The Pedagogy of Special Care of Child Protection

© Violetta Bíró
Eötvös József Főiskola, Baja, Hungary

The reasons and the course of raising children from their families are regulated by the law for protecting children. From 1st of January on children raised from their families are taken to fosterparents, except for those who are over 12 years old or the ones who are predicted to be unable to integrate into average family conditions since their personality status diverges from the norm or due to any other reasons.

The family’s protective field of children raised from their families did not prove to be sufficiently strong and lasting. They were not often able to cope with the problems, hardships in the family even with the help of the primary care of child welfare (Bánlaky, 2005). The leading cause of their being taken to a children’s home is mainly the appearance of secondary problems, such as playing truant, behavioural problems as the primary anomalies in the family functions cannot be detected in every case, for example the different forms of child abuse.

Removing from their families mean a break in a child’s life and in their personality development. It is not rare that an underage child who enters into the child protection system is repeatedly traumatized. It is the responsibility of the workers to correct the children’s personality which needs pedagogical expertise. My study is a good practice at the same time in which I intend to present tested pedagogical methods according to different competency areas.

Presentation of the Children’s Home Number IV in Hőgyész, Child Protection Directorate of Tolna County

Hőgyész, which is a large village, is situated in the Southern-Transdanubian region in Hungary, in the county of Tolna. Sándor Petőfi Foster Home started to operate here in Count Apponyi’s Castle in 1955 as the intitution of the ministry. In the 1990s the deinstitutialisation of big establishments and also the emphasis of education in a family way commenced. Since then the service apartments located in the castle’s garden has been reconstructed.
enabling them to educate children. Count Apponyi’s Small Castle became the central building.

Meanwhile the institution has become Children’s Home Number 4, Child Welfare Directorate of Tolna County where girl children live in four groups at present. In three groups of underage children of 10-12 children are educated with the help of five adults. The aftercare group is reserved for girls who take part in further education. One teacher helps them to prepare for independent living (Oszbach, 2005).

The children’s home is lead by Mária Oszbach children’s home headmistress. She co-ordinates the professional work of the groups and who is also the immediate supervisor of the group leader educators. The group leader educators have different pedagogical qualifications such as kindergarten-teachers, lower-primary school teachers, primary school teachers, social educator or teachers of handicapped children. They spend 32 hours directly with the children from their weekly working hours, 8 hours is free which includes planning of their professional work, organizing how to carry out this work, writing individual development plans, preparing annual revision and professional self-education.

**Welcoming new children in the Children’s Home**

Welcoming a new child follows a previously determined method. The first meeting takes place in the conference room of the Small Castle. We bear in mind that fright, fear of the unknown and new are all characteristic of their emotions. It is necessary to solve their anxiety this time. A friendly welcome, introduction with shaking hands, a smile facilitating reassurance, asking to sit down, open interest and emphasising honest communication are all key steps of the process.

A child care mentor is appointed for the new child whose work is co-ordinated and helped by group leader educators. The mentorship gives safety, more love, deeper attachment, personal care and education. The tasks become concrete, palpable for the adults and the quantity of work is divided proportionately between them.

The group leader educator deals with the academic issues and achievement of the underage. In case of learning difficulties and disorder of any subskill it is the development educator who measures the level of the child and he or she develops them in a personalized way either individually or in a small group format. Their work is helped by a psychologist.

It is necessary to pay attention to the child’s behaviour, reactions consciously from the very first moment as all information is indispensable to complete a personalized developmental-correction plan on the basis of a national form called GH-1. During the third
week after the arrival of the child the plan is written in team work where all the adults working in his or her group, the developmental educator, the psychologist and the headmistress of the children’s home are present.

**Personality status of the children got into children’s welfare home**

In children’s homes mainly adolescents can be found, yet I find important to emphasize what effects and results it has if children are raised from their families at an early age since we often get children from foster parents and adoptive parents.

A small proportion of children are taken into care during infancy. Raising from family results in mental injury in each case regardless the age of the child. Those who got into nursery homes during their first year of age are not able to establish a unipersonal attachment if they do not have an exclusive nurse. Without learning how to live in symbioses self-differentiation cannot take place in a healthy way which leads to personality development disorder. In the long run they have attachment disorder, in adulthood asociality is typical of them.

The so-called specific attachment discontinues if a child gets into special children’s welfare home between the ages of 1 and 3. The new surroundings and the appearance of unknown people seem frightening for them which hinders exploring the world. Typical symptoms are introversion, shynesss and anxiety. Their need for autonomy is suppressed.

