

# **Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research – challenges and possibilities**

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## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

***I woke up almost happy this morning!***

**Manager from a social work agency**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Research and practice could through a practice research process do something together instead of working at separate levels and instead of criticizing or even fighting each other**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Making it possible to connect practice experience and hands on knowledge with research based knowledge and analytical/theoretical approaches in a learning process with the aim of qualifying social work**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Practice needs the knowledge coming out of the research and the possibility of understanding and analyzing their own initiatives and outcome of services in new and more collective ways**

**While research needs practice as an object for studies and the findings to be set into actions**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Build on more than 'old knowledge',  
knowledge build on personal norms  
and knowledge build on professional  
experience**

**Research based knowledge is  
probably the most difficult and  
distant knowledge to obtain in  
practice**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**It is necessary to establish meetings  
between research and practice**

**To make sure that this kind of  
knowledge production is accepted by  
and interesting for all partners in the  
collaboration**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Society and social work are in need of establishing new kinds of processes where knowledge production is based and established bottom-up instead of only top-down**



## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

***If we want scientific knowledge, and especially empirical evidence, to play an effective role in professional action, then we have to focus on the contexts where the processes of generating knowledge for action actually take shape, that is, on the organizations engaged in social work***

**Gredig and Sommerfeld**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**To qualify social work research researchers need the knowledge from practice**

- **to know what to study**
- **to produce usable research question**
- **to connect findings to learning processes in social work practice**

# **Negotiation**

**- emphasizing that different perceptions will be part of the development of a practice research process**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Collaborative research processes have to be negotiated every time and everywhere it is established and practiced**

**It leaves the academic and methodological discussion of research more open and eased from dogmas**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Practice research is an ever-changing methodological approach influenced by different beliefs, understandings, perceptions and theories**

**Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research**

**Research in social work is just as eclectic as social work itself**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

- *Learning in practice* by Laves and Wenger
- *Learning processes* by Laursen and Stegager
- *Mode 2 Knowledge Production* by Nowtny
- *Science of the Concrete* by Flyvbjerg
- *Emancipatory Knowledge* by Habermas
- *Service User Involvement* by Beresford and McLaughlin
- *Sociological and Restrained Imagination* by Mills and Løchen
- *Reflexivity* by Bourdieu

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Practice research is closely connected to theoretical approaches focusing on:**

**Context; Dialogue; Empathy;  
Reflexivity; Creativity; Participation;  
Collective knowledge production;  
Trans-disciplinarity**



**Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research**

# **Science of the concrete**

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## **Key elements in science of the concrete are**

- **getting close to reality**
- **emphasizing little things**
- **looking at practice before discourse**
- **studying concrete cases and contexts**
- **joining agency and structure**
- **dialoguing with a polyphony of voices**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Theory has a minor position and context a major in science of the concrete**

**Flyvbjerg is not criticizing research rules, logic, analytical rational and theory per se**

**He is criticizing the dominance of these elements in correlation with other phenomenon**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Both participatory context-based research and theory will bias research**

**But the participatory processes will not bias research more than theory will**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Science of the concrete constitutes both a philosophical, a scientific, a theoretical and a methodological framework for practice research in social work**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Mode 2 knowledge production is characterised by application-oriented research where both frameworks and findings are discussed and evaluated by a number of partners – including laypeople – in public spheres**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Knowledge production arises in the light of a specific logic which participants must develop in common to be able to act together and towards the problem**

*Kristiansson*

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**There is a scientific basis for more context-based, dialogue-oriented, critical reflection-needed, participatory based and partnership-focused research and knowledge production**

**- elements connecting very well with, inspire and help to position practice research**



## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

- **Discuss if this is practice research**
- **Decide which partners are going to participate as stakeholders**
- **Define the joint understanding of both the research project and the learning process**
- **Discuss and decide the practice research approach(es)**
- **Decide the different responsibilities and roles in the process**
- **Work out a plan for meetings**
- **Be ready to argue for your interests and to be open-minded towards others**

