

Evaluation of the Knowledgeing Workshop

How Stories Enhanced Skills

** And the funny thing is that when you think you have seen what there is to see, understood what there is to understand, new and strange landscapes still turn up and again you are moved by how little you are in the big picture. Never had I imagined that my little story could be such a rich source of knowledge **

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Table of Contents

1. The Knowledgeing Workshop and its participants	2
Objectives.....	2
Who are the participants?.....	3
Spanish group.....	3
Northern Norwegian group	4
The Nordic group	4
The Knowledgeing Workshop as further education.....	4
Group characteristics.....	5
2. Details about the evaluation	5
3. The learning model.....	7
The group as a learning arena	8
The group as a learning arena versus the mutual aid model of group work in social work.....	9
From verbal storytelling to written reflection	10
Learning by way of writing.....	13
Practical knowledge development versus formal credit requirements.....	14
4. The stories	15
Loyalty to colleagues and/or to the child	15
About oneself as a professional.....	17
The story – a gateway to the development of judgement?.....	19
5. The Knowledgeing Workshop’s significance for the professional work.....	22
Recognizing practical knowledge	23
Maintaining reflection in everyday work.....	24
6. Conclusion.....	24
References	26

1. The Knowledgeing Workshop and its participants

The Knowledgeing Workshop (KWS) is supplementary training and/or further education program for social workers in child welfare.¹ The workshop's learning model and professional contents are developed by Associate Professor Inger Helen Erstad at the ²Child Welfare Development Centre in Northern Norway. The perspective on *practice* in social work is based on her doctoral dissertation (Erstad 2005). At the Knowledgeing Workshop actual incidents/concrete dilemmas from the participants practice are used as the basis for making a story. The stories from practice are studied by the group of participants, by way of reflection, supervision, and instruction. Based on his/her story, each participant must work out a written reflection assignment, or a more comprehensive scientific essay. The participants may choose whether they will use the KWS as supplementary training or as further education worth 10 or 30 credits³. Most participants chose to earn credits and use KWS as further education and were enrolled at the Tromsø University College. The program is being tested as a pilot project in Northern Norway, the Nordic countries, Spain and Estonia and is part of the EU program Leonardo da Vinci, Education and Culture, Community Action Program on Vocational Training.

Objectives

The superior objective of this further education program is to contribute to a deeper understanding of one's own practice and develop the professional's judgement in everyday work situations. In this way the program will contribute to an improved balance between theoretical and practical knowledge, by using experience-based knowledge as the object for systematic, written reflection. In addition, the program's working method will promote the use of systematic reflection as a continuous learning process in everyday work situations.

Learning outcome:

Upon completion of the program the students will have developed

- Increased understanding and improved basis for judgement
- Increased awareness and insight into their own professional practice and framework for practice
- Competence in using stories and essay writing in the reflection process
- Increased knowledge of how ethics is intertwined with judgement and professional practice

¹ The Knowledgeing Workshop is named by the project Stories Enhancing Skills

² Barnevernets Utviklingssenter i Nord-Norge

³ Credits are equivalent to ECTS credits. ECTS stands for European Credits Transfer System.

- Understanding of how various knowledge sources can complement each other (Tromsø University College, Faculty of Health Sciences)

The program runs over three semesters and has six course sessions. Each session has a minimum of six hours of teaching, plus writing skill development and individual instruction of students who take 30 credits. The learning model emphasises storytelling, both written and verbal, and reflection in combination with text book studies.

In the 10 credits course unit the students must hand in an eight page written reflection assignment. The assignment must be based on a story, which includes a dilemma from his/her work place, and must demonstrate self-reflection ability as well as in-depth ethical and professional understanding.

The 30 credits course unit requires a scientific essay of 20-25 pages. The essay must combine a personal and a scientific approach and demonstrate good judgement and theory development ability based on experience/integration of theory and practice. The essay must be presented at a conference or at his/her work place.

Who are the participants?

Minimum three years of experience from child welfare/social work is required in addition to the standard requirements of three years college /university-level education. Furthermore, the participants must commit themselves to complete the whole program (as further education).

Spanish group

Seven participants were admitted to this group. The group was recruited through the union⁴, which sent an information letter to selected work places in the Alicante district. The information letters had both the university logo and the Colegiate (union) logo, and was signed by both project manager and the Spanish project coordinator, who was the group supervisor. 14 people expressed their interest. In the admission process emphasis was placed on the composition of the group, gender, genuine motivation and motivation for writing. The University of Alicante recommended the program.

Four participants state that they have handed in the 10 credits assignment and intend to hand in the 30 credits assignment as well. They have been enrolled as students at Tromsø University College. In the first phase it is prepared for the approval of the 10 credits assignment, and plans are made for a Spanish accreditation of the 30 credits assignment.

⁴ Colegio Oficial de Diplomados en Trabajo Social y Asistentes Sociales = the Official Organisation of Social Workers in Alicante - a public corporation representing the social work profession in the province of Alicante.

Northern Norwegian group

The group is made up of six participants, three are managers at child welfare institutions, two are mid-level managers (vice-chairmen) and one is a professional team advisor. All have three years of higher education along with various further education courses in social work and pedagogy, as well as 12 to 25 years work experience in this area.

The office for Children, Youth and Family Affairs in Northern Norway ⁵ is appointed as partner in the project, and the recruitment has taken place within the government service for the welfare and protection of children and families. Eight people applied, and the regional office selected the participants. Two of the participants had previously taken part in a management development program headed by the same person in charge of this program and were familiar with her approach.

The Nordic group

Six participants were admitted to the program. However, two of them quit after a while because of change of jobs and new job responsibilities. The remaining group of participants comprised two from Sweden, one from Denmark and one from Norway. They all had extensive job experience as well, ranging from five to 26 years. Two of them work in institutions and two were local government employees. This group was mainly recruited through NOPUS⁶ / the project management's network of people and relevant work places. The Danish participant was recruited through the trade union. Initially, the program was advertised on NOPUS' website and by way of mailing lists, but this received very little response.