During nursery school years if children are suddenly taken out from their families, furthermore if they have ambivalent relationship with their parents this event results in long-continued grief reaction. Being separated and torn from abusive parents cause symptoms of depression or lead to behavioural disorders. This is the time when individuality evolves which serves the basis of the formation of a stable border of the self. Without a firm attachment point the good and the bad self-image, the object image cannot integrate. I would like to emphasize from the consequences that the child may establish utilitarian contacts later on. The so-called borderline or antisocial type of personality development can be linked to the problematic development of this period.

Reaching the elementary school age the traumatization and abuse in the family has been going on mostly for years. In spite of this fact children are becoming more attached to their parents which is burdened with guilt. Detachment from parents is atypical. Forming new connections on such basis is also full of hardships. These children usually oppose and indifference appears. They are apathetic and
Defiance is fixated which induce a series of conflicts (Kothenczné, 2009).

According to statistical data most children get into the child welfare system in their teens (Gáspár, 2003; Kothenczné, 2009). They arrive with stabilized personality from their families in a seriously traumatized way and the negative effects of their lifting out is also added. They disappointed with adults, they experience the feeling of being outcast, which interlaces forming their identity. In the children’s home they have the opportunity to experience what it feels like if they are taken care of in a sensitive way, when somebody listens to them and to their problems. Being admitted into a group requires adaptation and by this means their ability to co-operate develops. One of the significant roles of child welfare system, which provides home is to promote keeping in contact with their natural families. This task is realised with the help of the guardian and caregiver of the children’s home (Herczog, 2001, Bíró, 2006, Kothenczné, 2009).

Murányi-Kovács and Járó divide the typical distortion of personality structures into three different types. The first one is the oversensitive-qualmish type of children, who try to hide their anxiety. It seems to a third party that these type of children are able to accommodated nonetheless they are not attached to anyone. As they have a negative self-esteem, it has an impact on their performance, in addition to this their psychic bearing capacity is low as well. Psychosomatic symptoms often occur, they tend to be depressed. The second one is the hot-tempered-negativistic type, who is defiant, spiky, rejective and discontented. They give voice to their frustration by fits of passion. They are unable to adapt to new situations and mainly they are not willing to do this either. They are aggressive as well. They lack self-confidence, their self-assessment is negative. Children with dissociative symptoms can be put into the third group. They feel being outsiders, their personality is disintegrated, they oppose and can be characterised by extreme indiscipline and unreserve (Kothenczné, 2009).

The tasks and competencies of educators working in children’s welfare

These educators’ tasks significantly differ from their colleagues working in other educational institutions as it has turned out from the previous chapters. As a consequence of this one part of the competences expected from these educators are nominally the same but with different contents, the other part appears as extra competence.
**Family functions**

The residential care of child welfare has been striving for education in a family way. The functional model of family serves this purpose, which means the realisation of the family home as a model (Lightart, 1986). The performance of family functions and transferring them take place in so-called ‘families’. The head of the family is the groupleader teacher who organizes the co-operation, co-ordinates and shares the tasks. His or her work is directly supported by four childminders. The task realisation and the adequate work of the family is supervised by the guardian.

According to Gilligan (1999) children’s homes have four functions. These are the following: care, protection, compensation and preparation. Care means that the children’s needs are met suitably for their age. Protection includes ceasing those circumstances which endanger children who are admitted to the children’s home, protecting the children from the circumstances which endanger them, furthermore setting positive goals to them. The institution has the ability to compensate the arising deficiencies in children’s life, which on the one hand means enlisting healthcare, educational services, on the other hand having access to special therapies, which helps to work up any traumatic experience and PTDS. Preparation has a dual function. On the one hand, it means children are prepared for life by means of teaching them useful knowledge, on the other hand, preparation for replacing them into their families and fitting them in society.

Bastianoni and Emiliani consider that the protective function of the institution lies in the fact that ceasing the endangering factors reduce stress. The child’s developmental correction also takes place. It also helps children to fulfill the academic requirements, furthermore it increases self-assessment and self-confidence. Personality correction also begins. New social connections form which can also promote the development of personality by making a positive atmosphere.

Domszky highlights spending freetime in a useful way from the functions of the children’s home, which can be realised by recreational programmes. It has to be taught that renewing one’s physical, mental and intellectual power after tiredness, emotional strain, depletion of physical and intellectual power (Domszky, 1999).

