Practice Research and Co-creative Knowledge Production in Social Work

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My standpoint

- Challenges in the welfare structures and services and the people concerned

- Challenges in producing robust knowledge for knowledge development

- Builds on empirical and theoretical developments at the practice research milieu of the Mathilda Wrede –Institute

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Theories and practice

Reading some theories of action, it is easy to get lost in their abstractions, so that it takes a leap of imagination to be immersed again in events, passions, and struggles of actual people, and their institutions and their collectivities.

Anselm Strauss 1993, p.49

The impact of institutional conditions on social work

What being a professional entails has been changing, not simply because of a broadening of the category, but also because of the impact of the institutional conditions in which professionalism is enacted. Almost 50years ago Wilensky, criticising the then increasing bureaucratising of professional practice, reminded his readers of the importance of **the professional values and motive-led decision-making** *that he believed were consequently being eroded.*

Edwards & Daniels (2012) Knowledge that matters in professional practice
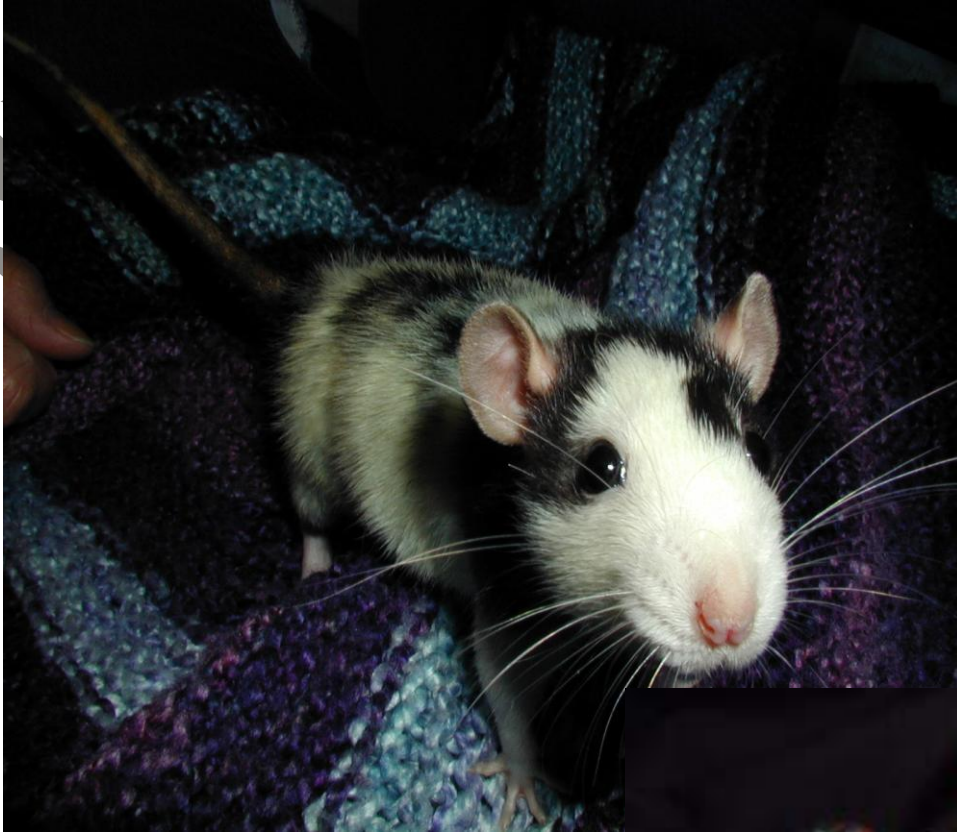
Transformations, restructurings fragments

The welfare sector has seen considerable changes in its operational context. Welfare services respond to an increasing number of challenges as citizens are confronted with life's uncertainties and a variety of complex situations.

The character of social work is getting more international. Local and global have become more intertwined and connected. It is actually the global change that social work is combatting with when people's welfare at the local level is realised and constructed through the everyday practices.

Practices are complex and constant changes has impact on practice and we need to both study this AND understand this

To be able to make interventions for better policies.

Why do depressed rats hide their marbles? (Irwin Epstein)

Btw, what is social robustness?

-Observable, Quantifiable, Reproducable?

