

HOW CAN WE MEET THE NEEDS OF BOYS AND GIRLS IN SOCIAL PEDAGOGICAL WORK?

Palle Esben JØRGENSEN¹
Knut SKJÆRVOLD

Sør-Trøndelag University College
Department of Child Care and Welfare Work
Trondheim, Norway

Abstract

The article discusses the pedagogical and social aspect in social pedagogy, including its focus and target. We look at the different needs of girls and boys, and point out how they have to be met in different ways. We underline that actual understanding of care is insufficient and has to be elaborated. That lead us to our conclusion that more men must work in the child welfare system, and for that purpose we suggest a quotation of male students in our education.

The pedagogical and social aspect in the social pedagogical approach

Pedagogy is the science of education. Pedagogy means how to plan, do and evaluate the strategies of teaching. Social pedagogy on the other hand is about how to help individuals and groups to achieve the ability to behave properly in the society, and to build the qualification to influence the space for new ways to behave. The pedagogical aspect of social work is not the same as socialization, but more about strategically planned interventions; named education. Social pedagogical interventions or social education is normative in the way that its aim is to include the individual in the society. The task for the social educator is to give individuals the necessary competencies to live a life integrated in the normal societal relations.

¹Address: Palle Esben Jørgensen and Knut Skjærvold: Sør-Trøndelag University College, Department of Child Care and Welfare Work, 7004 Trondheim, Norway.
E-mail: palle.esben.jorgensen@hist.no, knut.skjarvold@hist.no.

Key-words: social pedagogy, gender, gender equality, quota based allocation, Norway.

Mots-clé: education sociale, genre, l'égalité entre les deux sexes, allocation base en quotes, Norvège

The Norwegian social pedagogical theoretician, Mathiesen questions this pedagogical understanding of social pedagogy. He elaborates a critique of the way of thinking around the essence of social pedagogy in the pedagogical line. He supports the Danish theorist Bryderup when she says: "*Social pedagogy has turned into an **individually formulated normative pedagogy**. The development of ideas about normality and integration are individualized and takes place on a private sphere which means in the relation between the social pedagogue and the individual youngster.*" (Mathiesen, 1999, p. 37, our translation).

According to a definition of social pedagogy taken from the Danish theoretician Madsen, there is a focus on "pedagogical emergency situations." According to him (Madsen 1995, p. 20, our translation): "*Social pedagogy is characterized by a series of pedagogical dispositions and initiatives which purpose are to assure that vulnerable people are integrated into the society at large, and which development and growth must be seen as an answer to social and pedagogical emergency situations that have been formed in the industrial society.*"

Here the focus is on the vulnerable child, and what we think is best for children and youth. That includes help to both individuals and groups who are in marginal situations. Pedagogical emergency situations can then be explained as the result of both conflicts in the relationship between parents and children, between teachers and pupils, and as a result of the societal conditions for both families and the school system. The social pedagogue needs to have her focus on reducing the negative effects of pedagogical emergency situations in upbringing, education and general conditions of life. Social pedagogy can be understood as "*the third department for upbringing*" (Madsen, 2006, p. 39 (our translation)), "*with a focus on the problems of child-rearing*" (Mathiesen, 2008, p.11).

The objective of social pedagogy

We emphasize that inclusion and participation is the aim of social pedagogical work. We do not accept the idea that social exclusion is an acceptable way of dealing with "the Outsiders"; using a concept taken from Becker (1963). That is to say that the "social" aspect in the intervention concerns inclusion and socialisation of boys and girls in vulnerable positions. In the over all plan for educating social pedagogues in Norway the specific objective is "*to educate professionals qualified for welfare-, upbringing-, treatment- and preventive work with children and their families with special needs*". To commence with specific interventions mean for us that it is necessary to include both women and men in this kind of work. This gives a **double meaning to inclusion**; both inclusion of the vulnerable boys and girls and their families, and an inclusion of the underrepresented gender, namely men. Our opinion is that "social" in the "social pedagogy" concerns the development of a general sense of decorum in the context of the community (Natorp, in Mathiesen, 2008, p. 21). "Social" also implies a focus on *the individual in the society* and not on the individual as such.