The Knowledgeing Workshop as further education

When the invitation to the program was sent, it was not clear whether completion of the program would be awarded with credits. The approval from Tromsø University College came at a later date. The recruitment did therefore not go through the regular university college/university channels. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that the participants were not motivated by earning credits, but by an interest in the professional output. Nine participants from the Northern Norwegian group and the Nordic group have been enrolled as students at Tromsø University College, and eight participants have handed in the 10 credits

⁵ *Bufetat Region Nord* is one of the five Regional Offices for Children, Youth and Family Affairs in Norway.

⁶ NOPUS stands for "Nordiska utbildningsprogramt for utveckling av social service" = Nordic Education Program for Social Service Development, Malmö (Sweden)

assignment. Six participants state that they plan to hand in the 30 credits assignment, which must be delivered in December – after this report has been written.

Group characteristics

All 17 participants work with child welfare issues. They all have three years of higher education, and most of them have extensive work experience. In addition to these 17 participants, there is a group of four participants in Tartuu, Estonia, which is not included in this report. The reason is that they started at a later date and have not yet completed the program. The group as a whole seems exceptionally qualified as regards work experience in this field. The project manager writes in a summary in April 2008 that from the very beginning there has been a high level of motivation, enthusiasm and trust towards the project scheme.

2. Details about the evaluation

I have been commissioned to write this evaluation of the participants by the project management. My employer, the University of Agder, is a partner in the project and I have taken part in the training of supervisors. I learned about the education's objective and method through the supervisor training. This has probably influenced my choice as regards the evaluation topic and increased my interest in finding work methods and structures that further develop practical knowledge. Through my own experience from taking part in the supervisor group I have gained insight into the way a reflection process can be planned. This has been of vital importance in placing the participants' feedback in a framework.

In the evaluation I have chosen three areas for closer examination of the participants' experiences and learning outcome from the learning model. First, I have focused on **the learning model**, with its strong emphasis on group participation, reflections over each participant's story from practice, and in which written reflection is included as an essential part of the learning model. It is also of interest to grasp the importance of the fact that participants can earn credits in the university system. The second focus area is the **problems for discussion, which the participants have worked with in the Knowledgeing Workshop (KWS)**. The third area deals with **the participants' learning outcome and the impact the KWS has had on their professional practice**. Further details and grounds for choosing these areas are presented in each chapter.

In the following chapters the *Knowledgeing Workshop (KWS)* stands for both supplementary training and further education, and the term *learning model* stands for the KWS work

methods. Out of consideration for anonymity I will use he/she randomly when I refer to the participants' work.

This evaluation is based on written midway evaluations from 16 participants, and a written evaluation after the six face-to-face sessions had been arranged. Here, 13 evaluations are available. The participants responded to questions that had been stated in advance. The project manager formulated the questions in the first evaluation. The questions dealt with processes, learning outcome, and the participants' needs regarding the final part of the program. I formulated the questions in the final round as part of my assignment as evaluator. These questions dealt with learning outcome and the significance for the professional work. In each group there was an open-ended reflection concerning the program in the last session, and 13 participants gave their opinion. The oral evaluation was taped, transcribed and sent to me. Every piece of material from the Spanish group has been translated into Norwegian. Consequently, the data is merely made up of written text material. The written final evaluation was sent directly from each participant to me. The participants hardly knew me, so their replies were probably not tainted by my relationship with them. I have not interviewed any of the participants, which is a weakness in this material. However, this is compensated by the fact that I have had access to all reflection assignments (10 credits). Through the reflection assignments I have gained insight into the personal reflection concerning the story.

As previously mentioned, I do not have any material from the group in Tartuu. In line with the project plan this group started at a later date. Consequently, the group has had a different course of events than the other groups. Also, the evaluation does not include the experience from taking the 30 credits course unit since this evaluation is written before the 30 credits assignment is to be handed in.

The evaluation does not focus on comparing the groups from different countries, even though this could have been of interest. In some areas, however, some significant differences have appeared, and I have drawn attention to these differences.

In literature evaluation is usually organized in four schools: 1) An external, distanced perspective, 2) Responsive evaluations, 3) Transformative evaluations and 4) Evaluation derived from practice (Halvorsen and Gjedrem 2006). This evaluation is similar to a responsive evaluation, which is characterized by the fact that the various actors contribute in working out the evaluation. In this process the evaluation has been worked out in cooperation with the project manager and group leaders who have contributed in shaping evaluation topics

and questions to the participants. The project manager started the evaluation process by gathering the participants' midway experiences, and I took over the evaluation process in the final phase. The midway evaluation resulted in knowledge that was of importance in the last part of the Knowledgeing Workshop program. Consequently, the evaluation process has been useful during the process as well. In the analysis I have made a point of drawing attention to distinctive features of the learning model, which aims at developing practical knowledge in professional practice.

3. The learning model

The program is made up of six group sessions over three semesters, each session has minimum six hours of instruction.

The program structure is as follows:

- Introduction – clarification of expectations, rules/contract, stories and reflections, summary and evaluation
- Written stories and reflections, summary and evaluation
- Written stories and new reflections, literature reviews and start-up of essay-writing, summary and evaluation
- Meeting with all groups – intra-national training and exchange. Teaching in philosophy/ethics, essays/literature, culture/tradition and structural framework, summary and evaluation
- Thematic reflections, essay, literature or perhaps movie. Theory foundation, ethics, summary and evaluation

In between the group sessions the participants are expected to work on their own stories by way of literature reviews and written reflections connected to the stories. Participants planning to take an examination, i.e. earn credits, are offered extra instruction and supervision in the final part of the program (Tromsø University College, Faculty of Health Sciences, Knowledgeing Workshop).

