**‘Being a person not only a function’ — teaching professional knowledge within social work education**

*Hej, läs gärna utifrån om manuset är intressant och är urvalet relevant? Är metod och teori beskriven i tillräcklig utsträckning? Vad tänker du/ni om etiska aspekter? Är resultaten begripliga och fungerar tabellerna? Är diskussionen relevant och tillräckligt? mvh*

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*Abstract*

Social work practice includes a variety of roles that require different forms of knowledge and skills, here summarized in the concept of professional knowledge. The purpose of this text is to reflect on what professional knowledge in social work is, and when and how it can be stimulated during education. The starting point was a workshop held during a Swedish national conference in social work in 2023 where (12) teachers and researchers in social work at (6) Swedish higher education institutions participated. To validate the relevance of the Swedish social work teachers’ understandings of professional knowledge, two Irish social work teachers did the same type of workshop based on the notes from the first workshop. Included are also (65) Swedish social work students who did a similar workshop during their last semester. At the workshops, all participants contributed with their reflections on what professional knowledge is, and when and how it can be stimulated in academic education. The participants of the workshops emphasized that professional knowledge needs to be stimulated more at all levels of the education, from the first year to postgraduate level. The participants also emphasized that central for professional knowledge is that it is grounded in skills to make judgements that are based on critical reflection and relationship oriented. This type of knowledge we refer to as phronetic knowledge, and to convey this type of knowledge during the education teaching practices and methods that emphasize reflections in the sphere of ‘self-with-others’ is crucial. This is however time consuming and is therefore at risk of becoming increasingly overlooked in social work education today, due to down cuts and more austere times in higher education.

*Keywords:* social work education, teaching practice, professional knowledge, phronesis

*Introduction*

Developing an understanding of what social work means in practice is a challenge for students in social work education. In a study with newly graduated Swedish social workers, they expressed a wish that their academic education had been more practically oriented (Welander, et al., 2017), which shows a request for an education that had prepared them more for the challenges that they may face in their future professional role. Professional knowledge is for social workers part of a craft know-how, it is about acquiring a familiarity with working with people in vulnerable life situations where social problems such as addiction, poverty and exclusion are not seen as solely individual difficulties. Every case in social work contains sensitive relational aspects that needs to be considered and reflected on. Essential is also knowledge and awareness of structures of power and the service users’ possibilities to act and to claim their own rights. Social work has a long tradition of working with oppressed and vulnerable groups in society, where structural and individual explanatory models need to be combined. Mary Richmond, one of the forerunners of social work, emphasized humans’ close dependence on their surroundings, the more immediate surroundings as well as overall structures of society, and the importance for social workers to work with social relationships (Fjeldheim et al., 2015; Richmond, 1917). According to Ruch (2005) reflective capabilities is essential for social workers. In holistic reflective social work practice the uncertainness is always present in which relational and power dimensions of what praxis might entail becomes integrated with scientific and practical knowledge (Ruch, 2005). To repeatedly make use of both personal and professional experiences during the training period is a way to develop students’ reflective capabilities. Such reflections can be regarding matters on systemic and organizational levels as well as matters that regard the profession and the relationships with others. Social work education and practice is about development in the sphere of ‘self-with-others’ (Edwards, & Richards, 2002). Students in social work need to be able to listen to others, but to do that you also need to be able to listen to your self and use self-reflection in your learning and future work life. In addition, learning itself is relationship-based (Edwards, & Richards, 2002).

In the best-case scenario, the teachers and the students are parts of a relational based practice where the teacher’s relationship with the student as well as the student’s self and others relationship need to be considered as parts of every learning situation. Through relations (self-and-others) self-consciousness can be learned and used purposively in the social workers future work life (Wang, 2012). To achieve a relational based practice, the teacher needs to be present in the classroom with authenticity, which means that the teacher should be open with and reflect on own values, preferences, and experiences in relation to the students. From a social work perspective authenticity in the professional relation between teacher and student is understood as the foundation for learning (Rawles 2016). Professional knowledge in social work includes dialogue as well as self-reflection to further increase the development of critical reflection. Dialogic communication is about creating trust by listening to all parties in a meeting so that they are given the opportunity to describe what is going on rather than the person with professional responsibility trying to push their own line. The need to be right disappears if you focus on understanding the experiences of others. By allowing all voices to be heard, multiple interpretations can become possible (Arnkil, & Seikkula, 2015; Arnkil, 2018).

