

Guest editorial

This is the second of two special issues with the theme *Practice research in Nordic Social Work: Knowledge production in transition*. While the first issue presented four articles with a broader focus on the development of practice research and the theoretical framework for it, this issue draw on practice research accounts.

Laura Yliruka present results from a thorough experiment with research supported reflexive practices in child protection work in Finland. This may be regarded as a representative example of new practices under development throughout Scandinavia. As well as in Finland, new cooperative practices have evolved in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, where researchers based mainly within the schools of social work or in university departments for social work have worked closely with management, practitioners, and even users, to develop a more research informed and research based practice.

Karen Kildedal, an Associate Professor in the Department of Social Work at Aalborg University (Denmark), argues that action research may be especially relevant for research in practice. The methods of practice research and the way researchers and practitioners cooperate, often with users embedded in the projects – and especially when the projects include regular feedback and involvement – bring out the similarities between the use of those two concepts. Practice research may, as Uggerhøj discussed in the previous issue, include a wider range of methods and designs, with none of the concepts being exactly defined, Kildedal's use of the term action research may widen the horizon for knowledge production in practices.

Erja Saurama and Ilse Julkunen are both Professors in charge of projects like the Mirror, and they have been explorers in the field of practice research with heavy impact on the development of such practices in Finland. Their article is thus well informed by experience.

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All authors of the articles in these two special issues are grateful to the colleagues in a wider international network on practice research. Behind this development in the Nordic countries there is much inspiration from fellow researchers and scholars. We have also been fortunate to receive support from our universities and colleges, and from municipal and state grants, as well as cooperation. The will to develop social work and support backing from research seems to be strong in many Nordic countries and this may be linked to the ambivalent changes (for social work) in the welfare systems of these countries where quality development may be linked to outsourcing and greater focus on individual responsibility. This challenges the value base and understanding of the content and direction of social work. Tove Rasmussen's article in 15 (1) touched on

this theme, but it may be important to further develop a critical position against this evolving background to some of the more enthusiastic examples we have discussed here.

Developing practice research is a process that includes different standpoints, as well as different actors within universities, work organisations, municipalities, and new innovative fora. This dialogue is also inherent in the making of this project as it had been developed through discussions among the group.

The authors rely on experience from developing and managing research projects and infrastructure in the Nordic countries, and they are all active in the international drive for new knowledge production in social work. The project contributes to a wider discourse in social work and social work research but also to a global discourse on reflexive and critical knowledge production as well as evidence based practices.

The material brought together here is aimed at academics, students, practitioners, managers and those interested in social work in practice and research. It is a response to the need for a more thorough discussion on practice related research and to present and critically discuss new experiences in collaboration in knowledge production between academy, practice and management.

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