The teaching was carried out all in all as planned, but the time limit for the sessions was somewhat extended. The project manager has supervised the group in Northern Norway and the Nordic group, along with an assistant manager in each group. The Spanish group was led by a Spanish/Norwegian social worker. She and the two assistant managers took part in a parallel training program for supervisors, which was run by the project manager. All supervisors had extensive experience from working with groups. The fourth session was a joint session in Malmö, Sweden, with all groups from all four countries.

In this evaluation I will shed light on three characteristics with this learning model and show the participants' experiences with:

- The group as a learning arena
- Verbal and written reflection of own story from practice as a gateway to new knowledge
- The story itself - what kind of topics are the participants interested in, and how can the story contribute to the development of judgement power?

In conclusion, I am interested in finding out what significance the Knowledgeing Workshop has had on the participants' professional practice. I will also refer to the question of credits. Has the fact that participants could earn credits had any impact on the learning outcome?

The group as a learning arena

Both presentation of one's own story and reflection have taken place in the group. Halfway through the KWS most participants state that a safe and sound climate has been established in the group. Feedback from other group participants concerning your story has played an important role in achieving a deeper understanding of yourself and your own practice. The other group participants are perceived as very competent. *"I feel I have been supervised by a whole group of competent people"* - one participant writes. Gaining insight into other people's experiences has contributed to develop your own perspective. The group gives room for peace and quiet as well. One describes this as being in an incubator – which is essential for in-depth studies. Another one writes that it has been important to both be in the same group for a relatively long time and meet in different settings.

This overall positive feedback was challenged by one of the participants in the Spanish group, who raises the question whether the groups are not being critical enough of each other. The person in question received plenty of praise concerning her own work, but the participant wanted a more critical eye. The participant raised the issue in her own group, but did still not get the feedback she wanted. She thinks that it is a challenge in such a group to exercise both criticism and self criticism. A couple of other participants writes about difficulties in the beginning to share one's own insecurities, fear and emotions that they wanted to cover up and prevent from coming to the surface. Gradually, they learned that the others shared the same insecurities, and the group became a good place to work with these issues.

It means a lot for the group that the group leaders are professionally competent. *“They lead the group in a firm, but gentle manner, give good information along the way, and are challenging and caring”* - one of the participants writes.

The group as a learning arena versus the mutual aid system of group work in social work

All three groups are established as good learning arenas. The framework for the establishment and the group progress seem to follow the same mode as mutual aid based group work in social work (Heap 1998, Shulman 1992). The basic thoughts about group work are formulated as follows by Heap:

“the members can help both themselves and each other by sharing emotions and information, by comparing attitudes and experiences, by supporting each other in experimenting, taking risks and changing, by exchanging ideas, suggestions and solutions, by giving each other objections and by developing personal relations with each other” (Heap 1998, page 26,⁷)

The similarity between groups in an educational setting and as help method in social work is the groups' possibility to challenge and support each other. In the KWS this also included sharing emotions, seeing things from another person's perspective and giving feedback by way of reflections concerning the other person's story. In order to make groups work well it is important that you carefully plan the group composition. Heap (ibid) thinks that the group members must be able to identify with each other. At the same time both difference and diversity must be present. In the Knowledgeing Workshop the members have in common that they have long-lasting work experience in the same field, i.e. working with children and young people. This provides a common background. When the groups were formed, gender, motivation and competence were taken into consideration. Heap's advice was also followed when it came to the size of the groups. Groups of up to seven members are suitable for task-oriented discussions, whereas groups made up of four to five members are perceived as safer and more appropriate for work with heavier topics. In order to achieve a sound group process time was set aside in the beginning to clarify each individual's expectations. In addition, every session has included a self evaluation at the end of the course session.

When the KWS groups have become so important to the learning outcome, it is basically due to the fact that the groups have been supervised by experienced group leaders who have, in sum, competence in group management as both help method in social work and in an

⁷ Freely translated from Norwegian

educational setting. Nevertheless, the participants deserve credit for this. The participants were in many ways hand-picked and particularly motivated. Many had exceptionally long experience and an expressed wish to obtain a deeper insight into their own experience. They had the same formal competence and worked within the same area of work and field of interest. In spite of variations as regards culture and educational background in the different countries, a common feature seems to be a strong sense of belonging to the group, in all three groups. The solidarity and commitment to the groups have also ensured that there has not been any room for freeloaders in this program.⁸ A couple of the participants chose to quit when their work situation changed, instead of “hanging on”. It seems as if using groups as an essential work method has been an important framework for the learning process in KWS.

From verbal storytelling to written reflection

The Knowledgeing Workshop’s chief objective is to achieve a deeper understanding of own practice and develop each individual’s judgement power in professional work⁹. It is essential that the participants start the learning process by presenting a story to the group, based on their own practice. The story must describe a situation, which has affected the participant and includes a dilemma that the participant has faced. Through verbal and written reflection the story is examined, and a decisive moment in the story is zoomed in and frozen, and becomes the object for further investigation.

Halfway through the course a certain degree of uncertainty, in particular in the Spanish group, came to light as to what kind of place the story was going to have in the future work and how it would affect the professional work practice. One participant writes that it has been a challenge to present the story in a personal manner, whereas another one writes that he thought the story was an example of his poor job performance, but he discovered through the reflection process that it was not the case. Others write that the story has paved the way for new possibilities, and the reflections in the group have contributed to view the situation from new perspectives. Emotions and motivations that you had been unaware of turned up through the group reflection. *To finally get an arena for examining a professional dilemma from many angles has been important*, one of the participants writes.

At the last session for the Knowledgeing Workshop a Spanish participant writes the following in a reply to the question about the characteristics of this learning model compared with academic programs/further education:

⁸ Professor Anne Marie Støkken at University of Agder made me aware of this point.