Acquiring skills connected to professional knowledge is however time consuming and is therefore at risk of becoming increasingly overlooked in social work education today, due to down cuts and more austere times in the public sector (cf. Feigenbaum & Iqani, 2015). Also, the influence of New public management (NPM) has contributed to a development of an organizational professionalism where relational social work is given reduced influence (Hingley-Jones & Ruch, 2016; Nordesjö et al., 2022). NPMs influence also includes a focus on administrative work and documentation, so called ‘empaperment’ that emphasize general aspects rather than professional knowledge that is situated, specific and unique (Bornemark, 2018; 2020). We need to go back in the history to learn more about professional knowledge e.g. practice wisdom.

**Phronesis**

In social work, an especially important aspect of professional knowledge has been related to concepts such as phronesis (Birmingham, 2004). According to the Greek philosopher Aristotle episteme, techne and phronesis are different forms of knowledge (Birmingham, 2004; Aristotle, 1988). Episteme can be interpreted as theoretical knowledge, for example when students acquire knowledge of the law or theories on human behavior. Techne can be understood as practical know-how, craft or craft knowledge, such as for example knowing how to perform specific administrative procedures when doing a child welfare investigation. Phronesis is a form of practical knowledge which differs from theoretical knowledge – episteme - and practical know-how knowledge – techne - in the way that it is connected to insight (nous) (Nilsson, 2009). According to Aristotle what distinguishes phronesis from episteme and techne, is that phronesis is “a state of grasping the truth, involving reason, concerned with action about what is good or bad for a human being” (Aristotle quoted in Birmingham, 2004:314). Phronetic knowledge has also been described as practical wisdom (Thompson, & West, 2013), a situated knowledge with unicity where action is needed that includes being sensible for how things should be done in often ambiguous and complex situations (Bornemark, 2020). The knowing and thinking that phronesis calls for is concerned foremost with the particulars of the situation (Birmingham, 2004). Phronesis is therefore also connected to action, to make a decision to act properly in the specific care situation. van Manen (1991) use the concept *pedagogical tact*, which according to Birmingham (2004) resembles the virtueof phronesis. “To exercise tact means to *see* a situation calling for sensitivity, to *understand* the meaning of what is seen, to *sense the significance* of this situation, and to actually *do* something right” (van Manen, 1991:146. Quoted in Birmingham, 2004:317). A Swedish philosopher, (Bornemark 2020) conclude that professional judgement (as part of phronesis) is recognised by action and to be able to stay ‘pactive’ to be attentive and ready to act with tact and timing. According to Aristotle a way to become virtuous is to imitate a virtuous person (Birmingham, 2004:317). A role model which most of us need in life, in education and in social work praxis.

Empirical contexts

Sweden has traditionally been characterized as part of the social democratic welfare model, or the Nordic model of welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1990) where the state is responsible for the organization of social work initiatives and the employment of social workers. Most social work students do their practice training, their field education, in a public organization in the municipality or in the region that share the responsibilities for health care with the municipalities.

Ireland on the other hand could be categorised as part of a liberal welfare model (Esping -Andersen, 1990; Nygård, 2020) where most social work organizations are private enterprises, and a particular difficult part of the social work education is to find organizations that can take on social work students for field education practice training (ref?). The political system in each country affects the welfare situation and will contribute with specific challenges in each country related to both academic education and social work practice per se.

**Aim and research questions.**

The aim for this paper is to investigate how professional knowledge is conveyed in social work education. Impediments as well as possibilities to develop professional knowledge during education will be highlighted from both a teacher and a student perspective. Research questions are: What is considered as key elements of professional knowledge in social work? (previous research, workshops with teachers) How can it be trained during the education? (workshops with teachers). What possibilities and impediments to develop this type of knowledge during education do teachers and students in social work experience?

A further aim is to collect and disseminate creative ideas for stimulating the development of professional knowledge in the academic context.

