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## **The Knowledge Triangle in Learning to Innovate with Families – Intellectual Output 2**

**The LIFE project partners:**

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**Comune di Cervia, Italy**

**Ljubljana University, Slovenia**

**NTNU, Trondheim, Norway**

**Municipality of Linköping, R & D Centre, Sweden**

## 1. Introduction

This paper outlines the significance of the so-called Knowledge Triangle in the LIFE project. The knowledge triangle (the interaction between practice-based knowledge, knowledge in training and education, and research-based knowledge) is a fundamental issue in the LIFE project, which sets out to develop new skills, competencies and training products and methodologies to enable social workers and related professionals to innovate and adopt more effective interventions in working with families experiencing multiple and complex difficulties.

Practitioners in services face challenges in assimilating, analyzing and applying their own practice knowledge as well as knowledge based on research. This can be a barrier to innovation, the more so because practice-based knowledge and research-based knowledge must be seen as *different forms of knowledge*. Practice-based knowledge develops in the context of a particular workplace and is usually shared between those who work there. It is *situated knowledge* that often enough is not fully articulated and not shared with outsiders, but it shapes the workplace and the perceptions and preferences of those who work there nonetheless. Workplaces that function entirely on the basis of practice-based knowledge will risk becoming resistant to change and will operate within the comfort zone of their practitioners.

Research-based knowledge is developed using *universal criteria for validity and is often assumed to be applicable in many settings or even in any setting*, but such knowledge is, as experience tells us, not always readily adaptable to a particular setting. Applying research-based knowledge in a service setting and achieving a proper balance between practitioners' experience and research-based knowledge takes time and requires respect for the culture of the workplace. The point is that some kind of balance between practice-based and research-based knowledge has to be sought.

On the other hand we need to be able to develop ways of training practitioners that are responsive to the needs and experiences of service users. Practitioners must be able to reflect upon their work with users of services in order to find improved ways of working. An important idea in the LIFE project is that trainees will benefit from open-ended reflection about their clients, their work and their workplace. This is especially important in a situation in which we want to develop innovation skills. If information provided by clients can be deployed and used in training, so much the better.

### Innovations and social work with Multi-Challenged Families

1. A central premise in the LIFE project is that multi-challenged families make severe demands upon professional helping services. Services for families that struggle quite often do not provide adequate help. The more disorganised and difficult the circumstances a family have to contend with, the less adequate the help provided. This seems to occur partly because services are specialised and have their own agendas, and do not necessarily cooperate well. But quite a lot of parents from multi-challenged families say that professionals do not listen properly. In addition families often have great difficulty in coping on a daily basis, and this makes it very difficult for family members to work toward the changes that professionals would like to see. The research in Norway and Sweden also revealed very serious deficits in follow-up. Some families were left to fend for themselves after an initial assessment had indicated serious concern but no direct emergency. Another issue is that professionals seem often resigned to operating within the system with all its limitations. The problems encountered in helping multi-challenged families are so complex that professionals often do not feel able to challenge the status quo.
2. The second premise in the project is that there is no definitive approach or method that will reliably help all families. Circumstances and situations for families are infinitely variable and conditions are changing all the time: those who want to help have to be adaptable and capable of critical thinking and reflection. *Reflection and a critical approach to practice is the main avenue to useful innovation*. But information and perceptions of those who use the service have to be brought into the discourse.

3. The point of the Knowledge Triangle is to emphasise that research and everyday practice *provide us with the information that we need to innovate and improve services*. The point of training is to help professionals assemble and use this information.

## **Some reflections on the LIFE program and the work with the Knowledge Triangle**

The work with the knowledge triangle focus on the interaction between: 1) practice-based knowledge, 2) knowledge in training and education, and 3) research-based knowledge and is a fundamental issue in the LIFE project. Given the background description presented in the LIFE Baseline Study of how the education systems are organized in the different countries, we know broadly how the situation is regarding point 2 in the Knowledge Triangle. Although the different partners in LIFE overall agree on the definition on multi-challenged families as used in the project, there is some variation on the perceived challenges social work with this group of clients can entail. As described in The Baseline Study:

1. The most important contrast in the baseline material is the impact of economic problems and austerity policies in Italy, Slovenia and Portugal, which contrasts with more stable economic conditions and stable or expanding social and health service budgets in Sweden and Norway.
2. Social workers and psychologists appear to be the professional groups most often involved in work with multi-challenged families.
3. There are very few directly relevant courses of study that could provide a good training for work with multi-challenged families available in the partner countries.
4. The partners perceive what they see as gaps in available training rather differently.
5. The most common types of policy change that have affected partners' work with vulnerable families are stricter rules for benefits and access to services, and legislative changes.
6. Generally unfavorable social and economic conditions as well as austerity threaten work with multi-challenged families for the partners in southern Europe. The Scandinavian partners emphasize organizational problems and the impact of managerial approaches that hamper social work.