⁹ Tromsø University College, Faculty of Health Sciences, the Knowledgeing Workshop

“It is about an indirect learning where you raise questions, which you do not know that you have. This takes place through an internal reflection/investigation of emotions and examination on blank sheets. It is about learning that I have been totally unaware of up to now and it cannot be compared with anything I have experienced before. All previous teaching has been about attending lectures, or doing other kinds of activities without any form of reflection, but with reference to specific theories instead; therefore this model of reflection is something totally new for me and I believe this is the case for the others in the group as well.” (Translated from Spanish A. Majos)

This view is shared by several participants in the Spanish group. The reflection brings out the emotions in the story and consequently the personal aspects of the professional work come to light to a greater extent. Another Spanish participant writes that he has learned in his previous education that there must be “a thick line” between the professional and the personal. In KWS this line is not so thick and he discovered that personal aspects may be apparent in the professional work.

The reflection processes have been of great importance to the learning outcome for the two remaining groups as well. In particular, the processes emphasize the importance of devoting plenty of time to a limited dilemma. One of the participants describes the learning process as “live learning”, in which practice, theory and one’s own experience are tied together and challenged through the dialogue between the group leaders, the other participants and the individual written work. The participants stress the fact that the reflection has allowed personal aspects of the professional work to come forward and contribute to a connection between “*my professional self and my personal self*”.

The scientific literature that is required reading in the KWS is linked to ethics and practical philosophy. The reflections were supposed to be linked to this literature, but the participants were also encouraged to have an eye to fiction, film and art in order to open up to the reflection. The further development of the story and the reflection process based on theoretic perspectives came in the final part of the course. Several participants experienced this as a demanding process. The literature was new and different from what they were used to, and they were unsure how to deal with it. Here, the supervising from the group leader and the project manager probably played a decisive role.

The *writing* of one’s own reflections was a central part of the learning process. Of this reason I will shed light on the students’ comments about having to write it all out. Keep in mind that my data in this context refers to a midway evaluation and an evaluation after the completion of the 10 credits course. The 30 credits assignments have not been completed at the time of this assessment. Halfway through the six sessions, there was some uncertainty concerning the

written work, what was to be expected later on and what was the purpose. The Spanish group asked for more literature and help to grasp the essay mode of expression. One of the participants put it like this:

“I am used to talking about what I experience, about what I think, about my suggestions, but it is difficult to put it down on paper.” (Translated from Spanish A. Majos)

The group from Northern Norway and the Nordic group write the same. The writing process of the story presented a different challenge than the verbal story. The writing was perceived as a barrier, but at the same time it released a lot of new thoughts. The writing has stirred up a lot of new emotions and has brought forward an awareness concerning the choices that was made. In addition, writing your own story has sharpened your awareness as to how you describe other people in a respectful manner. The written story has provided an opportunity to review the text over and over again and ask new questions.

In both the Northern Norwegian and the Nordic group the participants were asked to retell, in writing, other participants' stories. The participants write, in their evaluation, about the great responsibility that lies in trying to interpret and write correctly the other person's story without reading more into the story than there is. This has resulted in associations about how they write about clients in for instance journal memos, and the importance of understanding the client's story like he conveys the story himself. The power of the pen has been brought into light, and one participant writes that he/she has discovered a lot of hidden power in the process of writing down other peoples' stories. The story turns out different depending on who is holding the pen. Another one writes that the re-telling of each other's stories has raised the precision level both in writing and verbally.

The writing in itself was a challenge for many in the beginning, but at the end of the KWS a number of the participants wrote that the writing process has contributed to a radical change from the first production to the present. Several participants say that they would have liked to have even more written training of others' stories throughout the workshop in order to be further involved in the other participants' learning processes. In the last half of the program the focus was concentrated on one's own written work.

In connection with the writing process one of the participants says:

“I have discovered a new side of myself, the part of writing, reflective writing. Now it is interesting to look at the first text and the text today; they are worlds apart. I would like to do more out of the writing bit by bit.”

This participant has discovered the joy of writing in himself/herself and the KWS has provided an opportunity to write about the professional work from a personal perspective. Another participant adds that it has been liberating to master the writing.

In the Spanish group two writers were invited and they directed attention to the writing process and fiction as a reflection source. A Spanish participant writes that he would have liked to have guidance from a literary scholar from the very beginning. A teacher of literature could assist in finding the literary style, sources for reflection and give guidance in orthography as well as literary construction. This is reflected in the Spanish stories, which seem to have emphasized a literary style. One story has even been written in the form of a fairy tale.

Learning by way of writing

An essential part of this learning model is to express yourself in writing. The story will be elaborated bit by bit through verbal and written reflection. The writing process will contribute to new insight. The examination for those who plan to earn credits is the result of this process. This form of learning is based on Jo Bech-Karlsen (2003). He writes the following on writing:

Essay writing is personal processing of experiences for the particular purpose to understand and gain insight. (Bech-Karlsen 2003: p19)

The essay is based on experience. Consequently, it is a suitable work method for the KWS starting point, i.e. the story. The story is based on a personal experience and this is the case for an essay as well. The writer must have a personal connection with what is to be voiced. *Personal because it is about how we are involved ourselves in what we write*, Bech-Karlsen writes (2003: p 35). Working out an essay is a process, which is an integrated part of the Knowledgeing Workshop learning process. This provides the participant/student/writer with a personal gateway to the learning process. In turn, this contributes to make visible the personal dimension's place in the professional work.

The essay is made up of two decisive components, the story and the reflection. *In order to become an essay, both components must combine into one*, Bech-Karlsen writes (2003: p147). In the light of this definition it is probably a wise decision to name the first assignment (10 credits) a reflection assignment and reserve the essay term for the 30 credits assignment. The latter is defined as a scientific essay and must combine a personal and a scientific approach. The available KWS material so far may be considered as a good start on the way to a professional/scientific essay.

To learn and write at the same time, the way this learning model prepares for, is a working method in which the learning and the writing mutually reinforce each other. This is an exciting interaction, which is well worth developing.