**Method - data collection**

To gather knowledge about professional knowledge in social work education three workshops were held with teachers in Sweden (1), teachers in Ireland (1) and Swedish social work students (1). Here follows an introduction to the approach that was used during the workshops and the ideas, thoughts and experiences shared by the academic teachers and students who participated in the workshops. The Swedish teachers were invited to a workshop during the national conference in social work in Stockholm (2023). The idea used for the workshop was inspired by the method World café (Turunen, 2013). This is a method that is used in community work to stimulate dialogue and collective learning. The World café method has its roots in social work organizations in the US. The aim of the method is to support participants through dialogue to share experiences and knowledge with each other to create an in-depth and shared meaning about urgent issues, to “cross-fertilize” and bring different perspectives together, and to stimulate participants to reflect together to create new insights (Turunen, 2013, World café, 2024). It is created on the idea of ​​conversations around coffee tables or campfires and is based on small and large group discussions. The process is managed with the help of a process manager, which is called a host. The host is in charge of the process management of the dialogue, which is carried out at round tables for four to five people (Turunen, 2013; World café, 2024).

Sample

Those who participated in the first workshop were 12 teachers in social work programs from six different Universities in Sweden. The teachers were divided into four groups by counting 1, 2, 3, 4, so that the groups were distributed independently of the participants' own choices. There were four tables with one question related to professional knowledge on each table. The question for table one was: What is professional knowledge? For table two the question was: When should professional knowledge be part of the education? And for table three: How is professional knowledge taught in education? On the fourth table the participants were asked to give: Creative ideas/free thinking regarding how to develop professional knowledge in the education further. On each table was a pad for the group to write notes on. All participants discussed all four questions. Each group started by formulating an answer to the question that was at their table, and one person in the group was asked to make notes and summarize the discussion. After 15 minutes of discussions the group moved on and changed tables and thus also the question. At the next table, the group began by reading what the previous group had written on the pad and then filled in with their ideas, thoughts, and experiences. The group was instructed to base the summary on the notes made by previous participants and add their own reflections if they felt that something was missing. The Irish teachers did a similar process and contributed with their own reflections and suggestions after reading a summary of the Swedish teachers' answers to each of the questions separately. Taking turns in writing new notes after having read one question at a time after reading the Swedish teachers’ reflections for each of the four questions. The two Irish teachers thus included aspects that according to them was missing in the written text at each table (1-4). The students, on the other hand, did a similar workshop as the Swedish teachers did. However, only one part of the students’ workshop data will be included in this paper, namely the students’ perspectives of how to learn professional knowledge (see table 5) which is suggested to be particularly relevant in relation to validating the teachers views on the learning aspects.

Analysis of the data

A summary of what was written down on the notepads during the workshop discussions will be presented under results. The notes by each table were organized by the first author who also was the leader of the three workshops. The goal when summarizing the data from the notepads was to keep close to the participants written reflections. The texts from the participants in the world café discussions of each question have been synthesized through three steps: At first all text were read under each question. As a second step different aspects under each question were summarized in tables. As a third step repetitive elements were withdrawn and naming of the subcategories took place. A summary of the participants answers to each question will be restated in the result section to give the reader a sense of the content . The summaries were done by the workshop leader (GÖ) based on the notes from the participants in the three workshops. The teachers’ perspectives are described in tables 1-4, including both workshop occasions, the one with the Swedish teachers and the one with the Irish teachers. The last table 5 presents the Swedish students’ perspectives on the learning of professional knowledge.

Methodological and ethical considerations

The teachers who participated in the workshops had the opportunity to contribute to and/or change in the manuscript if they felt that something was missing or had been misunderstood by the workshop leader.

The students have seen the results from their workshop and were asked if the last table on learning aspects of professional knowledge was okey to use as part of teachers discussions and/or in a possible publication. The students agreed to contribute with their views on the learning aspects of professional knowledge within social work education. The word validate is in this manuscript used as comparable with face validity (Bäckström 1997) where the different workshops participants recognize the empirical data collected in present study as trustworthy and relevant. One difficulty that might have influenced the results is the first authors language skills when changing the Swedish teachers notes to English. It was recognizable to me as being the first author and responsible of the data collection and analysis of results that the English-speaking teachers seem to contribute with more deepened knowledge. An explanation for this is that the Irish teachers had another point of departure in comparison to the Swedish teachers, they could use the notes from the Swedish workshop results to elaborate and further develop the answers to each of the questions.

**Results**

In this section the results from the workshops will be presented. The four questions that the workshop discussions revolved around were: What? When? How? and Creative ideas/free thinking regarding professional knowledge. The answers to the questions from the workshops helped us to identify learning sources to professional knowledge. The results will be presented in table 1-5, in which nr 5 is from a workshop with students that included their perspective on how one learns professional knowledge.

