

## Methods for counselling

The third component of the social pedagogical model for counselling is working methods. There are various interactive and creative methods that support the counsellor in the implementation of the principles and process of counselling. The methods can be applied and modified according to what kind of an approach is meaningful for a particular student or a group at a given time. In the model, the methods are divided into three groups based on whether they emphasise getting to know, acknowledging or providing support. Many of the methods are suitable for several steps. A more detailed presentation of the working methods and materials supporting their application are included on the model's website (Suomen Kansanopistoyhdistys Finlands Folkhögskolförening, n.d.a, n.d.b).

## Discussion and conclusions: counselling as a pedagogical relationship

In the research and development project described in this article, the aim was to create a social pedagogical model for counselling based on the expertise of the employees involved, on their views about what makes counselling meaningful for both the student and the surrounding society, and on a theoretical understanding stemming from traditional social pedagogical theory. Herman Nohl's concept of pedagogical relationship was not explicitly presented as a theoretical frame for the participants to consider but it was one of the theoretical roots guiding the researcher in her reflective analysis during the process. To conclude this article, we turn our attention to this concept and discuss how it can help in understanding counselling as a certain kind of relationship and a pedagogical activity.

Following the Nohlian tradition on pedagogical relationship, understanding counselling of immigrant students as a pedagogical activity, and defining the relationship between the counsellor and the student as a pedagogical relationship, involves identifying the potential of the student for self-education and setting this as the starting point and the goal of counselling. In other words, the student is encountered as an autonomous being capable of rational reflection and self-determination. Counselling is, in principle, conceived and conceptualised as a creative activity that cannot and should not be planned precisely in advance, but that allows for unforeseen questions and stimuli. The aim of

counselling is to help the student to identify the possibility of self-education and to reflect and build their own relationship to the new society as well as to promote their functional capacity as a member of this society. To reinforce and encourage the self-reliance of the student is thus a key factor in counselling.

Nohl's idea that the educator must consciously avoid coercion, manipulation and indoctrination applies in principle to all counselling aimed at influencing a person's perceptions, even the worldview. The pedagogical perspective requires transparency and excludes any kind of hidden influence from counselling. The will of the student must take precedence over the pedagogical will of the counsellor, which follows Nohl's idea of pedagogical tact. As the educator, or counsellor, has a desire to influence and shape, even determine outcomes for the student, and at the same time a desire to give space to the self-determination of the student, they have to be able to loosen their own free will and make room for the will of the student. This point is an essential ethical determinant of the relationship in the social pedagogical model for counselling. The counsellor has to refrain from defining how the student should organise their future. This does not prevent the counsellor from expressing their own views as long as pedagogical tact is maintained. The immigrant builds their own relationship with society.

While Nohl's conception of pedagogical relationship was basically an asymmetric relationship between an adult and a child, or a mature and an immature person, the social pedagogical model for counselling is about a relationship between two adults. It is based on the idea of interaction of two equal individuals. It includes a mentoring intention to promote the immigrant student's self-conscious construction of their own relationship to society. However, Nohl's idea of an intergenerational relationship is still valid in this context of counselling, because the construction of immigrants' social relations is a similar process of socialisation as is, in general, the growth into functional membership in society for young people. An individual's relationship to a society is seen to be built in a self-conscious reflection, in which the individual recognises their ability to influence their lifecourse as a member of their community. Awakening and strengthening this awareness is seen as a goal of social pedagogical counselling.

Nohl emphasised the self-education potential of the new generation, which he said should be given space in educational work. Meanwhile, social pedagogical counselling is based on the self-education potential of each individual student. Although the model emphasises individual counselling relationships, attention is also paid to working with groups and even to the possibility of collective self-education, in the form of peer counselling. Individual students are also viewed as members of their natural communities and are encouraged to reflect on their own relationship to the new society in this respect as well.

From a pedagogical point of view, counselling of immigrant students is not just about teaching practical skills and helping counselees to take care of things, but it is above all about promoting human growth through pedagogical means. The study of practical skills and knowledge is part of the picture but it is subordinate to the promotion of human development, self-reflection-based self-reliance, in building a personal relationship to the new society. It is essential to help a person to become aware of the opportunities they have in influencing their own lifecourse and to support them in acting accordingly. The aim of social pedagogical counselling is not the adaptation of immigrant students but their liberation to achieve active and critical citizenship.

## Note

<sup>1</sup>The quotations are freely translated from Nohl's texts into English and are not intended to be literal interpretations of Nohl's expressions.

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## Declarations and conflicts of interest

### Consent for publication statement

The authors declare that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication.

### Conflicts of interest statement

The authors declare no conflict of interests with this work; all efforts to sufficiently anonymise the authors during peer review of this article have been made.

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