Practical knowledge development versus formal credit requirements

The Knowledgeing Workshop was accredited as a program with 10/30 credits courses by Tromsø University College after the participants were admitted to the KWS and after the program had just started. The requirements for admittance to the program were, however, in accordance with the entrance requirements for further education students at Tromsø University College.

Nine of the 10 Norwegian and Nordic participants were enrolled as students. In the final evaluation form four of seven respondents replied that taking an examination had been an extra motivating factor. *It had something to do with the attitude from the beginning, because you decide that this is something you will spend time and efforts on*, one of the participants writes. A number of the participants mention that during rough patches it is easier to keep up one's motivation because you have sort of committed yourself. At the same time another one writes that the commitment to the group has been an even more important motivating factor. Contributing to a joint progress in the group and meeting time limits, have been more important for a number of participants than meeting the requirements for earning credits.

In other words, there is a different opinion as regards the importance of keeping the KWS within a university system, but most speak in favour of such a structure. As I have described previously the KWS has selected its participants based on motivation and group composition criteria. The combination of formal academic entrance requirements and considerations concerning motivation and group composition should form an ideal basis for a good learning arena. Besides, whether or not the participant would earn credits has apparently not made any difference within the groups. Here, the project manager makes a comment that it has been a challenge to balance these considerations.

Of the 17 participants 15 have handed in the 10 credits assignment and 10 participants plan to hand in the 30 credits essay.

Among those who plan to earn credits, there seems to be a somewhat different motivation among the Scandinavian participants and the Spanish participants. The Scandinavian participants emphasise the gathering of formal competence, whereas the Spanish participants seem to be more concerned with the evaluation aspect of taking an examination.

4. The stories

The participants' stories constitute the gateway to learning in the Knowledgeing Workshop, and the stories are the object of systematic investigation and dialogical reflection.¹⁰ I have reviewed 15 completed reflection assignments (10 credits) from the three groups, and this time round I have been particularly concerned with the topics and dilemmas, which the participants have brought to light.

Each story contains several topics and for that matter a number of crossroads and dilemmas which the participant has faced. During the reflection process topics have been narrowed down, and the dilemma for further reflection has come to light more clearly. I have grouped the reflection assignments into two groups. One group deals mainly with the organisation and the framework which the professional work is surrounded by. The participants' closeness and engagement in the children and families have created an understanding of the other which has been on a collision course with the systems connected to the case, as well as with other colleagues' point of view. The reflection assignments are about some sort of loyalty conflict which the participants are facing. The reflection assignments have brought forward the participants' courage to put forth the client's interest, and tie their reflections to such actions.

The other group is more directed towards reflections concerning the professional self and includes a self-critical element in which your own opinions and reactions are challenged. Examples of topics are the need to do well and gain recognition for your work, the child welfare worker's many emotions when assessing care options, the power of the professional when it comes to choices that are going to affect a child's future, the feeling of inadequacy when the teenager, whose life you are heavily involved in, still does not master his life, but goes to jail. Specific management topics are touched upon as well and deal with the interaction between managers and employees who are out of step.

Loyalty to colleagues and/or to the child

A common feature in this group's assignments is the participants' closeness and involvement in the clients on one side, and the obligation to represent a system or to cooperate with colleagues from other systems who hold different opinions, on the other. The dilemma involves one of the most central aspects of professional social work that is to be involved in a person's life and at the same time take care of the systems' interests concerning equal rights before the law and justice. The professional autonomy is challenged by universal rules and

¹⁰ Description of the Knowledgeing Workshop as a model for supplementary training and further education for social workers in child welfare.

regulations (Terum 2003). This topic is discussed in KWS as one of the areas of judgement power – *Assess the characteristics in situations that are seemingly homogenous, but not identical, and see similarities between something that is seemingly different.*¹¹ The judgement calls made by the social worker in the field, i.e. attending to both special and general characteristics at the same time, form one of the focus areas of the Knowledgeing Workshop.

This dilemma is most prominent in the Scandinavian reflections, but it appears in one assignment from the Spanish group as well. Here, the participant ponders over why the centre's management decided that she be a special contact person for a particular teenager. She was young herself and inexperienced, and was assigned to lead a young person into an independent adulthood. The teenager did poorly and the participant reflects in retrospect over her work.

Another story is about how the milieu therapist in the institution went against the municipal child welfare service in a process where the child was to be transferred to foster care. The participant describes this as follows:

“I could not have chosen differently than I did – but I knew it had consequences, both for me and the institution.”

The participant ties the incident to Løgstrup's description of holding a piece of the other in your hand, and she depicts very well how the closeness to the child convinces her to act in a certain way, and how astonished she was that her colleague at the local authorities viewed the situation so differently (Løgstrup 1991).

Another participant is concerned with a similar situation in which she found herself in a squeeze between the promise to a child and colleagues who had a different opinion of the situation than she did. She discusses the importance of establishing a dialogue with the colleagues, and uses the I-you and I-it perspective to examine this further.

The dilemma that occurs when a supervisor gives instruction concerning an approach, which the participant does not think is appropriate for the specific family she assigned to work with is another topic for discussion. The participant is in a squeeze between the supervisor's opinion and her own opinion, which she believes is correct because she knows the family and its cultural background. Here it must be mentioned that the supervisor's starting point is a specific manual-based program. The participant also makes use of Løgstrup's writings, i.e. the

¹¹ Tromsø University College, Faculty of Health Sciences, Knowledgeing Workshop page 2.

ethical requirement that lies in helping the other without taking over the other's responsibility for one's own life. In this story the Sami culture also plays a role. In the Sami culture elderly members of the family often assume responsibility for conflicts and difficulties within the family, and a more indirect form of conversation is prevalent. The participant refers to Saus' use of the trained and untrained eye which means which means to be inexperienced faced with new situations (Saus 2003). The participant asserts that in meeting with a Sami family it is essential to have an untrained eye. Treatments based on principles only may go wrong and can illustrate how an untrained eye may fail to take the distinctive character of the situation into account.