The challenge is to integrate this knowledge with results from research and experiences from the LIFE training program that focus more on practice-based knowledge. Against this background, we intend to present research on multi-challenged families in this chapter, experiences from projects intended to develop social work with this group of clients and experiences on how to organize practical development work based on Knowledge Triangle.

## **2. Research on Social Work and Multi-Challenged Families**

In this section we will give a description of the research that preceded LIFE and greatly contributed to how the project were organized. In the following we will present some results from the projects The New Child Welfare (NCW) and Families in Social Services, carried out by the Norwegian and the Swedish partners respectively. Furthermore we will briefly present the Swedish project the Family Pilot, a project based on the Norwegian and Swedish partnership. The Slovenian partner from the Faculty of Social Work, University of Ljubljana, have brought input to LIFE in the form of experiences from the project "*Helping families in the community: co-creation of desired changes for reducing social exclusion and strengthening health*".

### **The New Child Welfare, Families in Social services and the Family Pilot**

The Norwegian national research project The New Child Welfare (2007 – 2012) (Clifford, Fauske, Lichtwarck & Marthinsen, 2015) and the Swedish project Families in Social Services (2009 – 2013) (Davidson & Bredmar, 2012; Bredmar, Davidson, Leinhard & Petersson, 2014) aimed overall to increase the knowledge of families' contacts with social service and their living conditions. The projects also aimed to increase knowledge about how families experience the encounter with the social service and the services they received. These two projects were carried out with the same design to enable comparative studies and included a total of 917 families who had contact with the social services focusing on children and adolescents' situation. Both projects included a survey based interview with

a representative sample of parents as well as a survey of social workers as well as in-depth interviews with a smaller sample of parents, children and social workers.

The theoretical framework was based on theories of social capital, research on social work and its conditions and what vulnerability can mean in a changing welfare state (Clifford, Fauske, Lichtwarck & Marthinsen, 2015; Davidson & Bredmar, 2012; Bredmar, Davidson, Leinhard & Petersson, 2014). In the analysis of a sub sample of the families with the most complex situation, different patterns were crystallized around the parents' stories about their experiences and their life situation. These experiences formed the basis for the categorization of different family types. The results showed that there was a clear pattern in terms of family type, problem, but also of respondents' experiences of contacts with the social services and the effects of the help they received. The five family types were named:

1. Traumatic events in the parent's own childhood
2. Traumatic events in adulthood
3. Previous long-term abuse
4. Problems with the child at puberty
5. The child's disability

The family types that were characterized by traumatic events, in the parent's childhood or adulthood, or prior long-term abuse, exhibit some common features (i.e. family type 1, 2 and 3). For example, the parents have problems regarding their own physical and mental health, the majority are single and have a strained economy and the parents are unemployed and outside of the labor market. Especially with regard to those who themselves have had a difficult upbringing in homes with abuse and lack of parental care, where they as children have been subjected to efforts from the social services. In general, these parents have weak social networks and when there is a network of family and friends it does not mean any relief to their life situation. It is worth mentioning that these families also often have problems related to the children's social situation and health. It is these family types that are categorized as multi-challenged families.

In the family types where the problems are confined to problems with children at puberty or children with disabilities, the living conditions and the life situation are noticeably different (i.e. family type 4 and 5). Here, parents are more anchored in the labor market with permanent employment, they have higher education, better financial resources and a functioning social network that also provides relief for the children, giving parents time to recover.

Furthermore, the analysis shows a clear pattern of how the parents perceive the social services and the help they have received. Multi-challenged families have a more negative view compared to families where the needs and problems are more limited. In the multi-challenged families the parents themselves have also received a greater degree of support, the children are to a greater extent placed, the support are perceived to help in a lesser extent and the parents continue to want more support for both adults and children.

