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Social Pedagogy
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Dimensions of social pedagogical relationships in comparative perspective

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Why focus on relational practice?

- ‘The failure of the care system to replicate or compensate for the stable relationships that most children have with their parents is one of its most serious and long-standing deficiencies. Even when all the right frameworks and structures are in place, it is the quality of relationships that will determine whether a child in care feels cared about on a day-to-day basis’ (House of Commons 2009: 27).



Something going badly wrong ...

The centrality of forming relationships with children and families to understand and help them has become obscured.

Management of cases via flowcharts undermines importance of relationships founded on continuity

Children's needs and rights to ongoing relationship 'should be at the heart of practice, they should have a voice, and be listened to'.

Too many changes of worker, too many professionals involved ...

Eileen Munro (2011) **The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report**



Drawing on four papers

- Cameron, C. (2013) Cross-national understandings of the purpose of professional – child relationships: towards a social pedagogical approach, *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*
- Cameron, C., Reimer, D. and Smith, M. (2015) Towards a theory of upbringing in foster care in Europe, *European Journal of Social Work*,
- Cameron, C. (forthcoming) Risk and reciprocity in residential care: some problems with a universal norm, in M. Torronen, et al., (eds) *Reciprocal Relationships and Wellbeing: Implications for Social Work and Social Policy*,
- Smith, M., Cameron, C. and Reimer, D. (accepted for special issue) From Attachment to Recognition for looked after children, *British Journal of Social Work*

Data sources – relationships study

- Denmark, Flanders, Germany, (England)
- Background country reports
- Within country interviews with representatives of policy (n = 8), research (9), professional education (5), practice (10), unions (5)
- Six interviews with social pedagogues previously employed in residential care in England
- Total = 43 (across 29 interviews)

Data sources – upbringing paper

- Profiles of foster care and upbringing by 11 experts in European countries
 - the position of foster care in relation to other forms of placement for children, the state of research and what questions remained to be addressed.
 - definitions of upbringing both in general and for children in public care and particularly in foster care.
- Dialogue under the auspices of the Centre for Understanding Social Pedagogy, IOE

Attachment theory dominant

- 1946 foster care preferred; 1951 'warm intimate continuous relationship' essential to avoid irreversible mental health consequences
- 2017: Programmes and therapies abound & brain research invoked to support attachment
- Large minority said to be insecurely attached
- Babies' multiple attachments
- Does not reflect complexity of children's lives
- Not necessarily helpful for older young people



Experience and outcomes for children in care

- 100,000 children in and out of care over year
- Median foster placement length 152 days
- Fall behind educationally from young age; by age 16 one sixth (15%) have 'good' school leaving qualifications
- Around six percent of care leavers go to university compared to 45+% nationally

But

- Around 80 percent of children state that being in care had improved their lives.
- Low wellbeing for around 14 percent, especially girls



What children in care say about their care

- Trusting relationships of utmost importance – reliable, affectionate, a key figure
- Information about their families of origin, plans for the future
- Placements where they feel welcomed and they belong
- Treated in the same way as other children at home and at school, not singled out, able to take up chances and opportunities
- Friends they can keep
- Teachers they can talk to, be encouraged and praised by
- Respect for their individuality and uniqueness



Four purposes of relationship

- Building skills
- Ethical encounter
- Emancipation
- Gaining information and taking action

Building skills

- Young person seen as needing additional skills in order to participate in society
- Professional advise, models, shares lifespace

A 14 year old placed alone with 5 pedagogues:

- ‘They started from the beginning, teaching him how to get up in the morning, wash, place thing in the room ... And they took all the fights with him, but they were genuinely interested in him... After approximately one year he began to trust them’

Ethical encounter

- Without ulterior purpose
- ‘Work at notion of human dignity .. This is very broad but very important ... Its not about changing behaviour... [We] are not behaviourist or focused on rules. We are focused on settings and creating places in which people can come to reflect and do things together’
- ‘You enter a relation. The rest you can’t predefine. If you do structure or predefine, the relation becomes an instrumental’



A vehicle for emancipation

- Give opportunities, create the good conditions
- ‘Give the child a grip on his own life, so that he can develop and go further’
- To work with the autonomy of young people
- Participation in the structures of society – and everyday life



Gain information and take action

- Achieve a change
- 'Its important he tells me so I can understand'
- Have confidence in one special grown up
- 'If you have a relationship they want to spend time with you'

A good relationship

- Trust – if they don't trust you there is hardly anything you can do
- Conditions for trust
 - Authentic interest, mutuality
 - Reliability and continuity
 - Taking action on behalf of young people
- Interpretation and use of professional role – negotiating closeness and distance

Trust – what is it

- Respect for competence
- Having confidence in another's competence, that they know what they are doing
- A leap of faith
- Having commitment, reciprocity, sense of autonomy in everyday working relations

Constructing and maintaining relationships

- Present and future orientated: predictability
- Founded on action and concrete matters of importance to child: expertise
- Work on personal self: reflective, analytic competence, and awareness of boundaries
- *Organisational competence* to support reliability, and, where necessary learning through serendipity.

Risk discourse as risk for relationships

- Written risk assessments are bureaucratic
 - ‘sometimes [young people] would ask for things like go to a leisure centre on the weekends, perfectly ordinary things, and they would have to wait while you filled in the paperwork’.
- Risk aversion has pedagogic consequences
 - ‘I know the risks whether they are written down or not’.
 - ‘making a fire whilst camping is often not [thought] possible. I did it once and it was safe’.
 - ‘children need the right to let them make risky decisions. Let them hurt their leg and fall down. If we don’t let them be afraid, when they live on their own they will be and it’s not fair on them’.

Risk and touch

- physical touch as a source of comfort and security
 - ‘the quality of touch is that it covers things that can’t be expressed in words, if you ask for a hug, in a situation where there is conflict or grief, and there are no words to make the situation good. To give a hug or sit together close, is very helpful and important’.
- therapeutic potential of massage
 - We had a boy who was difficult, settling at bedtimes. He first observed me massaging, and then asked me if he could have a neck and shoulders massage. I asked him to shower and put on fresh clothes, which was often a matter for dispute. He watched TV while I massaged him. I could feel his tension in his shoulders releasing’.
- But against the rules ... fears of allegations against staff. Risk is a negative and defensive concept and seldom carries learning potential

Upbringing - Mollenhauer

- A non-directive educational task undertaken by parents or others
- Poorly defined in relation to children in care
- Mollenhauer: ‘happens all around ... a universal experience’
 - Foster carers as
 - Experts in everyday life
 - Reflexive capacities
 - Being together
- Negotiated upbringing?

Recognition - Honneth

- Mutuality with others
- The means by which self develops in relation to others
- Multi-dimensional, interactive, reciprocal, produced through conflict
- Three dimensions
 - Love – mutual support, exchange, warmth, extending oneself for others
 - Rights – citizenship
 - Solidarity – ties through shared values, builds pride and competence



Belonging

- Essential to development/human needs
- Ambivalence in policy for looked after children
- Individualised as ‘a sense of’

In addition ...

- Social and structural belonging –
 - Active inclusion
 - Active support for foster carers/experts in everyday life

References

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