Practice Development in Social Work

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Introduction

Programme

1. Social Work in the Netherlands
2. Professionalisation in social work
3. Practice Development in Social Work
4. Social Practice Development & the role of MSW programmes
5. Questions and Discussion

Social Work in the Netherlands

➢ **Social work was foremost voluntary work until WorldWar II**

➢ **After WWII a groing number of social workers & start scientific underpinning**

➢ **In the '70-90's professional social work under pressure**

➢ **From 2000 until now: government interference – instrumentalisation**

➢ **Since 2020 Social Work recognized as a crucial profession**

➢ **Currently the outflow in social work is high and increasing**

Social Work in the Netherlands (2)

A trunk with many branches (van Ewijk, 2008)

▶ **Many different functions**

▶ **Number of social workers not clear: 17.700 – 349.000**

▶ **Pendule movement: generalisation – specialisation -variations**

Social Work in the Netherlands (3)

- **Not a protected profession**
- **"Silent forces" of our welfare state (Spierts, 2014)**
- **External recognation: self-stigma? (Trappenburg et al., 2021)**

Professionalisation

Being labeled "unprofessional" is equivalent to striking the fear of God into many social work practioners" (Webb, 2016, p.7)

➢ **Professionalisation social work is ongoing issue (Flexner, 1915, 2001)**

➢ **Different approaches: classical and dynamic approach**

➢ **Different different levels**

➢ **Academisation**

Classical approaches:

1. Functionalistic approach (Parsons, 1939)
2. Characteristic approach / attribution theory (Freidson, 2021)
3. Power approach (Illich, 1978)

Mean feature: *occupational* closure (Noordegraaf, 2007)

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Social work is:

- Open and public profession (Abbott, 1988; Hoijtink et al., 2021; Noordegraaf, 2007)

- Operates in dynamic context (Noordegraaf, 2007)

- Is part of web of dependences

So a dynamic approach of professionalisation seems more promising:

- Boundary work (Gieryn, 1983; Heite, 2012; Riesch, 2010)

- Connective professionalism (Noordegraaf, 2007;Noordegraaf et al, 2011)

- Democratic professionalism (Dzur, 2007)

Professionalisation: how?

A professional is not something you are, but something you more and more become (Scanlon, 2011)

Social work is a verb, something that needs work and activities at 3 levels:

➢ **Individual professional**

➢ **Team & organisation**

➢ **Collective level of the profession (Van Pelt et al., 2020)**

Academisation as professionalisation

- The importance of knowledge and theory development & use in social work :
  - Social work as a scientific discipline (IFSW, 2014: Ornellas et al., 2018)
  - Underpinning social work practice
  - To counter de-intellectualisation and reproduction of "bad" practice (Singh & Cowden, 2009)

- Illustrated by growing number of research & master's programmes (Shaw & Lorenz, 2016)
- In the Netherlands:
  - Growing number of social work research a.o. at UAS since 2002
  - Introduction of Master's programmes in social work in 2008
  - Social work on solid ground (Health Agency of the Netherlands, 2014)
  - Knowledge & Research Agenda Social Work (2020)

Social work education & professionalisation

1. A result of professionalisation

2. A means and booster for professionalisation

Practice development

A systematic, common and on different knowledge sources based manner of improving social work practice (Van Pelt & Hermans, 2020)

Practice = the actions / conduct of social workers and the circumstances in which this takes place

Team & organisation level

Practice development: starting points

1. Social issues that are considered important according to several stakeholders

2. Social workers have questions about their practice in relation to these issues

3. Social workers have an active role as "knowledge-brokers"

4. Scientific knowledge is used and applied in practice

5. Focus on knowing how to practice (action repertoire) and knowledge development through practice development

Different approaches

- Evidence-Based practice
- Case-based reasoning (Vlaemink, 2005)
- Theory-led evaluation
  - Practical programme evaluation (Chen, 2005)
  - CAIMeR model (Blom & Morén, 2010)
- Social practice development (Van Pelt et al.,, 2020)

3 forms of practice development

Approach	Level	Focus	Role social worker	Knowledge use	Contribution to knowledge development
Case-based reasoning	Team Department Organisation Group	Learning and developing own practice	Active Large (Initiative)	Implicit knowledge is made explicit and checked against that of other social workers	Knowledge for local practice
Theory-led evaluation (Programme evaluation and CAIMeR model)	Programme	How and why practices work	Participant	Developing theory on how and why practice(s) work	Theory (that has to be translated to local practice)
Social Practice Development (SPD)	Team Department Organisation Group	Improving practice on modest scale	Active and large	Linking professional knowledge to theory and scientific knowledge	Knowledge for local practice and comparable practices; sometimes scientific knowledge

Social Practice Development (SPD)

- ▶ Based on Practice Development in Nursing

- ▶ Translated to social work by social work experts (Van Pelt et al., 2020)

- ▶ Three core components:
  - ▶ Cooperation with diversity of stakeholders
  - ▶ Linking (problem framing, connecting and contextualization)
  - ▶ Broad approach of EBP (including reflection and doing research)

- ▶ Role of social worker as practice developer

Cooperation

Linking

Evidence Based Practice

Master's programme in Social Work (MSW programme)

- ▶ Background
- ▶ Contribute to professionalisation
- ▶ Generalist in nature
- ▶ Explicit goal: improving practice in relation to current social problems
- ▶ Four different programmes
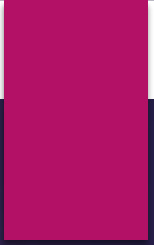- ▶ HAN university of applied sciences Nijmegen: educating for SPD

HAN MSW programme

- ▶ Learning by doing
- ▶ Two year part-time programme: 60EC
- ▶ Diversity of bachelor educated social workers
- ▶ Mostly experienced social workers
- ▶ Programme consists of 4 phases & 10 steps:
  - ▶ 1. Determining the social issue
  - ▶ 2. Researching practice in relation to the desired situation
  - ▶ 3. Developing, implementing and monitoring an improvement
  - ▶ 4. Knowledge dissemination and positioning

SPD in practice
(Van Pelt et.al. 2021, 2022)

- SPD is recognized as part of social work practice

- Social workers with a bachelor degree conduct SPD to a modest extent

- EBP is seldomly conducted

- Master educated social workers conduct more SPD then their bachelor fellows

- When controlling for main task: master education only has a positive effect on EBP

- One needs a certain distance to practice in order to conduct SPD

- Hence: there is a need for both MSW programmes and for task – function differentiation

- There is work to be done for the MSW programmes, especially with regard to EBP

Social Practice Development & Dynamic Professionalisation: Promising or wishfull thinking?