A similar dilemma is described by a participant who was being told by colleagues and managers how to handle a hospitalization of a young girl. Because of an illness the mother was not to be told about why the child could not be treated at home. This resulted in a dilemma for the participant, and she reflects on different aspects of holding back information. She makes use of Løgstrup's approach and struggles to find a middle road between the two opposites in communication between people – compliance – and getting the other one to comply with your point of view. In addition, she discusses what it means to have a child's perspective and discovers through this reflection that the approach was correct out of consideration of the child. She had wanted to take part in the assessment that was done and not only be given instructions from the management and colleagues.

About oneself as a professional

A few assignments dealt with management challenges. A couple of the reflection assignments are about how participants take on too much responsibility and through this gain control of the situation. One of the participants compares a personnel group, which he heads, with a picture of gaping young cuckoos. This picture was a useful gateway to a reflection concerning his role and opinion of a very competent group of personnel. He gains an understanding of the importance of facing the group on the basis of each individual's skills and competence, the importance of being able to listen to the personnel and meet them with trust, with reference to Løgstrup. Another manager reflected upon her own irritation and powerlessness when personnel had a different view on the residents than she had. Her authority as a manager was challenged and in the reflection paper she discusses her own point of view. Was it a fear of revealing poor leadership in herself, or was it lack of understanding from the others?

The power you have both as a leader and as a professional is discussed in several reflection assignments. One writes about the way written reports have consequences for the future of a child, and asks herself the following questions. How far can she go as to decide on other people's lives, and why is her point of view better than other opinions? The participant continues to work on these reflections and relates to the movie about Spiderman. She writes:

During the movie I suddenly felt that I had something in common with him (even though I am not very interested in super heroes). I suddenly realized that a human in flesh and blood could jump into a suit that enabled him to save other people. He could do so thanks to the suit and the spider's web that came out of the glove. While I was watching the movie a voice said, "All power carries a great responsibility". I could not avoid feeling that I was inside that suit. I thought that my profession is like that, like Spiderman in the movie. How many times do the clients place their total trust in us, as if we could be their Spiderman? And, we are the ones who begin to weave this web in order to use it in our work with the clients. (Translated by A. Majos)

This Spanish participant draws on movies as a reflection source and by way of the Spiderman figure she sees her own power position from a new perspective.

Another leader tells a story of a father who rejected her. She was scolded and the father left the meeting that was about the placement of his child. The participant reflects on the experience of being insulted. She uses experiences from her own life as a starting point in order to be acquainted with the experience of being insulted. The participant is often in situations in which she must use formal authority in meeting with parents who cannot take care of their children, and she handles and understands the parents' many negative reactions. Nevertheless, the rejection by the father in this case affects her in a particular way. Here, she felt that her professional authority was at risk, and she discovered a vulnerability in herself that surprised her. In the reflection she brought to light that she lacked attentiveness and humility when faced with this father's difficult situation. She used her own experiences of being offended and tried to picture herself in the father's situation. The participant refers to Løgstrup's statement of holding a piece of the other in your hand (Løgstrup 1991).

Trusting your intuition is a topic that is brought forward. The participant describes a line-drawing situation in a child care institutions that could have been dangerous, but in which she acts on instinct, on "autopilot". She discusses the concepts intuition and gut feeling and compares with Josefsson's definition of confidence knowledge (Josefsson 1991). Based on Josefsson's point of view on confidence knowledge the participant writes that it was like getting recognition for part of the job she "just does" and that she cannot explain. She concludes her assignment by saying that after many years of experience, she felt reassured

that she does not always need to know and that she has started to make use of the unconscious more often.

Several participants touched upon the topic of feeling inadequate when faced with people in a difficult life situation. One mentions the topic of assuming responsibility for the other and “curing the family”. She examines the matter of taking on too much responsibility for the client and compares it with compliance on the other side. The inadequacies are mentioned in a number of the Spanish assignments, and they write about great expectations of the social worker to lead the clients to change, one of them writes:

I was disillusioned and sometimes I thought of giving up when it looked like I was unable to rescue them from things that would ruin their lives.

(Translated by A. Majos.)

The built-in tension in the professional role of “curing the family” to enabling the family “to cure itself”, is thematized in these reflection assignments.

The story – a gateway to the development of judgement?

One of the objectives of the Knowledgeing Workshop is to develop the professional’s judgement in work situations. In order to examine this more closely, I have selected two aspects, which the KWS regards as essential in the development of judgement power: To contribute to a balance between theoretical and practical knowledge, and to develop the ability to identify the distinctive features in situations that are seemingly alike, but not identical, and see similarities in what appears to be different.

To contribute to a balance between theoretical and practical knowledge

The story is the key to the balance between theory and practice. Christoffersen (2005) refers to a hermeneutic perspective on judgement that seems to be in line with the KWS view, which regards the judgement a mediator between theory and practice, but also as a result of the interaction. In the Knowledgeing Workshop this is described as a dialogic process, between telling and re-telling of a story, concrete reflection and theoretical reflection. This is both a gradual and a circular process. In other words, there is no judgement outside this interaction; the judgement must always carry an element of a theoretical perspective. The judgement becomes important for practice, and the theory becomes important to the judgement. The judgement *does not come from the outside as an authority which “masters” theory and practice, but it is shaped and developed somewhere in between* (Christoffersen 2005 p. 73).

Thus, the judgement is not developed on its own through practice, but needs to be reflected in the light of theoretical perspectives, based both on scientific knowledge as well as ethical

knowledge. In the reflection assignments so far, it is the stories from the professional work place which dominate, plus reflections concerning oneself and one's own thoughts about the story. Many of the participants use Løgstrup as a theoretical basis for their discussions, in particular his views on accepting the other's trust and the responsibility and obligation this entails. Løgstrup's elaboration on the trust as a spontaneous life expression shed, for instance, new light on the story of the milieu therapist who carried some of the child's trust in her hand and had to act against the colleagues' opinion.

