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ABSTRACTS FOR WORKSHOPS

F. Practice research in social work

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Introduction to the theme: Practice research – a new winning concept with old and solid roots

This workshop discusses practice research both in theory and practice. It discusses the structure and knowledge development processes and sets out some challenging issues. The terminology varies but the core elements of practice research are: practice embeddedness, interactiveness, the utilisation of research, the role of the researcher as both subject and object. In this workshop Ilse Julkunen starts up by giving an introduction to the concept. Aulikki Kananoja then continues to present the Helsinki model of practice research, a new type of community where different actors collaborate with the focus of developing social services and social work. Pia Eriksson presents her practice research on the adoption process from a user perspective. The workshop then discusses different other experiences of the approach and synthesises about the premises, processes and promises of practice research.

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The dialogue of social work practice and research - Heikki Waris Institute as a model of collaboration of the City of Helsinki and the University of Helsinki

A relationship of practice and research has been a topic of debates in social work for years. Researchers claim that social workers do not make use of research results, and social workers claim that research results are too abstract to be applied in a real life.

There is, however, a growing need for collaboration of practice and research in social services. Social work needs new approaches and new methods in a changing world, where old practices and bureaucratic procedures do not meet the needs of people. Need to know more about impact and effects of professional work is growing.

Social work practice is not only an applier of research, but practice can also produce

knowledge from inside. Knowledge needed and developed by social work is context-connected and unique in that respect. It concerns – In addition user–practitioner relations – relations between people and their social and economic environments and relations between the practitioner and his/her organizational and cultural environments. Demands for knowledge, unique for social work, cannot be met by knowledge production divided into traditional branches of sciences or by information collected for administrative purposes.

Social Services Department of the city of Helsinki and the University of Helsinki, its Department of Social Policy, made a decision in 2001 to create a common unit to forward integration of practice and research in knowledge production in social work. The unit, Heikki Waris Institute, started its work in the fall 2001. In the institute, there are research social workers and development social workers. They have their permanent posts in the Social Services Department and they can work in the institute for a period of about 2-3 years. The university allocates a professor in practice research and a lecturer to work in the institute. They bring their scientific and educational expertise to the work of research and development social workers. – Several important studies and methodological developments have been done so far. Heikki Waris Institute creates a new type of practice research community, where knowledge, unique to social work, is being built and forwarded to practice.

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Prospective adoptive parents and professionals in the adoption process

This presentation is based on my ongoing research project and doctoral thesis, in which I focus on the experiences of the prospective adoptive parents in the international adoption process. My empirical material consists of 12 narrative interviews with adoptive parents and persons who have pursued an adoption process that for some reason has ended. The aim of the study is to understand the experiences of prospective adoptive parents in the different phases of the adoption process. The experiences and feelings are related to three different kinds of layers within the adoption process. The first one is the experiences of a often new role, as a client in social welfare services. The second one is related to the legal and bureaucratic setting for international adoptions and the third one is a personal process of growing in to the new role of adoptive parenthood.

In trying to understand the experiences of the prospective adoptive parents I also want to explore the challenges in the meeting between the client and professional in the different phases of the process. My focus will be on the framework and the different factors that influence the dialogue between client and professional.