*The first key element – self-awareness*

The first question (see table 1): *What is professional knowledge* was by the teachers defined as a personal competence in which you need to use acquired theoretical knowledge and know-how of e.g. the welfare system to handle complex and difficult/uncertain situations. Another key essence of professional knowledge is connected to self-awareness, described as being able to ‘be a person rather than a function’, using situational based wisdom, handle complex matters, and to work emancipatory creating relationships with social work clients. The Irish teachers validated what had been written by the Swedish social work teachers, but they also underlined the need for critical reflections and included what might be qualified as more immersed professional skills such as act as user’s navigator in complex welfare systems and to promote self-determination in the face of risk. Both group of teachers also underlined the importance of having acquired theoretical knowledge such as psychology, sociology, law, and social policy. Understanding professional knowledge as different shades of practical wisdom (Thompson, & West, 2013) or phronetic knowledge (Aristotle 1988) was what the teachers included under the first question (table 1). In phronetic knowledge both theoretical knowledge (episteme) and techne (craftmanship) which in social work is closely connected to relational work (Edwards, & Richards, 2002) is included. Pivotal for phronetic professional knowledge in social work practice is self-awareness in combination with a professional judgment that is based on situation specificity (Bornemark, 2020) especially when promoting self-determination in the face of risk as the Irish teachers underlined being a part of the specific challenges of social work.

*The second key element – maintain relationships*

The second question (see table 2): *How can professional knowledge be trained* was according to the teachers connected to maintaining relationships such as being a member of a group where relational collective learning can take place over time. Another example of how professional knowledge could be trained was to use mentorship both from Alumni students and teachers or social workers they met in placements. Another suggestion was to stage-manage situations in teaching where dialogic processes from different contexts are made visible giving that systemic understandings might be retrieved. The validation included develop confidence through peer-learning, focusing on more collaboration between practice and the academia. While the Swedish teachers discussed the importance of using different material and contexts the Irish teachers underlined engaging with literature and research findings not forgetting the life course changings in humans. Finding role models within social works was also highlighted as important for learning professional knowledge according to all teachers, and to maintain relationships overtime. Maintaining relationships is part of techne and the craftsmanship that social work students need to develop.

*Key element – lifelong learning*

Answers to the third question (see table 3): *When during the education should professional knowledge be trained* emphasized that this type of knowledge is a continuous process. The groups agreed about the need for including different forms of practical exercises that promote the students’ development of professional knowledge in every part of the education. Moreover, the importance of lifelong learning in social work as part of developing oneself and the profession was part of a general agreement. In the validation the importance of fostering the professional development right from the start of the education including to exhort students to engage with the trade union and in practice research. There is a request stated by the Irish teachers to upgrade placements as a crucial part of social work education. Without techne eg. handcraftship within social work education also practical wisdom or phonetic knowledge would fail.

*Key element - engagement*

The aim with the fourth question was to *collect creative ideas and suggestions of how to further stimulate the development of professional knowledge within the educational context* (see table 4). Themes that were highlighted here was to use more concrete methods where more senses are involved and to do action-oriented examinations. The importance of working with 'real situations' and people's current life circumstances that are based on lived experience was emphasized. The importance of commitment, involvement and empowerment as well as more contact with different fields of social work, was also stressed, something that could be achieved with for example the help of former students. In addition, the need for more practice-based master's programs were also highlighted, a type of program which is not found in Swedish social work education of today. The Irish teachers underlined the importance of using students own interests to engage them in the social work education concerning for example environmental sustainability and sports. Commitment from teacher as well as students is probably the most important aspect for developing professional knowledge within social work education. Although lack of theoretical knowledge (episteme) can of course make you fail in phronetic practical wisdom.

*Key elements – responsiveness and techne*

A key element in learning professional knowledge according to the Swedish students who also did the workshop was to have certain personal qualities such as responsiveness and be receptive to criticism and by that find it easier to learn from others (table 5). The students underlined that to acquire professional knowledge you need to be a knowledge seeker and being a person that is willing to challenge yourself. Another aspect put forward was to be able to cultivate self-courage and dare to ask difficult questions. The students also underlined the importance of being involved in social interactions and observations of social work as sources to find professional knowledge. Another suggestion was to learn from mistakes, your own and/or others which you may meet in practice and/or trough media from reported personal lived experiences. The students also value learning by doing through conducting social work jn practice, and by finding role models and establish relationships with them can be a source of inspiration. Teachers and students agree about the importance of relational based skills as one of the main sources to accomplish the different tasks of social work.