The analysis also shows that multi-challenged families lack trust in their contact with the social services. If the families have experienced that the social service's efforts have led to deterioration, then they have no confidence that the social service wants them well. These families also have low expectations that their financial situation will improve or that they will get a job. The families who have a stronger social situation, better economy, stronger networks and a connection to working life, usually have better experiences of the social service's efforts and actions. These families, which often consists of two adults, where at least one has employment, has a relatively good economy and their life situation is perceived as more predictable and stable. Their stories show that they have faith in both the social service and themselves as parents, which can be reflected in the descriptions of the social service which are often positive. These families have more in common with social service employees in terms of living conditions, finance and work.

The conclusion is that the most vulnerable families, that is, the families with the largest and most complex needs and with the smallest resources, are those who feel they have been least helped by the efforts of social services. An implication of this is that the social service's work with multi-challenged families need to be able to consider the family's problems from a more holistic perspective, which also includes structural factors in relation to the family's social capital, and to be able to choose and coordinate support efforts in a better way.

Furthermore, the organizational specialization in the social services, which can be characterized by many and weakly coordinated efforts and contacts that the client must manage, has negative consequences for this group of clients. The specialization contributes to fragmentation of the social services in terms of responsibilities and tasks which makes the social services themselves complex.

The Swedish researcher Grell (2016) has applied complexity theory to analyze the interaction between the social service and its clients. Grell describes and analyzes the consequences that an organizational specialized social service can have for clients with complex needs (i.e. multi-challenged families). The conclusions show that the organizational specialization in the social service has negative consequences for this group of clients. The specialization contributes to fragmentation of the social service in terms of responsibilities and tasks that become difficult to handle for the clients. Based on Grell (2016) this can be summarized as follows:

- Clients have difficulties in understanding and orient themselves in their contacts with social services as well as finding the help they need.
- Clients are confronted by a variety of confusing parallel contacts, which consume their time and energy.
- There is an unclear division in social services of responsibilities, both between different units and between different social workers.
- There is a paradox in social services as there are both overlaps and gaps in the help provided
- The clients need to perform a balancing act in order to managing intricately interconnected interventions from several different actors within social services, where the nature of each unit's intervention ranges from purely voluntary to interventions of more or less compelling character
- Clients have difficulties in establishing close, helping relationships with individual social workers

Grell (2016) points out that these conclusions are found in international as well as in Swedish studies. Grell further argues that complexity theory can be used to analyze the relationship/ tension between the organizational conditions in the social service and the clients' living conditions. He believes that an organizational specialized social service is primarily suitable for dealing with simple, or to some extent complicated problems, which is true of many of the problems handled by social services (i.e. family type 4 and 5). The specialized and fragmented social services, with overlapping organizational units, find it more difficult to deal with complex problems where the outcome of interventions is more difficult to predict and where the specialization can become counterproductive. Grell (2016: 50) describes it as: "In unfavorable cases, the client ends up in a professional crossfire where various actors within social services are pushing their own respective agendas too much." The conclusion will be to change perspectives and to consider the client as an agent, and who just like the social worker, is seen as a subject, an acting individual. And to see the organizational specialization and its consequences from a client perspective.

### **Implications for Social Work with Multi-Challenged Families**

Against the background of the results obtained in the research projects Families in the Social Services and The New Child Welfare Service, some conclusions and suggestions can be made on how social work with multi-challenged families can be developed (Bredmar, Davidson, Leinhard & Petersson, 2014; Clifford, Fauske, Lichtwarck & Marthinsen, 2015). In this context, the focus is also on the organization of social services.

A central point of departure for these changes should be a conscious effort to start from the family's perspective, rather than just the individual child or parent. This, in turn, means adopting a holistic

perspective on the family's needs and situation, but without losing focus on the individuals in the family. A holistic perspective, where the explanatory value of contextual and socio-economic factors is taken into account, also leads to questions relating to coordination of different actors' efforts and how to consider the family as a unit in a wider context.

