

Social interventions: quality standards, suitable research instruments

Martijn Bool

Movisie

Social work nowadays is often described in terms of social interventions. Social interventions can be characterized as systematic and interactive processes between (semi)professionals and citizens with a specific aim. All stakeholders, professionals, citizens, policy, strive at effectiveness of social interventions. Effectiveness is one important aspect of quality development. It is not only an end state but a process. We will distinguish and present five steps in the process of quality development. For the purpose of accountability we have selected several research instruments matching these five steps for use in practice, each with their specific profits. The workshop addresses the conference themes of - knowledge production and public accountability in social work and evidence and uncertainty; - pathways to accountable social work research and practice. Quality development of social interventions contains several dimensions. Besides the interactive process of interventions and the role of the client or citizen, the main components are the skills, attitudes and knowledge of the professional on the one hand and the quality of the intervention on the other hand. In this workshop we present five steps for the quality development of social interventions and several research instruments for use in each of these steps. We give an overview of the five steps and the instruments. The first step is to make a good description of an intervention, the second is to build a theoretical foundation, the third step is to do research into application and experiences of citizens and professionals, followed by systematic monitoring of results, and the fifth step is research into its effectiveness. These five steps are based on practice and research criteria for interventions in youth care, health promotion, sports and social interventions applied by several institutes in the Netherlands. Accountability is linked most strongly to the fifth step: research into effectiveness. Although the criterion of accountability is not disputed, there are many obstacles to obtaining accountability in the reality of social interventions. Therefore we aim for forms of accountability which include the other four steps. Starting with a description of an intervention will give insight in the aims and approach used. To be more specific, a good description explains which social question is addressed, with which aims, which approach is used, what competencies are expected, what are the foundations and the experiences of the approach. For steps two to five we have a set of research instruments which have proved their value for the social sector. Each instruments has strength and can serve specific aims in accountability, e.g. case study, arena of effects, theory of change, monitoring. We explored these research instruments in practice and summarized them in a (Dutch) publication. In the workshop we present and explore with the participants the overall picture of the five steps and the set of research instruments. The next step is a more in-depth exploration of one of the five steps and one of the research instruments, based on the preferences and experiences of the participants. We aim with our presentation to give a comprehensive and compact overview of routes towards accountability suitable for social work.

Key words: quality development, effectiveness, research methods.