**Discussion**

Professional knowledge is about handling care versus control responsibilities in complex situations. Techne, the craft knowledge in social work is to learn different techniques, to have a toolbox of different ways of how to for example address and talk to people in an empowering way. Phronetic knowledge is to use your combined wisdom in the specific context of social work and adjust it to the service user’s needs in that particular context. The teachers also believe that professional knowledge is a personal competence that contain theoretical knowledge – episteme (table 1). According to the teachers, self-awareness is a key element that can be trained by developing and maintaining relationships within and outside social work (table 2). The requested lifelong learning (table 3) that answered the question of when one learns professional knowledge is one of the great things about being a social worker, but also the main challenge. Developing professional knowledge (techne, episteme and phronesis) is challenging and require learning by relating to self and others in which students explore the conditions and content of social work through integration of knowledge, a process that needs to be continued lifelong (Brave, 2007; Rawles. 2016).

Techne – practical skills were described by the students as of main importance when they identified what professional knowledge is within social work (table 5). Practice skills were mainly recognized as the main source of learning the workcraft in social work (techne). Social work students' learning practice therefore needs to include even more practical aspects (table 4). As a teacher in social work, it may seem central to consider the social environment, i.e. the educational context, as decisive for the learning practice, and to reflect on whether the teaching practices used contribute to new experiences and learning for both teachers and students. Focusing on professional knowledge as a main part of social work education also includes to upgrade placements as a crucial part of social work education including establishing closer cooperation with practice both in education and in research (table 3-4). Relational social work is a crucial part of professional knowledge. According to the students responsiveness toward self-and others is an important aspect of learning professional knowledge. which was also underlined in previous research (Edwards, & Richards, 2002; Wang, 2012). Edvards and Richards (2002) argue that relational teaching is done by mutual engagement which fosters non-hierarchical relationships needed when empowering people. The Irish teachers wanted to work with more empowering work practices within social work education, such as to work directly with users’ groups or with students for developing professional knowledge. To increase the professional knowledge the service-users could to a greater extent be included as knowledge carriers in social work education, which would be another challenge in the academic monopoly of knowledge (Wallengren Lynch, et al., 2019) but none the less urgent. The professional knowledge provides increased security in uncertain situations, as social work is often about knowing that one can handle uncertain situations together with people who are having a hard time.

As teachers, we are obliged to act and react to injustices and maintain a positive climate in the group we are responsible for, not least if we claim to educate professional knowledge (cf. Hingley-Jones, & Ruch, 2016). In the academic tradition, there are also literature seminars with the purpose to reflect together on a text and in this way, through the collective sharing of different interpretations, one's own perspective can be broadened. The importance of critical reflections as a source to professional knowledge was also underlined by the teachers in the present study. This academic form of conversation and dialogue also provides the opportunity to develop as a person and acquire knowledge in depth, which the students also underlined as one important source to professional knowledge. To use forms of academic learning that emphasize reflecting together with others, to encourage openness and the asking of questions rather than providing answers in the search for knowledge would be yet another step in the development of students’ professional knowledge. Organizational professionalism in line with NPM has come to have an increased influence in social work education as well, and it is not unusual that students nowadays primarily ask for manuals and guidelines rather than thinking about how cooperation with users and networks can be further developed (c.f. Hingley-Jones & Ruch, 2016; Bornemark 2018). Teachers in higher education, such as social work academic education, also face systemic challenges to keep up the quality of education, an increasing teaching load and increased class-sizes makes it hard to develop relationships with students (cf. Feigenbaum & Iqani, 2015).

*Concluding remarks*

Our empirical examples come from teachers and students in social work education programs in 2023 where professional knowledge seems to have an uncertain place at least within the Swedish academic program despite support from dedicated employees. Urging academic teachers to be a person rather than just a teacher can hold forth increased possibilities for students to develop further professional knowledge. Professional knowledge in social work is a relational-based knowledge that include practical wisdom. Relating as a person give new opportunities to discover more circumstances that can be of help for developing an understanding of the breadth of social problems and constraints. In social work, critical reflection is also needed on how groups and systems function both within the organization and how cooperation with other welfare professions can be further developed.