The needs of boys and girls

Behaviour problems, problems in the school system, aggression and lack of monitoring are some of the challenges we are facing as social pedagogues. We can focus on maturational transitions of a normative kind (Kloep and Hendry, 2003, p. 60). There are some differences between the way girls and boys experience and

react to such challenges. More girls react with depression and internalization, in contrast to the acting out and antisocial behaviour of boys.

When it comes to social pedagogical interventions the tendency is that more female social pedagogues work with girls and smaller children, while most male social pedagogues work with youth and antisocial boys. This is also a reflection of the dominant view that care is a feminine domain.

When we look for settings where both men and women are working with boys and girls, we find them in the family, with relatives, in the kindergarten, at school and in leisure activities. On some of these arenas boys and girls come in contact with professional workers, including social pedagogues, and most of them are female. In an earlier presentation (Skjærvold, 2009) we have focused on recruiting men to work with children in the child welfare system.

The situation in Norway

In a contextual understanding we can say that masculinity and femininity are descriptive concepts that must be understood in relation to the lives of men and women. Certain ideas and practices are linked to gender-based opinions that are part of the contemporary culture. From our practice we have seen that stereotyped pictures of masculinity and femininity to a certain extent are class related. A majority of the clients in the child welfare system are from the lower social classes. That means that these stereotypes are found both among the parents and the children from these classes.

The "White Paper on Male Roles and Gender Equality" (2008), points to a more gender-equal home life. Men do more housework and care more for their children than they did three decades ago. Younger men are more tolerant of differences in the way masculinity and male identity is expressed. Overall the structure of gender equality has changed more than gender identity. Both men and women want more men to go into female-dominated occupations. They also want children to grow up in a society with equal rights. These ideas are more accepted among people from the middle-class than from the working-class. *"Traditional constructions of manhood are associated with traits such as aggression, competition, dominance, independence, superiority and self-confidence. Masculine identity is also based around an understanding of what it is not; it is not "girly" or "sissy"* (Smith, MacLeod & Mercadante, 2006, p.11). Today, the picture is complex, as work comes into conflict with the role of being a father. Fathers have started to change their focus from work to care giving. To be an accessible father has become a dominant ideal, especially in the middle classes.

Even though it is expected that men should be accessible fathers, there is still far to go before fathers have the same status as caregivers as mothers do. Attitudes in the work place have a strong influence on parenting practices of fathers. Fathers in male-dominated businesses take leave less often than fathers who work in female-dominated or gender-balanced organisations.

The workplace has served to hinder progress towards equality. This is one of the main findings of the "White Paper on Male Roles and Gender Equality" (2008).

According to this investigation there has been greater progress towards equality in the home than in the workplace, and Norway still has one of the most gender divided labour markets in Europe.

Children do not grow up under equal conditions. We need to know more about the situation for girls and boys, and for men and women. The social pedagogue works to

improve the standard of living for children with social or psycho-social problems on behalf of the society at large, as well as a critical professional. Therefore it is necessary to know how to work with conditions on the societal level. The social pedagogical practise includes learning of skills that make it possible for us to participate in and cope with different situations of a social character. That again tells us also that it is important for boys and girls to be included in social situations with both men and women.

Male care – any difference?

In the Danish book “Men and care”; Krøjer (2003) refers to an investigation where a number of pedagogues in day care institutions were asked to gender-label different work functions. Daily shopping, food production, cleaning, care and tending, and repairing clothes were all regarded as feminine functions. Activities including bicycles, go-carts, cars and busses, activities with computers and electronics, crafts, physical and violent conflicts, and use of power, boys play, wild-, power related or outdoor activities were regarded as masculine functions.

A Norwegian study, “Gender in social work with youth and their parents” (Sagatun, 2008, p. 60) implies that male child care workers include fathers when it comes to doing activities that are physically challenging and adventurous; and mothers when the focus are on establishing or strengthening emotional bonds with the son.

Why is the picture so traditional when the pedagogues themselves consider gender equality as an ideal? They all made activities in the private sphere contradicted to this traditional understanding. Krøjer uses the metaphor of the “Proper Home”. In a “Proper Home” you must have “*The Big Mummy*” and “*The Big Father*”.