Bronfenbreener analysed the process of socialisation as a system in the 1990s. He differentiated micro, mezo, exo and macro systems. In accordance with his theories, the individual and its surroundings constitute a system, which has different levels. The levels are built on one another and form concentric circles. Each level has an impact on
the following level and they are interrelated (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). This model serves as a frame to the interpretation related to socialization in child welfare homes. It was named ‘black box’ phenomenon since researchers do not know a lot about operative problem solving, applied means and their effects in child welfare (Ploeg, 1986; Palareti, Berti, 2009).

Palareti and Berti (2009) used Bronfenbrenner’s model to analyse socialisation on the basis of which it can be stated that the corrective education of children does not only depend on the work and preparation of professionals but also the dynamic relationship of environmental systems is also a significant element to make changes. This means that the microsystem comprises of the child and the adults related to him both from quantitative and qualitative respect. The atmosphere of the community which the child is placed into contributes to this as well. Determinant elements are the daily routine, the rules and the policy of the institution. We mean the community around the child, the school and freetime activities by mezosystem. The plan for caring appears here which connects the present, the past and the future. The exosystem involves relations, for example, with other institutions or the natural parents of the child. It is an important principle if the child is not present the events still have an effect on him or her. The management, the communication, the coordination of the establishment operate on this level. The macrosystem forms the sociocultural background of helping. This is the level of therapeutic work, possibilities and educational methods (Palareti, Berti, 2009). Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model may facilitate the assessment of institutional allocation, designating the direction of interference with the help of which the institutional education can be made efficient.

Resocialization is getting to be a more and more stressed function of children’s homes and apartments. The aim is to improve children’s level of socialisation showing antisocial behaviour and also to integrate them into society (Volentics, 1996). Socialisation is influenced by the following in institutions: the previous circumstances of the children, their experience and the age when they were raised from their families.

Dutch researchers found that the correlation between the time of dwelling and problems can be characterized by a U-shaped graph among children growing up in child welfare homes. This means that there are only few problems at the beginning then they proliferate. As a result of development in children’s home it reaches a higher limit, then it has no effect and after that certain problems and conflicts recur (Ploeg, 1986).

Due to the corrective effects of family functions, educators should definitely be aware of the following: they have to know the phases of the child’s personality development, the various characteristic
features of atypical development, the method of determine the areas be developed, they have to know the way how each areas should be developed, they should have a high level of situation awareness, be active and be present in the process with conscious presence. Although it is not a primary tasks of children’s homes to keep in contact with the child’s real family, their task is to prepare the children to be replace into their families. Parents should also be taught to take responsibility of their child living in special circumstances. The effect of family background has an impression on the children after they got into the establishment (Ploeg, 1986). Parents get an invitation every June to spend a day together with their child to attain this aim. The day’s program is busy and professionally well-built. The headmistress of the establishment inform them about the current topics, such as changes in law or implementation of programmes. It is a good occasion to reinforce parents’ role and to ask them to co-operate as children’s education is a common purpose that is why it can be realised with joined forces.

**Personality development of the underage**

Educators cannot conduct psychotherapy, although psychotherapeutical situations can be found in everyday interaction, too. Day by day we use several helping strategies instinctively, for example reassurance, diversion, audition, making people talk out, sympathy, awakening, confrontation, reinforcement, counselling etc., when using them we rely on our everyday experience, the knowledge we have gained (Szönyi, 2000). There are situations when specific psychotherapy cannot be carried out, furthermore when an educator does not have the necessary qualification and competence to perform therapy, however with a psychotherapeutic approach and attitude educators are able to improve and to solve problematic situations. Psychoterapeutic approach means that educators draw from the theory and experience of psychotherapies, for example, based on the normal developmental psychology to obtain information about abnormal personality development. The primary aim is to re-establish the harmony of the development process, to promote the spontaneous corrective opportunities. This overplus knowledge promotes the co-operation between the different specialities.

Various therapeutical methods exist, their classification is based on the different theoretical ideas about how psyche works. In practice they rely on psychoanalysis and learning theories. According to other classification we can talk about verbal therapy when communication takes place via speaking primarily or therapies based on non-verbal technics such as games, movement and tasks based on creativity.
The therapy can be conducted individually or in groups (Gárdoros, 2003).