The results from the workshops show that relationship-based professional knowledge can very well be stimulated in academic education with various pedagogical tools. But the teachers in the workshop described that professional knowledge cannot be done without relational social work, as commitment and relating are seen as part of the education. Teachers in an academic context find it increasingly difficult to establish relationships and qualitative meetings with students due to larger student groups and less time for teaching in line with increased demands for efficiency, increased administrative burden for teachers, less time for pedagogical competence development and time for learning collectively together with others. Not having time to meet with colleagues to reflect together creates feelings of being alone in charge of courses. Teachers on social work programs need to develop relations with colleagues and to further reflect on professional knowledge in social work to be able to convey this to the students. But the time for reflection and nurturing relationships and thus developing professional knowledge within academia and among colleagues is scarce, and even less is the time that teachers spend together with the students at least from a Swedish perspective.

In order to develop professional knowledge, we in the academy need to help each other to contribute to creating opportunities for students and teachers to meet in situations where applied, action-oriented and reflective interactions can emerge and develop throughout the education rather than simplified one-way solutions that does not take power and relationship into account (cf. Rush, 2005; Hingley-Jones & Ruch, 2016). The workshops participants' descriptions included a preference of more action-oriented academic education, which places great demands on the teachers, not least in terms of their own commitment and participation. Creative working methods often require smaller groups that can attract students as well as teachers to engage in further knowledge developments in social work. The development in social work education has, however, been in the opposite direction, towards larger sizes of classes, and a heavier teaching load, which we perceive as an obstacle for creating an educational environment that enables development of professional knowledge. Ideas and suggestions on how professional knowledge could be better integrated in social work education programs concerns developing techne - practical skills further in social work courses irrespective of educational level, as well as increasing the opportunities for students to develop phronetic knowledge which can be done by having more aspects of the teaching where the students are encouraged to apply their knowledge to ‘real case scenarios’ Social work education and practice is about development in the sphere of ‘self-with-others’ (Edwards, & Richards, 2002). Social work is based on respect for people's right to self-determination and integrity, but despite the fact that solidarity and justice are discussed within the different sub-courses of the social work program, the person's responsibility for their situation always risks being misinterpreted in the discussion of social problems and individual difficulties. Students should be asked questions such as: Imagine that you are a client in a curative meeting or a mother in an inquiry regarding your child’s welfare. Would you like to meet yourself as a social worker? If not, which skills do I need to develop in order to want to face "myself" in a crisis situation?

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Table 1. What is professional knowledge in social work, results from workshop with social work teachers in Sweden and Ireland, 2023.

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| **Themes** | ***What is professional knowledge in social work?*** |
| *Being a person with a function* | Being a person, not just a function |
| *Situational based wisdom* | Practical wisdom that is carried out with professional judgment in situation-specific contexts on individual/group/structural levels |
| *Handle complex matters* | Being able to handle complex matters and see different perspectives and flex in-between |
| *Allow all voices* | Self-awareness and dialogically learning where all voices are allowed to contribute |
| *Emancipatory work* | Using emancipatory social work; to create, build and maintain relationships |
| **Validation** |  |
| *Combine care and responsibilities* | Ability to manage care versus control responsibilities and functions. Holding the voice of the service user as critical in all interventions |
| *Use self-awareness and critical thinking* | Understand our own psychological make-up and family history, self-awareness and thinking critically |
| *Relationship based practice as a core* | Relationship based practice at the best - the core of social work practice |
| *Act as user’s navigator in complex welfare systems* | Prompts the use of self and on awareness that social workers are not just state agents and act as a buffer which helps to make sense of complex systems and experiences that that service users have to navigate |
| *Promote self-determination in the face of risk* | Includes critical reflection and a capacity to promote autonomy/self-determination in the face of risk. Recognizing the limits and role whereby there is a statutory function |
| **Theoretical aspects from both groups** | Professional knowledge also means having acquired theoretical knowledge such as psychology, sociology, law, social policy, and a critical interjection of these |

Table 2, How can professional knowledge be trained, results from workshop with social work teachers in Sweden and Ireland, 2023.

