

RESME Educational Manual

The European Council recently considered the issue of two of the key professional orientations towards working with young people in state care, child care and mental health treatment, operating without sufficient connection or collaboration. Yet the children and young people who come to the attention of mental health and residential child care services are likely to be drawn from the same population with the same issues. This course is designed to encourage inter-professional understanding and mutual learning to improve the mental health and general wellbeing of children at the boundaries of the two professional groupings.

The RESME bid was to develop a 15 ECTS course around best practices in 'borderline' work between residential child care workers and mental health professionals to be delivered to both groups of workers across each of the partner countries. We developed a full manual in line with these original intentions. This is available to course trainers.

However, one of the main findings of the RESME project has been that this original aim of a pan-European curriculum was over-ambitious for several reasons:

- we found few examples of sustained good practice in borderline work across any of the partner countries
- in each country, to a greater or lesser degree, there were differences in status between residential care workers and mental health workers, which made it difficult to bring them together for joint training
- every country found it difficult to release staff for the contact days that would be expected for a 15 ECTS course. This was particularly true for residential care providers who also had to pay 'backfill' costs to cover the shifts of those on training.
- service providers wanted certifiable training, whereas the RESME course was only a pilot without formal certification. In some countries there was scope to accredit the course retrospectively.
- it proved impossible to harmonise the timings of the course delivery across the partner countries which would have been required to facilitate the planned cross national collaborative work. This was because timings had to take into account national contexts and priorities around, for instance, University term times, or in some cases external factors that prevented agencies from committing staff to the course at particular times
- a final difficulty was that each partner country had to deliver training content that was relevant to their particular national context. Without this, there was a danger that the curriculum would reflect dominant English language material

Theoretical rationale

The course was designed following interviews with child care staff and mental health practitioners in each of the partner countries. This research showed that there was an overwhelming need for inter-professional collaboration. It also showed that there were some areas that the countries felt were needed in terms of specific topics to be explored in a collaborative learning environment.

Poor mental health among children in state care tends to be manifest in complex ways which can differ greatly from child to child and which may not constitute a readily definable set of symptoms. For this group of children, the appropriate starting point may not centre on establishing a diagnosis using medical models of disorder but may emerge from concerns elicited by the child's behaviour. Experienced practitioners suggest that it is more useful with this population to work with concepts of change, trauma, resilience, loss and attachment that situates that behaviour within the child's social circumstances and current and past experiences.

Course aims

The aim of this course is to promote inter-professional learning and collaboration between mental health professionals and child care professionals.

The objectives of the course are:

- To allow each group of professionals to explore the common nature of the children and young people with whom they work
- To provide opportunities to share knowledge about specific aspects in the lives of vulnerable children and young people with whom they work
- To provide practical experience of each other's working structures and environments
- To encourage reflection on the application of learning to practice across boundaries
- To provide opportunities to learn from each other's experiences
- To develop a training needs analysis for guiding future learning and collaborative opportunities

The course will follow accepted adult professional learning principles. Adults learn best in an experiential way. The professionals involved will be encouraged to use their experience, acquire new information and skills and use critical reflection and appraisal to integrate new knowledge into practice. The course has three modules:

Models of delivery

The original intention in the bid was to run a pilot course for equal numbers of residential child care and mental health practitioners to allow for paired learning. In most countries this has proved to be difficult, so more creative ways have had to be found to ensure that both professional perspectives are addressed within teaching (including work shadowing).

Teaching has involved a blended learning approach involving a combination of face-to-face, online and independent study.

Each country ran the course between January to September 2014, some over a period of nine months, some over three

Teaching was by means of: lectures, case studies, group work, learning café, work shadowing, article circles, the use of external experts, web-based learning, article presentations, tutorials, role play, use of videos and video lessons, and intravision (peer) reflection in groups, learning cafes.

In each country, the course was taught by a combination of project team members and outside experts.

In some countries the course has been advertised among residential child care and mental health agencies, who have supported staff members to attend the course. The student cohort is thus drawn from a range of different agencies. In other cases, agencies have sought to incorporate the RESME course within their organizational training strategies. Participants include residential care workers, social pedagogues, some psychologists, psychotherapists, mental health nurses. In Spain, the heads of both residential care and mental health services are attending the course.

In all countries, the course was taught by a minimum of two tutors and additional experts in particular areas of work.

Course content

The Educational Manual is based around three themes:

One : Problems that practitioners face in everyday work. To include:

- contextual issues which affect practice including images of childhood, social inequality, working with families
- key problems which affect the young people with whom we work including trauma, loss, separation, substance misuse and self-harm

Two: Inter-professional issues and collaboration. To include:

- theories of organisations and organisational change
- appraisal of participants' own organisations and their capacity for change
- experience of working in another setting on the borderline of res

Three: European perspective

- to learn about different European perspectives in relation to mental health and residential child care

Trainers have been provided with a case study that they can use to draw out some of the above themes

Over and above these over-arching aims different countries included specific topics and issues pertinent to their own national contexts. Examples of these were:

- discipline and love in everyday work, therapeutic approaches to residential child care, myths and truths about laws and legislation (Finland)
- interventions for children with complex needs, dealing with obstacles to collaborative practice and creating a therapeutic environment in residential child care (Spain)
- professional identities, different working conditions, dealing with crisis and dialogue between systems (Germany)
- work in a complex and changing society, coherent action for the mentally ill (Denmark)
- sociological perspectives on health inequalities, social and medical models, introduction of international experts (Scotland)
- ethics in child mental health services, protecting children's rights and responsibilities of children and professionals.

Assessment

Assessment of course material has included a range of methods. Different countries have employed different tools to assess students' learning in line with their own institution's expectations of what is required for the award of 15 ECTS points. Case examples are a popular method for 'grounding' assessment in everyday practice realities. Other examples of assessment tools include conventional essays, article reviews, pieces of reflective writing, presentations, exams, role-play or video exercises.

Sustainability

It is important that course material developed for the RESME project is 'mainstreamed' in subsequent teaching in the partner countries. Thus, each country has sought to incorporate material in existing courses (e.g. social work or psychology degrees) or has sought to have material validated through institutional structures. In some countries RESME material is being offered as continuing professional development or in summer schools.