- A holistic approach to working with the family.
- Co-creation of solutions with the family, valuing their perceptions. This contrasts with much current practice which tends to assume the families are fundamentally dysfunctional and that their perceptions are therefore of little value.
- The need for a multi-disciplinary approach to address the fragmented nature of multiple professional interventions.
- Case Management as part of this and understanding the challenge that this represents to professional and management hierarchies.
- Understanding innovation in social work in a family environment.
- Identifying areas with potential for change in the family situation and prioritizing interventions accordingly (being proactive rather than reactive).
- Practical Skills and Solutions required to implement innovation - Generic Skills e.g. analyzing needs of families, reflection on theory and practice, problem solving, teamwork, communication.

The development proposals outlined above require structural changes and priorities at the organizational level and are therefore not possible to implement by individual professionals at the local operational level, no matter how good the knowledge and the intentions. This also means strengthening a holistic perspective in the social service's work with families and individuals with complex needs - a holistic perspective that also means being able to take into account the social and cultural capital of families in relation to a complex welfare system.

## **The Family Pilot – a project to develop working methods in social work with families with complex needs**

### **Background**

The project was organized in the form of a social investment fund in Linköping municipality with the aim to develop better and earlier support for children, young people and their parents and to prevent placements and thus reduce costs for the municipality (Davidsson et al, 2017a; Davidsson, 2017b). The project started in August 2014 and continued until July 2017. The need for development work derives from descriptions from several different areas of activity and from results from the R & D project "Families in Social Services" (Davidson & Bredmar, 2012; Bredmar, Davidson, Leinhard & Petersson, 2014) and the Norwegian national research project The New Child Welfare (Clifford, Fauske, Lichtwarck & Marthinsen, 2015). In this context, the term "families with complex needs" is introduced (i.e. multi-challenged families which are characterized by unemployment, bad economy, physical and/or mental health problems, poor network, and problems at school for the children).

The development work in the project was cross-sectoral and involved the social services, school and job training and is characterized by a holistic approach. The support for the families was based on the needs of the families and would include: the new role of Family Pilot, school support, and support for work or education for the parents.

*The project was expected to produce results and effects on three levels:*

- **Family level** (effects in terms of individual and group impact)
- **Process and method level** (working methods, knowledge creation, knowledge use and innovations)
- **Structural level** (interaction between involved organizations, activities)

*The goal was to support families to improve:*

- The everyday situation at home
- The situation at school for the children
- Leisure activities for the children

- Work or education for parents

In the project, a team comprising 2 project managers, 3 Family Pilots and 5 coordinators were organized. The Family Pilot's task was to work from a holistic perspective and in close collaboration with the family to form an understanding of the family's situation and to represent the family. The coordinators' task was to coordinate the work with social services, school and the Job center. The project included 18 families of a total of 61 people (26 adults and 35 children) divided into 20 households. All families met the criteria for participation in the project, which meant contact with social services, children in elementary school and diagnosed neuropsychiatric disability in the family.

*The Family Pilot's work model can be summarized as follows:*

- The work method is flexible in terms of time, location, working methods and tasks
- Family Pilots see the family as a whole, working on the family's assignment, and spend a great deal of time with the families
- Family Pilots can remit to social support but do not work specifically with treatment
- Family Pilots coordinate and interact with other activities and can provide families with advice, interpretation and "translation" of documents and support during crisis
- Family Pilots work as team combining different skills and experiences and has knowledge of society, social services, the rights of the family and can give "legitimacy" to the family
- The working method of the Family Pilots is compensatory
- Family Pilots document and follow up but do not make formal assessments

The project was evaluated by the R & D Center focusing on three levels, namely: Family, Process and Method, and Structural Level. In the data collection, quantitative and qualitative information was combined in the form of interviews with parents (pre- and post-measurement), qualitative interviews with parents and children, interviews and focus groups with participants in the project, logbooks from the project group and records of the families' situation regarding interventions and contacts and statistics about the children's absence in school. The evaluation also includes a theoretical framework with three focuses, namely: International Research Discourse - Social Child Welfare, Social Work and Society; Case management and social work in families with complex needs; as well as neuropsychiatric disabilities.

## **Results**

### *Family Pilot's work model*

- The work model of the Family Pilot is successful in relation to families with complex needs regarding the families' everyday situation, children's schooling, children's leisure time and parents' employment
- The work model is flexible in terms of time, place, working methods and tasks
- Family Pilots consider the family as a whole, work on the family's "mission", and work extensively with the families
- The working method is compensatory

### *Overall*

- The families' contacts with social services change and become more functional and effective
- Costs for the social services are reduced and placements of children are avoided
- Parents go from unemployment to daily activities / work training, work and studies
- The school situation for children and young people is improved (costs increase)
- Families receive better and more adapted health care (increasing)
- Overall, parents change their perception of social services (in the broad sense) from negative to VERY POSITIVE (Family Pilots).