Still, the connection to theory constitutes an integrated part in few assignments. The participants have to a lesser degree used the wide scope of the given text book literature. As a rule one or two of the sources are referred to, and the connection with the theory is in most cases not explained in detail. It seems like the theoretical part came at a later stage and has been written into the assignment, somewhat disconnected. It is fairly reasonable since it is the story itself that will give inspiration for further investigation. In the dialogic process that has been described as part of this model, the theoretical reflection is mentioned as the final stage, but still part of a circular process. It seems like the participants, after six sessions, are now just about to start this process. However, the 10 credits course requirement includes theoretical reflection in which ethical perspectives and scientific understanding are being demonstrated. A challenge for the KWS is to start with the dialogic process concerning theoretical perspectives connected to the story.

The participants write about being insecure as regards the work method in the beginning, and the groups needed time to develop the verbal story telling and focus on the judgemental development. This was a new and unusual learning model for most participants, and it seems to have been necessary to spend this time to open up, wonder about and focus on the story. It was not until the fourth session that the participants got an introduction to ethics and philosophy. It is also likely that there was some uncertainty as to the role fiction, art, poems, fairy tales, fables and the like was going to have as opposed to other theoretical sources. Personally, I have struggled to find the connection between the various reflection sources. One way to understand this is to think of fiction as a key to open up to the story, give associations and view the stories from different angles etc. However, the judgement must be discussed in light of ethics theory, because this is where the choices concerning values are made visible. Perhaps I put a lid on the openness, which is a distinguishing feature of the KWS, by delimiting the use of sources, but in my opinion the openness calls for a direction and this can be found by focusing on the choice of values that lies in the judgement situation.

There is a call for relevant theory in the Spanish group. They have not had access to the same scientific literature. Most reflections assignments from the Spanish group are linked to movies and fiction.

To develop the ability to identify the distinctive features in situations that are seemingly alike, but not identical, and see similarities in what appears to be different

Based on the stories the students are able to throw light on distinctive features in situations. It has taken a long time for the KWS participants to find the distinctiveness in all the stories in the groups. However, they are also expected to demonstrate the ability to connect specific situations or incidents to more general aspects and universal principles. Hansen (2007: p. 4) writes about essay writing that *“The objective is not only to learn about private and personal opinions, but to see the universally human and general in the personal.”* This seems to be in line with the KWS’ intentions.

In the reflection assignments I find traces of such considerations in which the participants establish a link between the stories to similar situations they have faced, or to the way they act in their daily lives. For example, one participant writes that the tendency to assume responsibility for others is something she has had since childhood. It is important to see concrete actions and choices you make from a more universal perspective, because this creates an interest among others in similar situations. This issue has not been fully examined in the reflection assignments so far. The project manager, on the other hand, has written an article in which she places the stories from the reflections assignments in a more general perspective. For example she points to the fact that the professional role seems to be undergoing a change from being perceived as an expert to a more partaking and resource oriented role.¹² As part of these changes new dilemmas arise, as well as uneasiness regarding the extent of such cooperation in child welfare. Where is the limit? She also sees a tendency in the stories that they are primarily about relations on an individual level, whereas structural framework for the work, marginalisation and poverty remain in the dark. (Erstad p. 8).

I bring this up because I want to illustrate that through an analysis of the participants’ stories, the way Erstad does, you can provide knowledge that is of general interest, in this case about changes in the professional self understanding.

¹² Inger Helen Erstad: Fortelling og refleksjon i Kunnskapsverkstedet.
<http://www.sesproject.eu/filearchive/3/3639/Fortelling%20og%20refleksjon.pdf>

5. The Knowledgeing Workshop's significance for the professional work

One of the KWS' objectives is to develop competence in the application of systematic reflection as a continuous learning process in the professional workday. In the following I will present the participants' feedback both halfway through and at the end of the program, concerning what they have discovered about themselves and their professional work during this process.

As early as in the midway evaluation several participants write that they have gained valuable knowledge well worth bringing into their own work, from the way questions have been asked in KWS. Another one writes that when she is asked for advice by colleagues, she spends more time to discuss different approaches and makes an assessment along with the other person, as to what could be a useful approach.

In the final evaluation participants may write that they have become more confident and that they have discovered that they have a lot to offer. The fact that the others in the group did not know their story has been positive in that they have received more objective responses than if the others already knew the story.

A number of the participants write about an inner peace in the reflection process. One puts it like this: It is like reflecting from the inside and out, and from the outside and in, with a shift in the distance to your feelings. It has not always been easy either to discover new sides about yourself. Many write about the discovery of unpleasant sides, for example inadequacy when it comes to take a person's situation to heart. One participant writes that he categorized other people too quickly, whereas another one discovered that she had not taken interest in the colleagues' opinion because she thought that they shared the same opinion.

The ability to hold on to the other's world and not be ruled by for example manuals is also underlined. In the midway evaluation the Spanish group was somewhat uncertain as to the value of KWS in the professional work and the direction of the work. In the final phase of the workshop this seems to have fallen into place. Several participants write about the importance of recognizing yourself in each other stories and dilemmas. The human aspect of professional work is emphasized and is made room for in a different way. The discovery of the fact that the choices you make in the professional work are influenced by your own emotions, your upbringing and life experience, has been an important realization. The fact that this is also a resource when you work with people is a new dimension of professional work, which they have discovered in the Knowledgeing Workshop.

The importance of the personal aspect of professional work seems to be a special discovery for the Spanish group. In the Northern Norwegian and Nordic groups it is apparently the discovery of knowledge that lies in the story and in your own experience, which is deemed as most important. By using your own practice as a gateway to new learning, the learning process becomes relevant and is closely linked to practice.

Recognizing practical knowledge

It is interesting that the participants write that they have discovered through this process that they have something to offer, their own practice can be used as a source of knowledge, and their personal qualities can be a resource in the professional work. The reflections concerning the stories have enabled them to gain this insight, and they have acquired a sort of recognition of the fact that this understanding is valid knowledge in professional work.