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| **Themes** | **How can professional knowledge be trained?** |
| *Through prolonged self-other situations* | Challenge students to reflect on themselves and others through being a member of a cohesive group |
| *Maintain relationships with students* | Establish and maintain relationships with students and former students |
| *Through role models and mentorship* | Offer role models and preferably mentorship with professionals who have accepted to be 'one to learn from' |
| *Through commitment and inspiration* | Use methods in teaching that engages, includes, and inspires the students |
| *Include different materials and contexts* | Use practice, literature, fiction, film, case descriptions, and simulation environments |
| **Validation** |  |
| *Develop confidence through peer learning* | Peer learning through organized practice skill training in safe environments that develops confidence |
| *Collaboration between practice and academy* | Commitment to the integration of theory/practice by dynamic commitment of collaboration between academic teachers and practice teachers |
| *Engage with literature and research findings, consider the life course changings* | Engaging with the literature and research, ensuring students use material that is evidence based. Keeping in mind the importance of an application across the life course |
| **Integrate a systemic perspective - both groups** | Make students use systemic theory and processes that might extend across and between people in a family, the social service agency, a work group, the classroom…. |

Table 3, When should professional knowledge be trained, results from workshop with social work teachers in Sweden and Ireland, 2023.

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| **Themes** | **When should professional knowledge be trained?** |
| *Life-long Learning* | Professional knowledge needs to be developed continuously from the beginning of the education and last throughout the study period and preferably never stop! |
| *Mandatory in and after education* | Mandatory during the social work education and followed up during times of employment |
| *Post gradual education* | Be included in master’s and doctoral education |
| *In placements and as trainees* | Preserve placement during the social work education. Include trainees to participate in alumni activities after the education |
| *Continuous training* | Professional knowledge is a combination of theoretical and practical knowledge that should be seen as a whole throughout the social work education |
| **Validation** |  |
| *Foster commitment to professional developments* | Should be integrated part of programs from the start. Important to foster from the beginning a commitment to ongoing continued professional development (CPD) |
| *Engage students in trade unions* | Make students aware of the purpose /function of professional bodies and their educational role (IASW\*) |
| *Engaging in practice research* | Encouraging and supporting students and qualified practitioners to engage in practice research to inform practice. To promote and develop research informed practice that will inform professional training |
| *Upgrade the importance of placement* | Practice placement is as important as a site of professional development and learning as the classroom |

\*Irish association of social workers

Table 4, Creative ideas that stimulate professional knowledge, results from workshop with social work teachers in Sweden and Ireland, 2023.

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| **Themes** | **What creative ideas are suggested that can further stimulate professional knowledge?** |
| *Action-oriented methods* | Use mobilization methods such as open space, photovoice and computer simulation |
| *Anchored emotional knowledge* | Use more senses, cultural expressions such as film, painting, creative arts, music, sports, nature and animals |
| *Network with former students* | Alumni students networking with current students |
| *Learning examinations* | Developing learning examinations where practical parts are included in the examinations |
| **Validation** |  |
| *Working directly with children* | Experimental learning with different materials in developing skills of practicing with children outside the social work area. Use of exhibitions to prompt discussions on the meaning of families |
| *Link to vulnerable groups with digital tools* | Use of technology to engage with vulnerable groups who may be otherwise be reluctant to engage, eg. Young people with mental health issues |
| *Find student’s confidence* | Encourage students to evaluate and investigate areas they are passionate about. |
| **Link social work with the society from both groups** | Find "living projects" and highlight current events in society. Focusing on links between social work and wider questions of sustainability |

Table 5, How does one learn professional knowledge, results from students' workshop in the last semester of the social work education, Sweden 2023.

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| **Social work students**  **last semester, 2023** | **How does one learn professional knowledge?** |
| *Through role models and willingness to learn* | From case reviews and in model learning, to be responsive and receptive to constructive critique from colleagues |
| *Interactions in and observation of social work* | Interaction and observation of conversations as well as in collaboration between different organizations and professions |
| *Challenge your-self* | Curiosity, interest, ambition and willingness to develop and challenge oneself |
| *Be a knowledge seeker* | Lectures, literature, theories and courses as well as seeking knowledge about the profession |
| *Self-awareness and knowledge of social problems* | Self-knowledge and life experience as well as experiences of own and/or others' social problems, and life difficulties |
| *Go outside the box* | Critical reflections: to ask difficult questions and dare to go outside the box and be flexible |
| *Practice gives skills* | Practice gives skill - documentation and routines for work as well as lived experience of difficult situations. |
| *Learn from own and others’ mistakes* | Learn from their own and others' mistakes (legal cases) as well as via the media; documentaries, podcasts, news |