

Synnöve Karvinen-Niinikoski

Department of Social Studies
University of Helsinki

synnove.karvinen@helsinki.fi

THE AGENDA: SOCIAL WORK AS A GLOBAL FORCE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social work challenge today is to protect and promote enduring social life in a global society. Social work basic values are social justice, human rights and human dignity. Even though social workers may hold shared values and draw on worldwide known methods and theories, it is the local and cultural contexts and practices that make social work. What is universal is the respect for people as subjects of their own life. In a world of disasters, wars, misery, injustice and socio-economical crises social work needs to find its role as social force for a humane world. The traditional understanding of social work in a systemic perspective stemming from the individual and reaching through close communities to societal and national levels tends today to be altered. The dynamics rather are seen to stem from local contexts reaching to global levels. On one hand there is a need to emphasize local and indigenous social work, but on the other we cannot avoid the fact of entering a new kind of living and society, the global information or digital society. What we need is a global and multi-professional dialogue for searching for new approaches in social work.

I believe in critical reflexivity and expansive learning - both a kind of meta-level approaches to be taught in the schools of social work. My view is that social work education should give tools for analytical practice-related knowledge production and qualifications to social research. I don't support scientism, the belief that only scientifically evidenced practice would be valid and that it is the scientific truth that makes us wise, but still call for practice-related research and researcher qualifications for social workers as important knowledge users and producers. In my thinking this is a pre-requisite for social work to deliver any good or even to understand what should be delivered.

This urges the schools of social work promoting such education and training that allow flexible and contextual development of a profession with respect to the people they work with. The very core of social work is relational, but the relational psychodynamic core of the professional skills may be challenged by the virtualisation of our life. All this connotes that social work education should be reflexive and innovative. On the journey to the New Social Work social work educators, practitioners and administrators should unify in dialogue for seeking pathways for promoting social development. In my presentation I will discuss the challenges for social work education and research in times of crises and radical social change. By my topic I refer to the Social Work World Conference 2010 calling all social welfare professionals to join in promoting social development.