The notion of the objectively distanced professional is still valid in many circles, and there is still a quest for new theoretical sources and methods to improve practice. The professional may perceive this as a gap between the concrete, practical world, where the professional operates, and the requirements set by formal methods and systems. When caught in the middle, professionals may feel that they fall short. Habberstad (2002) describes three areas that have worried her in her work as a social worker. One was the constant search for new methods, and the second area was lack of a general sense of decorum. Here she points to the frustration many clients feel in meeting with the system, and their feeling of not being understood. The third area was the uneasiness in connection with the idea of neutrality and the view on using personal aspects in professional work. I believe many professionals recognize this uneasiness and must find a way to cope with an understanding of the professional work that is hard to live up to.

When the participants here feel that they have something to offer and have gained more confidence, it is reasonable to link this to the KWS direct approach to the individual professional work in concrete situations. The focus is on professional personality (Uggerhøj 1997). The learning is based on each participant's particular story. This way the participants acquire different learning experiences linked directly to oneself as a person and to own practice. The peace, which the participants describe, allows for the process of finding previous experiences and opens up to new senses that can be integrated in the personal professional development. The recognition of such processes as new sources of knowledge is

perceived as something new and even as a surprise to many participants. Yet at the same time, it has boosted their self-confidence and made them think that they have something to offer.

Maintaining reflection in everyday work

The Knowledgeing Workshop aims to stimulate systematic reflection as a continuous learning process in everyday work. Several participants state that they have discovered that practical concrete situations may constitute a source of knowledge, and that they have learned to ask a few questions to get such processes going. The KWS has also contributed to draw more attention to the personal dimension of the professional work. However, when you focus on the personal aspects of practice, you must also pay attention to factors that influence professional actions, and the interests that control the choices made by the professional (Nordstoga 2004). Here ethical knowledge may be put to use. If this type of learning is to be developed in the work place, it is necessary to establish structures that give room to such processes. I have previously argued in favour of establishing arenas for ethical reflection (Nordstoga 2004). It can be done by groups of colleagues who dedicate time to reflect on a regular basis. You have to ensure that you attain the same peace and patience, which the KWS participants have emphasized as important. One person must be in charge of the process and must make sure dilemmas or situations that give grounds for judgement, are brought into focus and examined in the light of making ethical choices. Preferably, this person should be someone outside the group, someone who can maintain a distance and cut through the unwritten rules that are often found in groups of colleagues.

In my opinion, the reflections and considerations are not sufficient. Child care workers must act in their practical work situations and the considerations must result in reflections over values and interests that form the basis of their actions, and through this way only, judgement is used. The Knowledgeing Workshop has contributed with an ideal example of how an arena for such ethical reflection can be.

6. Conclusion

In this report I have shed light on the participants' experience with some of the distinctive features of the Knowledgeing Workshop as a learning arena. The KWS represents a different approach than those used by traditional further education programs for social workers. The KWS puts focus directly on the practical knowledge and awakening to the personal dimension of the professional work. Recognizing this as valid knowledge seems to have been somewhat unusual for the groups, in particular the Spanish group. It has been decisive that the project

manager has previously worked with this approach, and had both a scientific and professional background. With that she was not affected by the participants' occasional uncertainty concerning the direction of the work, but remained confident that the process was on the right track. Her trust in the scientific approach in combination with the group supervisors' extensive experience with both group management and practical social work has strengthened the learning process in the groups.

The participants' broad experience and motivation for the KWS contributed to the fact that the groups became a good arena for reflections over the stories. The written reflection was another unfamiliar work method, and the project manager's guidance was probably of great importance here as well. Several participants state that the writing process clarified the reflections.

Then, what have the participants discovered about their professional work through working with the stories? Since the learning is based on each participant's particular story, the participants have got totally different learning experiences that are directly linked to themselves, as individuals and as professionals. The peace, which the participants have described, provides an opportunity to grasp previous experiences and open up new senses that can be integrated in the personal professional development. To recognize such processes as a source of knowledge is perceived as something new, and even as a surprise to some of the participants. At the same time it has given them more confidence in themselves and they are more satisfied with what they can offer in the professional work.

I have previously suggested that there is a difference between the Spanish and the Scandinavian participants. In the evaluations the Spanish participants have placed importance on the discovery of the fact that the personal dimension has a valid place in the professional work. The reflection over one's own emotions and how they affect the professional work seems to have been a liberating discovery. In the Scandinavian groups the participants emphasized the discovery of the fact that the stories could hold so much hidden knowledge. The fact that the stories have been made valid as a gateway to a knowledge source has been stressed by both groups.

Have the story reflections contributed to the development of judgement? In exercising judgement it is necessary to combine theory and practice. In the Knowledgeing Workshop the theory is based on ethics and practical philosophy, which have been strange and demanding literature for many participants. Very little of this theory was available in Spanish for the

Spanish group. The group reflections started as an open process. The next step was to examine the reflections more thoroughly, and later on they were linked to a judgement situation. This process took a long time. One of the reasons was that all the participants needed time for their stories in the groups. At the end of the first half of the KWS the theoretical connection has just been made. This constitutes a solid foundation for the continued work on a scientific and personal essay worth 30 credits.

Another important aspect of judgement is, according to the KWS, the ability to identify the uniqueness in a situation and view this in a more universal setting. So far the reflection assignments deal mainly with particular stories that have not been seen in a larger context. In many ways, this is a demanding process that may be pursued in the essay in the final round.

The first groups in the Knowledgeing Workshop have, in my opinion, contributed to new and important knowledge about how the practical knowledge can be developed. Thanks to their courage and commitment to the groups we are well on the road to make visible a different approach to learning than the traditional approach at universities. The stories are numerous and hold oceans of knowledge, a huge source for the Knowledgeing Workshop in the years to come.

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