2nd Practice Research Conference in Helsinki

https://blogs.helsinki.fi/practice-research-conference-2012/

The robust knowledge

The question of robustness goes beyond the question of effectiveness. The clue lies in the strong contextualisation and the relational concept

NOT only an issue of the scientific process

but also the practice context, cultural differences,

and the changes that knowledge production facilitates,

echoing the emphasis on research where findings are disseminated through dialogue with practice and reflecting learning processes in practice.

Social sciences that matter

Practice research is about negotiations..

Lars Uggerhöj 2012

We should promote social sciences that are strong where natural science is weak – that is, **in reflexive analysis and deliberation about values and interests aimed at praxis,** which are essential to social and economic development in society. We should promote value rationality over epistemic rationality, in order **to arrive at social science that matters.**

– Bent Flyvberg (2005)

Practice Research

Practice research combines an interest in describing, explaining and theorising on practice, using knowledge as a means of improving practice and active participation in testing and exploring new ways of working.

It is a question of carrying out rigorous and worthwhile research, and making sure that the outcomes are relevant in and for practice while at the same time expanding and promoting general knowledge.

The Salisbury statement

Social workers need to engage empirically with their practice cultures as playful and serious interrogators of their own domains
Sue White

Examples in studying and practising and doing research:

Practice research courses at master levels – doing small things beautiful

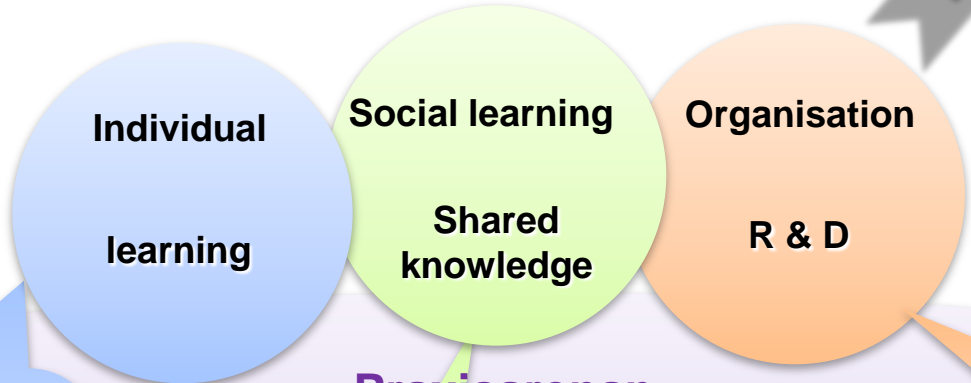Developing Practice Units – forming structures and systematizion

Research at doctoral levels – Research that matters

Collaborative knowledge production

From monologic- to dialogic – to trialogic

The trialogical approach to learning builds on the knowledge-creation metaphor of learning.

The trialogic approach (Paavola, Engeström R. & Hakkarainen 2010) is a concept for elaborating collaborative knowledge creation in change processes

Examples: The University Social Welfare Agency Models in Norway

A future question of broadening the perspective

Focus on the issue in a broader context (not just services but external networks)

- recognizing different actors, civil community and integrating this into the research design.

Actor Relational Approach (ARA)

Luuk Boleans (2010)

Grounded in a relational understanding of space

Stimulates the formation of associative governance networks around spatial issues

Identifying possible stakeholders

Network associations around meaningful things

Seven Steps to Socially Robust Knowledge

1) Interpreting the problem by determining the focal actors and unique core values

2) Actor identification and actor analysis

3) Opportunity maps and developmental possibilities

4) Bilateral talks and round tables

5) Cases and pilots

6) Practice development and general outlines

7) Democratic anchoring

Added value

Focus on leading and strategic actors incorporates a form of power dynamics and subjectivity

Focus on sustainability and the importance of longlasting relations and trust

Anchoring!

Social robustness in knowledge production

An example: Youth and otherness as a growing concern in a Nordic context

A practice research that concerns vulnerable young people in transition who occupy an uncertain place in the educational, labor market and social policy regimes and social work practices

Actors: professionals, leaders, the young, students, researchers

The outset: Conflicts in looking at the problem

Dialogue: round tables and reflections, negotiations with interested frontline practices

The emotional and political: By applying a multilevel framework for addressing these global but highly complex frontline practices we may produce new knowledge into the strategies and practices of welfare work with Possible through studies at many levels

Democratic anchoring:

Ilse Julkunen & Synnöve Karvinen Niinikoski (2013) Socially robust knowledge processes of local and global interest in social work, to be published

Thank you for listening!

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