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Forms of knowledge and evaluation in the field of social educational work

The purpose of my Phd. Project is to investigate the linkages between evaluating strategies and forms of knowledge in the field of social educational work. The field of research is residential care centres, and more specific the field of children and young people placed outside their homes. Generally seen the idea of evaluation is based on different positions and stakeholders involved in social educational work, but a central perspective in my Phd. Project is how social workers evaluate their work practice and how evaluation strategies used by social workers correspond to the demands of evaluation from the field of social policy?

The key concepts

The concept of 'evaluation' is central in my Phd.

The increased focus on evaluation and evidence-based knowledge and practice prompts a lot of debate within the field of social education. The problems shown in this debate are connected to different positions and stakeholders involved in social work education and their assessments of how social work education can be more visible, and in particular how the field should be evaluated. A main issue for my Phd. project is to investigate the relations between the demands of the current social policies about evaluation and evidence, and the various forms of knowledge that comes out within social work education. The scientists try to find usable methods to investigate social work practice and make it visible (Bryderup, 2005)(Kristensen, 2006)(Sommerfeld, 2005), but what evidences do social workers draw; how do social workers, by themselves, understand and register their every-day-practice and how do they put it into words and documents?

'Social work practice' is also a key concept in my Phd. The challenge is to define 'practice' and categorize it into different standards, forms and planes of knowledge etc., and from that perspective try to connect the practice concept to the evaluation concept.

A central part of the Phd. project is to examine the idea of evaluation, social work practice and forms of knowledge, and study this concepts as matrices in which the ideas are formed as a complex of institutions, proceedings, decisions etc. (Hacking, 1999)

The empirical work

A key element of my data collection is the perspectives of the social workers; to bring the social workers and their meaning and knowledge production into focus and sheds light on social workers evaluation of their work practice.

The methodology is selected with the aim of getting information about how the professionals orally describe and thematise their internal knowledge and strategies about the cases, and how they in writing register, clarify and make their work visible.

The empirical basis of my Phd. project consists of three methods and five different kinds of empirical data.

I work with a research design that combines observations, interviews and documents (records, logs, manuals of developments, and manuals of practice etc., prepared by social educators) in two selected residential care centres for children and young people with mental and social problems.

Two forms of interview are used; the semi structured interview and a narrative structured interview. The semi structured form has 'evaluation' as the major theme; what is evaluation and how do you evaluate? The narrative form has 'practice' as the major theme; tell me about a successful event or episode and tell me about a less successful event or episode.

By using the narrative structure the intention is to gain a clearer understanding of the social workers own perceptions and cultural constructions (Bruner, 1990) and the narrative structure is used with a view to getting into practice from the perspective of an everyday practitioner.

This approach enables social workers to talk about the sorts of issues connected to practice and to the case that concerns them.

By using a qualitative approach to the field of social educational work, analyzing interviews and documents (oral and written presentations of social work practice (Gabrielsen, 2000)), the intention is to find linkages between evaluating strategies and forms of knowledge; to find the connection between how social workers construct meaning and knowledge and how they register and evaluate their every-day-practice; making social work practice visible.

References

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