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## 7. EXPLORING THE SELF AS PART OF PRACTICE

*Reflections on students' practice learning from the social work perspective*

### INTRODUCTION

In what ways could students' practice learning of another welfare profession, such as social work, be taken into consideration to further promote a 'practicum turn' in preservice teacher education? Though social work obviously is very different from teaching in respect to the day-to-day work, there are, however, at least three reasons to reflect on the practice learning of preservice teachers from the social work perspective (see for example Carlgren, 1996; Heggen, 2003). Firstly, as with preservice teacher education, social work has become gradually incorporated in the universities since the 1970s. Partly due to this integration, theoretical knowledge has become one founding part of the professional practice knowledge in both degrees (Heggen 2003; Johansson and Andersson, 2002). Secondly, similar to preservice teacher education, practicum is considered as fundamental to social work education. Students' practice learning is therefore a central part of both degrees – a part that is also guided by specific principles and values. Finally, in both preservice teacher and social work education, personal qualities, competences and values are becoming increasingly emphasised as crucial in the professional preparations of the occupation (see introductory chapter of this book by Matts Mattsson, Tor Vidar Eilertsen and Doreen Rorrison). In Sweden, perhaps this development has reached furthest in the social work degree, as personal maturity, conduct and values have been parts of the System of Qualifications of Social Work since 2007 (Högskoleverket, 2009).

The aim of this chapter is to examine how lecturers and students of social work reflect on and conceptualise the learning of professional practice knowledge, including personal qualities and competencies such as conduct, maturity and values. How do social work lecturers teach in professional practice knowledge and how do social work students think about their learning of professional practice knowledge? By looking into students' practice learning of another welfare profession such as social work - which at least in Sweden has had an educational path of development similar to preservice teachers - this chapter strives to introduce some new reference points concerning preservice teachers' practice learning. Above all, this chapter highlights how awareness of the self and exploration of personal qualities and abilities are incorporated in students' practice learning in social work and how methods and concepts of the social work degree could be used to enrich and encourage preservice teachers' practice learning.

## THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Similar to the case of pedagogy, it has been argued that social work is a theory in practice (see for example Schön, 1983). As in pedagogy, professional practice knowledge in social work is therefore best described as socially situated knowledge constituted by a combination of declarative (know that), procedural (know-how) and conditional knowledge (knowing when and why) (see for example Trevithick, 2008). Thus, resembling the case of becoming a wise educator, the social worker must learn to synthesise knowledge as *epistēmē* (theoretical knowledge) and *technē* (know-how) with *phronēsis* (prudence and practical wisdom) in order to become a wise practitioner (see Butler, 2003; Kjørstad, 2008; Trevithick, 2008).

While it is possible to characterise professional practice knowledge by the different forms of knowledge that it requires, it's nevertheless an ambiguous concept. This depends mainly on the many different associations connected with the word 'practice'. Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) argue, for example, that practice is a concept full of nuances because it is situated in time and history. Furthermore, according to Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) practice is formed by the interplay of social, economic, material and cultural circumstances in general, as well as being shaped by the values and traditions of the professional practitioners in particular. Practice, and therefore also professional practice knowledge, is consequently not a static but a continuously changing concept. To examine how teachers teach and students learn the practice of any profession, it is therefore necessary to get beyond the taken-for-granted notions and reconsider what practice learning actually signifies within the discourses of the degree as well as of the profession.

*From a competence-based to a reflective learning paradigm*

One common characteristic of the social work degree in most countries is the increasing emphasis of theoretical knowledge (see for example Alwall, 2004; Johansson and Andersson, 2002; Lam, Wong and Leung, 2007; Trevithick, 2008; Wilson and Berni, 2010). Based on the British example, Wilson and Berni (2010) describe this development as a shift from a competence-based learning paradigm that emphasises the students' learning of technical and practical aspects of social work, to a reflective paradigm that focuses on students' learning through the dialectical process of knowledge, action and reflection.

However, Wilson and Berni (2010) do not explore changes of paradigms in the strict Kuhnian sense. Rather, they use the concept of paradigm as an ideal type to emphasise some conflicting tendencies in the social work degree. According to Wilson and Berni (2010), the competence-based and reflective learning paradigms – or ideal types – co-exist within the social work degree, although they advance different professional beliefs, ideals and values. While the competence-based learning paradigm tends to encourage the prescriptive, regulating and controlling aspects of the profession, the reflective paradigm promotes the socially situated knowledge that the professional social worker comes to develop (Wilson and Berni