The outcome can be interpreted as having greatly reduced the complexity of the family's life situation. The role of Family Pilot involves solving complex problems, i.e. to be able to find unique solutions for each family and individual. In this context, it is important to have a holistic view not only of the family's complex situation but also of society and especially the social services. A cautious conclusion is that these families are probably in need of long-term, compensatory support, since the problems related to the neuropsychiatric disabilities cannot be cured. Against this background, the working method of

the Family Pilot should be applicable to other families in the same situation. It is likely that families with complex needs but who do not have neuropsychiatric disabilities may benefit from a Family Pilot and that the help for these families can then be phased out.

Has the project succeeded in reducing complexity in the social services? Here the answer is not quite clear. The function of the Family Pilot unit in the project can be said to be "outside" of the regular social services and rather to complement it. The Family Pilot unit is a "filter", a bridge between families and social services and school. It is this filter that reduces the complexity by sorting, compensating and bridging the gap. To some extent, social services and school have changed as a consequence of the project. However, the organization, both within the social service and between social service, school, healthcare, employment services etc., is still largely divided into several parallel subdivisions. In order to fundamentally reduce the complexity of the welfare system, more radical organizational changes are required.

### **Helping families in the community: co-creation of desired changes for reducing social exclusion and strengthening health**

In February 2015 the Faculty of Social Work (hereinafter: FSW), University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, launched the project "*Helping families in the community: co-creation of desired changes for reducing social exclusion and strengthening health*", which was carried out within the framework of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014, with the participation of the University of Ljubljana (the FSW, the Faculty of Sport and the Faculty of Health Sciences), together with partners - NTNU, Trondheim, Norway and the Association of Friends of Youth Moste-Polje (AFY). The objectives of the project was to co-create changes with family members in order to reduce health inequalities, create a model of helping families in a community and train professionals for work in the areas of the participating faculties.

The beginnings of the development of the project date back to 2013 and the start of implementation of the Social Work with Families master's programme at the FSW. At the time, FSW were looking for ways to support students who had already completed the Social work programme at the graduate level, in their professional and personal growth, and which would represent new, not yet established ways of learning. At the same time, the situation in Slovenia, where many families faced poverty and related problems due to the overall social crisis, contributed to the fact that FSW wanted to support people who often face social exclusion by directly collaborating with families. FSW also experienced the need for the continuous development of knowledge in the field of social work with families. In the project, students who had completed undergraduate education at the FSW, independently entered into processes of support and help to multi-challenged families. One family collaborated with one student who visited the family independently in their home, and together with the family members co-created desired outcomes in the working relationship and an individual working project of help (hereinafter: IWPH). During the completion of the practical work, students received intensive, continuous support from small mentoring groups and had the opportunity to consult with a mentor at the faculty individually and on a regular basis.

#### **Model of help to Multi-Challenged Families**

Students drew inspiration from the draft model, which was created by researchers before the commencement of the fieldwork, and was upgraded based on experiences gained during the collaboration with multi-challenged families. Figure 1, the flow chart shows a model briefly described in the continuation.