**Difficult to start joint discussions**

**Definitions and descriptions may help stakeholders to start and direct discussions and decisions**

**To agree on, to disagree on or to use as inspiration**

**A helping kit to projects**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

***Practice research is any disciplined empirical inquiry (research, evaluation, analysis) or theoretical/conceptual analyses, conducted by and/or negotiated between researchers, practitioners and/or service users that is intended, wholly or to some significant degree, to shed light on, support learning processes or explain social work intervention/practice with the purpose of qualifying social work through new knowledge and/or developing social work actions***

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

- **New knowledge**
- **Small findings needed for a later development or change**
- **Part of a big change**

**Practice research is focusing on being a part of a learning process rather than demanding a big change**

## **Practice research on social work**

**Research questions and design, data-collection, analysis and information about the research are led and directed by external researchers**

**Practice has no real say in the process**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

- **The phenomenon is understandable to practice**
- **The problem can be turned in to a research question**
- **It is possible to collect data**
- **It is possible to apply the findings in practice**
- **The process and the findings can have implications and impact on developments of social work**

# Service User Focused Research

- **Consultants**
- **Research 'holders'**
- **Stakeholders**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**The third approach 'Practitioner Research' focuses on research carried out by practitioners**



## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

***Practice based research is the use of research inspired principles, designs and research methods in everyday practice enabling participants to answer questions, which originates from practice and which will give answers in ways that will inform practice***

**Epstein**

***Practice research is the phenomenon that occurs when practitioners commit themselves to something they call research in their own practice while they, at the same time, practice social work***

**Ramian**

**Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research**

# **Practice is the research institution**

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## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**The researcher does not need to be an educated researcher**

**But needs to have knowledge about research**

## **Science producing network**

**Different kinds of collaboration where practitioner researchers are collaborating, determined and growth-oriented to produce knowledge in a specific practice field and sharing this experience and knowledge with other practitioner researchers**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**'Participatory Practice Research' is carried out in collaboration between practice and research**

**There is a need and demand for a close collaboration between practice and research**

**Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research**

**Practice and research develop every  
single collaboration in common**

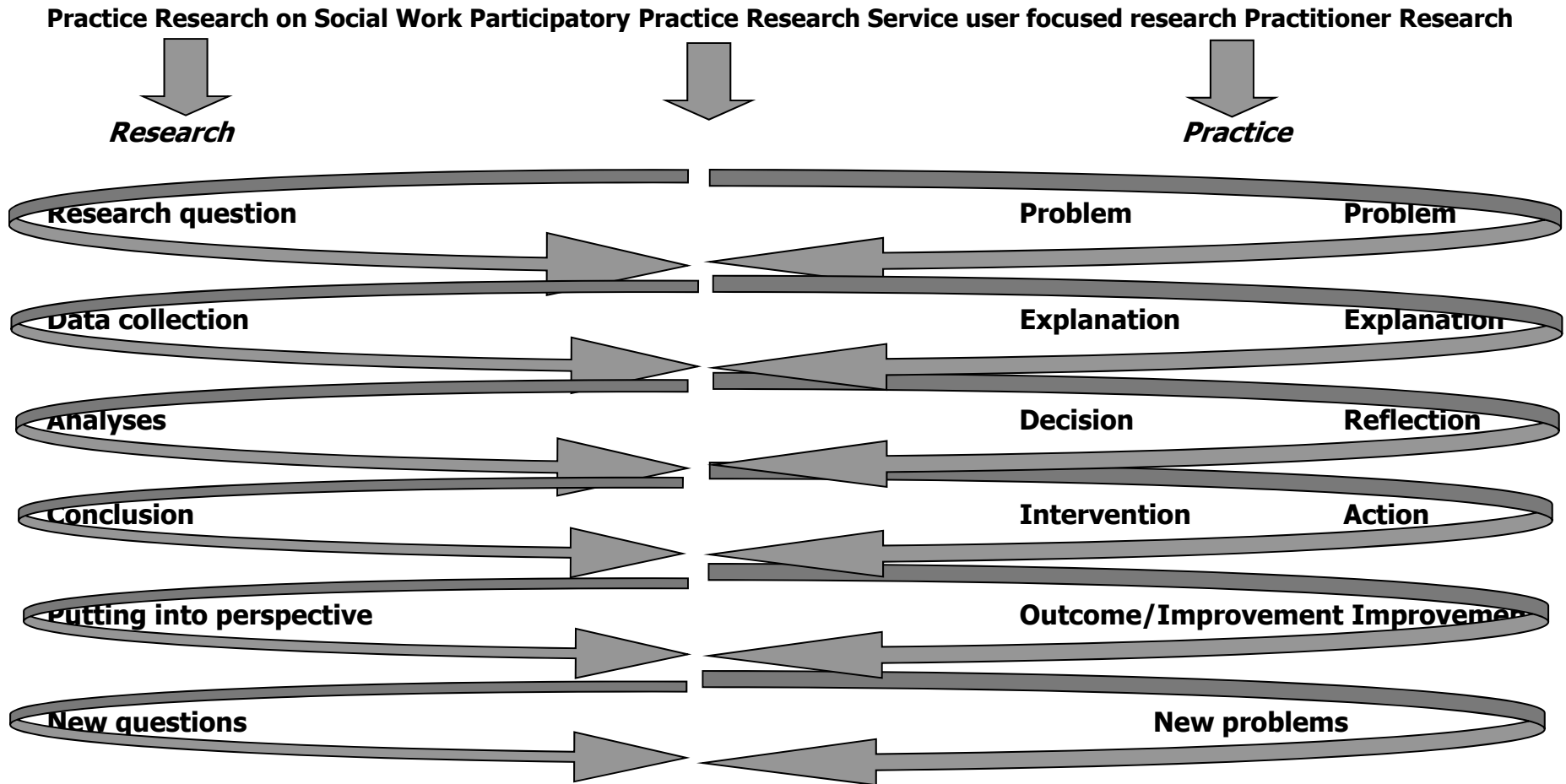
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## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Research is part of a learning process**