Therapies relying on theories of psychoanalysis if the exploration is started at the root of the problem they are called expressive technics such as clarification, confrontation, interpretation or technical neutrality. When using supportive technics interpretation falls into the background such as corrective emotional experience, counselling, reinforcement and environmental intervention (Flaskay, 2010).

The most important aim is to correct the injuries in the child’s personality development. Erickson stresses in his theories that we can relive certain periods if crisis arises. We tune the therapeutic aim to the periods in which the age of the child is determinative. The first period ends with establishing arch-reliance. When measuring the child’s feeling of safety and faith those relationship patterns resonate which was experienced in his or her first year. The second period closes with forming autonomy. In this case the negative feelings experienced between the ages of 1 and 3 are put forward such as doubt and shame. The third period measures one’s initiative which forms between the ages of 3 and 6 otherwise remorse is activated. The fourth period establishes performance between the ages of 6 and 12 or it can lead to inferiority complex. Adolescence between the ages 12 and 18 establishes indentity that is the consciousness of self-identity. It is vital to integrate into society and find their place in the world. The formation of identity assumes the successful completion of the previous stages. To realise these aims it is necessary that the child’s life should be predictable, consequent with reasonable limits and the community of the children’s home should be be retaining. The adults should be predictable, consequent, patient, empathic, supporting, personal pedagogical effects should prevail, values and strong points should be stressed and accepted. The communication should be pedagogy-centred, optimistic, professional and an efficient organization of professional activities. An outstanding goal can be sorting out the relationship with the child’s natural parents (Major, Mészáros, Tatárné, 2008).

*Family-like groups, promoting and developing forming communities*

The composition of the groups changes several times a year as new children come to the group or leave it. The latter happens because the reason for raising a child from his or her family ceased, furthermore when the child comes of age, moving to the aftercare group or because of leaving the establishment. While planning it is
necessary to think of having open groups where the changes can be followed up.

Every autumn a Hiking Day is organized, which is a day for team building at the same time. Children’s knowledge is tested at various stations where children revise the annual development. The night ends with a dinner together.

Integration into a group does not mean only integration within the establishment but children have to be accepted in their class too. The classmates of our children get an invitation to our institute as well. It is a highly important event as children often struggle with lack of confidence or they are afraid of their peers’ prejudice. In each case we get a feedback about the visitors’ opinion in a few lines. They cannot help but admire our homelike surroundings.

They are introduced into the world of work with setting example and doing common activities on the busy weekdays. Tidying the yard is done together with the children which is not an easy task to do neither for the children nor for the adults but it is worth the effort since we can develop their need for a tidy environment.

Integration of disciplines, vocational subjects and curricular knowledge

The goal of our project pedagogy is to reduce or eliminate the sociocultural detriments, to improve the child’s personality so as to integrate them into society. Our task is to impart extensive knowledge so that they can also become cultured and valuable people. The topics are worked up with a versatile, complex approach and perspective. I intend to highlight some of them which can serve as an example.

The Péter Mansfeld quiz was an introduction to Péter Mansfeld Memorial Tour. Every child tried to prepare for this quiz according to their abilities. Thanks to the colleagues a mini exhibition was opened in the developmental educator’s room from the objects originating from the 1950s linked with a food tasting. The poverty and difficult life situations which were typical of the era were highlighted. Comparing the fashion of the era with today’s fashion contributed to the complex working up of the topic. The workmen arrived with photoalbums showing their families’ memories, the children made analysis based on the previously prepared list of points of views. Literary knowledge could not have been left out. At two different points of the thematically-based quiz two of Márai’s poems were performed by an adolescent girl who is a regular and successful contestant of the national poetry contest. Another brave volunteer prepared for reading ‘Egy mondat a zsarnokságról’ aloud in an
emphatic way by Gyula Illyés. The different forms of despotism could easily be recognisable. The sense of achievement was guaranteed for everybody. After that the participants completed a worksheet compiled in advance by the educators, next the worksheets were checked. Almost everybody knew the answers. The children who had a lot of failure at school were persistent and had a sense of achievement. The children were informed about their result the following day in the conference room upstairs in the Small Castle where the children got to know who can join Péter Mansfeld Memorial Tour.

Another station of historical roaming was introduced in a film club. The children watched a film working up the era when Mária Terézia's reigned controlled by developmental educators. Then they went on a trip to Vienna, Baden and Mayerling.

