

Participatory action research (PAR) as knowledge production in social work.

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4. European Conference for Social Work Research "Private troubles or public issues? Challenges for social work research" 15 – 17 April 2014, Free University of Bolzano, Italy Abstract Author: Sissel Seim, Oslo and Akershus University College of applied sciences (HIOA) Title: Participatory action research (PAR) as knowledge production in social work. The topic to be discussed in this paper is Participatory action research as an approach for developing knowledge in social work. The project Research circles to promote children's participation in child welfare, will be used as a case for the discussion. In this project social work practitioners and academic researchers have been engaged in continuing dialogue, aiming to produce knowledge relevant to the practices involved. The research questions to be discussed in this paper are: * Have the activities lead to development of new understanding of children's participation in child welfare? * Have the activities lead to knowledge about implementing children's participation? * PAR as a suitable approach for developing understanding and knowledge of children's participation The project Research circles has chosen participatory action research (PAR) as an approach aimed simultaneously at enhancing the understanding of children's participation, making changes in the involved practices, and at production of knowledge. The empirical basis for the discussion is the research activities in the project conducted at two colleges, Diakonhjemmet University College, and Oslo and Akershus University College, in close cooperation with ten child protection/child welfare centres in Oslo and Akershus County. The project has been financed by the County Governor of Oslo and Akershus. The two research circles, consisting of two social workers from each of the centres, and two academic researchers from the colleges have met regularly for 18 months from August 2012 till January 2014. The activities in the circles are based on dialogue between researchers and practitioners, reflections on cases from the practices, interviews with children and young people and of theoretical studies. The discussion in the paper will also be based on focus group interviews in at the end of the period January 2014, and on written material from all participants. As the project is not yet finished, it is too early to conclude about results or implications of the activities. So far the participants, both practitioners and the researchers, as well as the County governor see this as an interesting approach to develop understanding and knowledge about practicing children's participation in child welfare/child protection services. The project will therefore continue with two new research circles starting in February 2014.

Keywords: Participatory action research, Research circle, children's participation, child welfare.