**Practice will manage the learning process while researchers will manage the research process**

# Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research





## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

***Participatory practice research* is both part of traditional research processes and part of processes in practice – but it has its own position in between research on social work and practitioner research**

## **Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research**

***Curiosity***

***Critical reflection***

***Critical thinking and decision making***

**Austin, Dal Santo and Lee**

**Why can't practitioners and service user just act as informants in research?**

**Why do they need to become partners?**

**What is the added value of involving practitioners and service users in research - and what is the added value of involving researchers in learning and developing processes in agencies?**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Practice won't have to supplement their skills to become researchers and to be informed about the demands, the ethics, scientific positions, usable research methods, analytic tools etc.**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Data and findings will not be 'taken away' from practice it will be co-produced with researchers and kept as a part of learning processes in practice**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**For research the added value of collaborating with practice and service users is that all parts of the research process become more qualified**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Collaborating with practitioners and service users gives the researcher new angles and insight knowledge about the phenomenon and thus qualify both the research set up and the findings**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**During collaboration and negotiation stakeholders and partners obtain more knowledge about each other and the different interest among partners  
– they start to understand what they didn't understand previously**



## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**The differences between stakeholders need to be discussed and negotiated as a part of the collaboration processes**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

- **The different interests of the different actors are important for each and every one of them – and significant to society**
- **The quality of function within the different groups of actors depends on the possibility of retaining these different interests**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Instead of trying to balance the differences, it is important to enlighten them**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Practice Research needs to and will develop and connect both out of contradictions and out of an understanding that collaboration is needed**

**Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research**

***Learning processes have to be  
disturbing to participants***

**Laursen and Stegager**

***It must disturb in a constructive way***

**Cochran-Smith & Lytle**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Practice Research must disturb everyday practice - as well as it has to be disturbing to traditional research practice**

**The negotiation in practice research will rather be focusing on disturbance than consensus**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**Practice Research is a field which is characterized by being influenced by and having influence on practice at the same time**

**A research field that is linked especially to practice and even in its focus in depth and independence will be influenced by practice**

**In this understanding practice research in social work and social work practice have to walk hand in hand**

**- without becoming lovers**

## Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research

**No individual is skilled enough to give sufficient answers**

**The role of both researcher, practitioner and service user is to advance parts of the answer as an input in an ongoing dialogue concerning issues and risks mankind is confronted with and concerning how eventually to solve these issues**

**Research and practice possess both part of the answer and part of the solution – by which position everybody (researchers, practitioners and service user) is producing knowledge**

**Flyvbjerg**



**Theories and Approaches in Social Work Practice Research**

**Thank you for listening!**

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