The other central element of the pedagogical programme of the children's home is to educate them to protect their environment with thematical camps and trips. Among others it concentrates on helping children to get to know the flora and fauna of forests, lakes and their surroundings. Highlighted programmes were exploring Lake Plitvice and its flora and fauna and experiencing the wonderful landscape of Transylvania.

We provide sports facilities for our children suitable for the season. We have been teaching them for years how to skate and ski in winter. A good model is provided to them as we also put on our skates and skis. We exploit the opportunities to develop them as these activities teach us to listen, be disciplined, endure, cooperate and be tolerant.

Children attend a swimming course every summer, learn to play tennis, play basketball and run. Our purpose is to teach them the adaptive ways of coping with stress.

Planning of the pedagogical process

The planning of the pedagogical process significantly differs from that of other educational institutions as the child welfare educators’ work is not connected to any syllabus consequently there are no teaching materials. Our goals are different with each child as they arrive with different background and status. It would be impossible to follow any kind of guideline as the consistence of each group is heterogenous considering age, mental capacity, level of socialisation and so on. Individual development and personality correction are based on individual development plans which require flexibility, creativity, divergent way of thinking and determination.

GH-sheets which are used nationwide provide thematical framework for planning. GH-1 sheets are necessary to complete in
one month after the arrival of the child. GH-3 sheets provide annual supervision. Both forms should be completed in team work. The construction of these forms help to set our goals but reaching them depends on the efficiency, methodical knowledge and the personality of educators and professionals.

Imparting knowledge can happen verbally, via exemplification, by making children act and also with constructivist methods which can be appropriately combined. During planning not only the goals to be reached but also the methods in use should be presented and progress should be made in accordance with this throughout the whole year. To do this the completed forms are always available for the colleagues working with children, it can be expanded and supplemented with notes any time to follow the changes continually.

Organising and controlling the learning process

The aim is to prepare for the lesson and to create the learning environment. I demonstrate how it works by giving an everyday example at the children’s home. During the schoolyear the group leader teacher have two lessons from 4 to 6 every day. The method which is easiest to carry out is differentiated organisation of learning which allows taking individual features into consideration.

Besides individual form of learning, pairwork and small group format can also be used. Independent learning improves individual work. Pairs can be formed based on similar classification or in the tutorial system the more skillful, better students, those on higher level can help their peers. By this their ability to cooperate, tolerancy and empathy improves.

The continuous assessment of pedagogical processes and the personality development of children

The feedback of achievements influences the whole pedagogical process. There is a significant difference between the applied feedback methods compared to the ones used in educational institutions as no marks are given. Basically we take the child’s cognitive and non-cognitive personality traits into consideration. Our feedback promotes differentiated, flexible and optimum achievement. The realistic feedback contributes to the correction of the self-image of the child and also to the positive self-assessment.
Professional cooperation and communication

Personality correction of traumatized children is not an easy task to do. There is only little sense of achievement as girls’ need for a change who got into the establishment in their teens is very low, their motivational urge is atypical. It is important that we should not be alone with this problem in a difficult situation but we should dare to ask for help. To this end, a professional day is organized which is an interdisciplinary discussion where we try to find solutions to current problematic issues thinking together with the representatives of related professions. That is why several professional people were invited from the ministry with hight rank, colleagues who increased the efficiency of our work in the long run with their advice and support. It is natural that we do not only invite people but we are also invited to meetings so as to be able to bring about positive changes in these distressed children’s life.

Commitment and responsibility for professional development

Educators working in child welfare often take part in accredited courses and trainings to broaden their horizons, to work more efficiently all days and last but not least to prevent becoming weary.

Summary

Child welfare educators’ job in child welfare homes significantly differ from that of the teachers’ working in educational institutions. They focus on a special field of training and education which is personality development in a complex way and personality correction. The work of personality development is effective only if we manage to arise children’s interest in activities. Our aim is to provide them with experiences, the chance to get experience, the means and conditions of this which provide support to their improvement compared to themselves, to prevent their possible lack of abilities and to fight with it and also to evolve their talent. We strive for the optimum balance of conditions both outer-objective and inner-psyhol ogical so that the child’s psychological functions are able to evolve optimally besides natural maturation.

To reach our goals the competency areas which can be expected from educators working in child welfare is supplemented by family functions as the educator takes the role of the head of the family,
who imparts a wide range of knowledge from economic to recreational. Without the lack of professional expertise only those teachers remain on this field who are dedicated enough, their personality is sensitive, flexible, they are able to think divergently so they are able to perform corrective tasks beyond educational work.

References