Institutions in the child welfare system have as their first aim to “offer safe and good conditions for growing up and for living in a homelike milieu.” In the research literature we have found that care of children is related to female ways of thinking and acting towards children. Proper care is understood as closeness and intimacy.

Understanding the signals from children regarding needs for changing of nappies, needs for food, needs for consolation is an essential part of daily care.

Bratterud et.al. (2006) refer to investigations that are of interest here. In Oslo a kindergarten made an experiment with only men working in one of the sections of the kindergarten. Actions and physical activity appeared to be more typical in this section compared to the other ones, though they too were good at talking to the children, reading books and creating good relations.

In a study from 2000, Stundal tried to define differences between a female and male understanding of care among men working in kindergartens. She found that men and women agreed on the substance of care, but they also found some differences.

Stundal shows in “Men and Care” (Bratterud, 2006, p.135) that men focus on an element of action in their care. Men underline the importance of active participation in play and other activities with children. Some of them point out the importance of opposition to the tendency in the society to overprotect children. Stundal concludes that this is different from a typical female way of doing care.

In “Men and Care” Hjorth (2003, p.112) refers to her own research among young pedagogues in the transition between studies and work. In the study she especially focused on three male pedagogues. She underlines some points where men differ from females in the study. She says: “*When the men talk about their pedagogical work they formulate themselves in what I will call a “challenge discourse”. A way of*

talking that differs very much from the “care discourse” the women in the study mainly use.”

We think it is relevant here to use competency to illustrate what is important to strengthen in work with children and youth. When we talk of social competency we can divide it in subgroups like intellectual, emotional, and behavioural functioning. They can be also be understood as subgroups of resilience. In this way we can focus on aspects that certainly are of interest for both male and female social pedagogues and for the boys and girls in vulnerable situations.

Age and experience as a factor

In some research reports, also confirmed through our own research (Skjærvold, 2009), male students in child care work usually are older than the female students. They have another education or have been working in traditional male dominated areas before they became students. When these areas are threatened by restructuring and unemployment, they look for new appointments in other fields. It is also strongly related to personal experiences with children and youth. They usually have commitments to family and therefore see it as difficult to be full-time students for three or four years. Therefore the Norwegian Expert Commission on Competency in the Child Welfare System (2009) suggests establishing a one year study in milieu work qualifying these men for work in residential care. From Denmark and Scotland we find examples that can be followed (Smith et.al. 2006). The Norwegian Expert Commission says: *“To guarantee a broad recruitment to the residential child care worker education it must be offered both as full time and part time education. This is an education that should be possible to supply to or take as part of a bachelor education as child care pedagogue”.*

Quota-based allocation

The extremely gender divided labour market in Norway is one of the reasons to recommend measures to increase the number of men on all arenas of social welfare. We proposed a quota-based allocation in the social pedagogical study. This proposal has been accepted in a modified way by our University College with a quota of 20%, and this is supported by The Norwegian Expert Commission on Competency in the Child Welfare System. The study of social work at our university college has a quota-based allocation for students with an ethnic minority background, which is a success. On the programs for data education at NTNU (Norwegian University of Science and Technology) they have experienced that some of their special measures taken for recruiting female students have given positive results, but only as long as they were active. These measures were other than the traditional ones like advertising at the movies, on TV, and other media. The tendency that special measures had a temporary effect is also reported when it comes to recruiting more men to work in the kindergarten.

For a sustainable change we see quota-based allocation as an effective measure. To recruit more men is more effective when you can point out that there are already a group of men at the study and at the workplace. We appreciate the long term effect of men taking care of their children when they are babies, but we would like to see a more immediate change.

When it comes to training of the students, it is obvious that we need to have more men that can clarify preferred masculine competencies connected to excitement and

thrill seeking in acceptable manners. Using these activities makes it possible for boys (and girls) to participate in relations where it is favourable to show feelings to peers of both sexes. Our view is in accordance with Smith (2009, p. 94) when he points out that “Men and women care in different ways and children should experience both sexes in caring roles”. So, how can we understand care from both a feminine and a masculine point of view? When it comes to the childcare services we speak of professional care and competencies. Therefore it is necessary with an education that focuses on girls and boys, and social pedagogues of both sexes to do the professional work that the society demands.

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