

Description of The Knowledgeing Work-Shop as a Model in Upgrade and Further Education

Introduction

The Project “Stories enhancing Skills” is a pilot project within the Leonardo da Vinci program. The Knowledgeing Work-Shop will be introduced in Spain, Estonia, and in the Nordic countries as a model for upgrade and further education for social workers in child welfare. The model is based on methodological knowledge developed in a thesis (Erstad 2005).

What is The Knowledgeing Work-Shop?

The Knowledgeing Work-Shop is basically a meeting-place between practice and theory, where practitioners and advisor/researcher work together on a systematic knowledge development and an understanding of practical work. The practitioners communicate their experience based knowledge by rendering stories based on concrete situations. The stories will then be the subject of systematic investigation and dialogical reflection. This is a process of storytelling and modified reproductions of the stories, alternating between the oral and the written, between the concrete and the theoretical. The themes of the stories will be elucidated from different angles, with contributions from ethics, philosophy, art and field theory. Thus the experiences become a source of deeper insight and understanding.

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The model includes six meetings during a period of one year. Here participants and advisor join in common dialogue. Between meetings the stories and the empirical material are modified. This involves basic literature as well as self-defined literature related to the theme of the story.

Throughout the dialogical process the problem situations, in particular, will be the subject of systematic reflection:

- Narratives and transcripts
- Concrete reflection
- Theoretical reflection

This is both a step-by-step process and a circular process aiming to amplify the themes of the stories. Theoretical reflections also include inspiration from poetry and other art forms. Because the purpose of the Work-Shop is development and learning, it is essential that the participants work on written reflections. Within this education it is supposed to result in a personal essay that elucidates and discusses central themes in the story, also by using theoretical reflections.

Why The Knowledgeing Work-Shop?

Today's society often emphasises theoretical knowledge based on research as the only legitimate basis of knowledge for practical professional training (Molander 1993). Such one-sided emphasis on theory involves the danger that the professional sees the situation through the glasses of theory only, without paying attention to the nuances or the specifics that evolves from the situation itself.

Reflections on experience, however, can lead on to a different source of knowledge, which we may call experience based or practical knowledge. This is related to contemplation, valuation and action in specific situations. This type of knowledge is rarely emphasised, analyzed or written down in forms that can contribute to the development of practical professional knowledge. When knowledge remains tacit, the experience will not be a subject of critical reflection. What is wisdom and what is myths and non-knowledge?

The Form of Experiential Knowledge

Practical knowledge emerges in the form of the ability of *judgement* in concrete situations where we ourselves create a totality for understanding, based on a series of previous experiences from similar situations (Janik 1996). Thus the power of judgement or the ability to make important distinctions is the form of this knowledge. Through practical knowledge, the ability to judge the specific in similar, but not identical situations and to see similarities in what appears to be different, is developed. Thus it is the *situation*, contrary to the facts of theoretical knowledge that is the significant unit for understanding. The social worker must develop and use his or her power of judgement, including ethical considerations and theoretical and experiential knowledge. These are the forms of wisdom and competence The Knowledgeing Work-Shop is concerned with.

The Knowledgeing Work-shop as a Place of Reflection

Throughout our history and various cultures stories have been a source of knowledge and understanding. One could say that the story is a primitive form that has accompanied the human race for as long as we know. Nergård (2000) discusses, with reference to the Sami traditions of reindeer husbandry, the oral narrative as a storage place for knowledge and a preparation for social practice.

In The Knowledgeing Work-Shop the social worker describes his or her experiences in the form of stories. This requires time, serenity and active listening both from the advisor and the other participants. After the story has been told, there is often a need to ask illuminating questions. The adviser, in particular, is responsible for asking questions that can widen the perspective as well as deepen the reflections. When the social worker tells his or her story, some alertness is necessary in order to see clearly what kind of questions, tensions or dilemmas that indeed are communicated. What is the underlying theme? This is the time to freeze and focus on a crucial situation in the story.

What kind of judgement was made in this crucial situation? What was it that the social worker saw and understood, and how did this manifest itself in action? What did the social worker actually say or do? It is often necessary to return several times to this for sufficient amplification.

This leads to a clarification of the way in which the situation was composed.

What is in the foreground, what can be sensed in the background and what can be imagined outside the picture? By reorganising the foreground and the background we can see a multiplicity of the situation emerging, which leads us to several possibilities of interpretation. Further on we can ask questions as to what manifests itself as important interpretations and thus leads us deeper into understanding. What values and interests is it that are at risk in the stories? In which values are the traditions of practice rooted? In which way are knowledge and power interwoven? What about the influence of power in the situation? What are the underlying themes and how does different values and interests emerge?

The work of enhancing practical knowledge can in part be described as the road inward to reveal implicit or basic principles. The insight gained by reflection can be used to shape and reshape examples or stories that are more or less indicative in their form. This is the road out to the exemplifying.

Many Sources of Insight

Josefson (1991) is one of the profession scientists who discuss in depth how art and literature represent sources of human insight, also in a professional context. Here, she uses insights from Aristotle's poetics and demonstrates through a series of examples how fiction and poetry can capture and enhance the universal in the unique. Fiction and other artistic sources can stimulate the capability of curiosity and attentiveness, and to compassion and sensitivity in relations that are different.

With reference to Nussbaum (1990) Josefson stresses that the artist's eye for the unique represents a model for developing good judgement in other contexts as well. At the same time, Josefson stresses that the professional also need nourishment from theoretical knowledge in order to develop proficiency. This points to the importance of making connections between artistic sources, experiences from lived life, and the professional field.

The challenge of The Knowledgeing Work-Shop's systematic research is to stimulate curiosity. It may be that stories from practical life, by the way it is told, confirms the social worker's judgement of the situation, something that contributes to *block* new understanding. By active use of literature focussing on basic human themes in other (dramatic) forms, one can attempt to *open up* to reflection and analogies. Literature, poetry, fairytales and old sources of wisdom are valuable contributions.