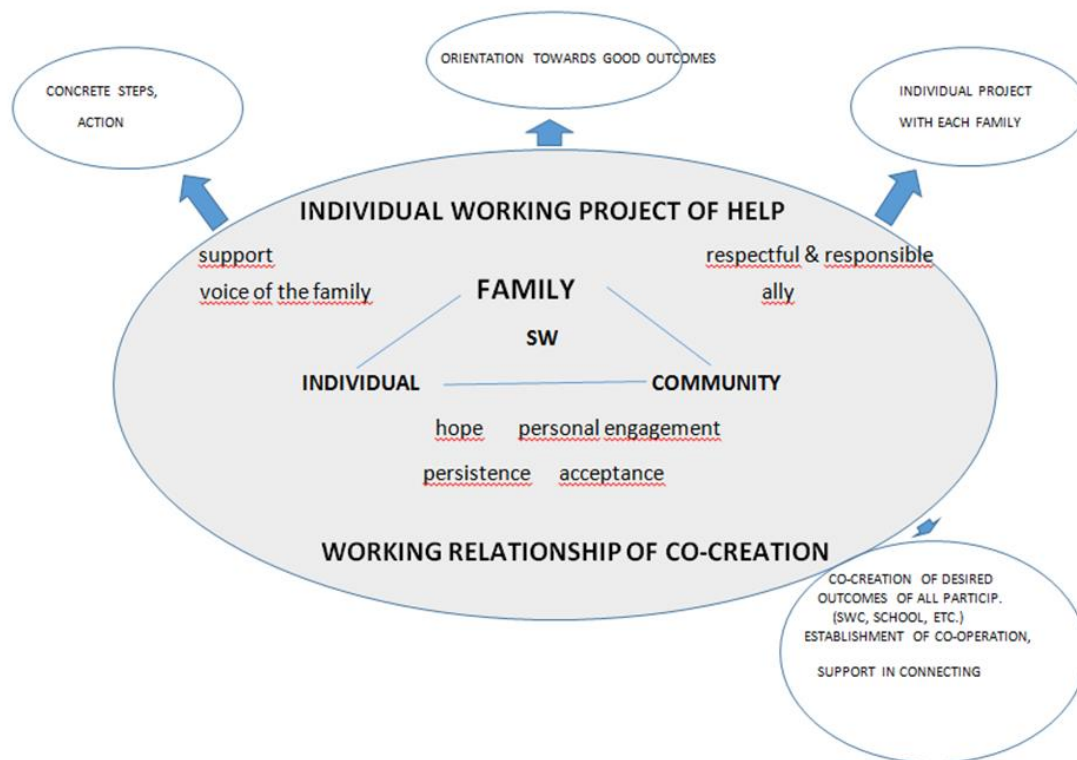


Figure 1. Model of Collaborative Processes of Social Work with Families in the Community

The ultimate objective of collaboration with a family in the community is to establish and maintain a co-creative working relationship, and the IWPH. A social worker must move from personal to relational tasks with different family members within an individual conversation and the whole process.

Effective projects of help in social work extend from families to the community. Help to families in the community is considered as help to families, which is implemented in people's homes, i.e. in the community where a family lives. The IWPH also involve other resources in a community that support a family on their way to desired changes (e.g. school, centre for social work, charitable organisations, relatives, neighbours). In this way the problems of frequent dispersal of help can be overcome. The social worker is supposed to be an appreciative and accountable ally. It is important that they enter into the collaboration with personal vigour in a way that helps reshape the despair, a frequent companion of families, into hope. In IWPH the voice of the family and each family member is taken into account, and are oriented to a good outcome, to support people in realising concrete steps that can bring about desired changes.

## Research

### **Population and sampling**

The research population were multi-challenged families in Slovenia. The sample for the research encompasses families who were involved in the project. The AFY Moste Polje<sup>1</sup> (24 families) and various CSWs in Slovenia (4 families) selected families, which according to them needed additional help, like what we have conceived for the project, and submitted to us a list of families that were invited to collaborate. The project involved 28 families, of which six families prematurely ended the collaboration with students for various reasons (incorrect information about what collaboration in the project means, employment of a family member, etc.). Therefore, during the academic year 2015/16, students continuously collaborated with 22 families.

<sup>1</sup> The non-governmental organisation, which, inter alia, provides material assistance to the needy.

### ***Research Method and Sources of Data***

The project was an action research project, which means that the focus was on the work, the process of support and help to families in a community and support for students in their independent work with families. In this project, processes of work were also studied in order to be able to answer the question of how to work in a community in the co-creative working relationship with families that face numerous challenges, and how to support students in practical learning. For recording the work process within the framework of the project, various forms were designed.

### ***Data analysis***

The analysis of the material was carried out according to the method of qualitative analysis. We analyzed records of meetings with families, expectations of family members, the interim and final evaluation, final in-depth interviews with families, students' final papers, and focus groups with the students.

### **Key results**

#### ***Competence of Professionals Working with Multi-Challenged Families:***

- The need to support professionals to develop their own professional working frame with the help of reflexive dialogue to integrate theoretical knowledge and practical experiences.
- Future social workers need support to withstand the uncertainty that is always part of the processes of support and help, and to develop their professional theoretical framework for more certainty. Mentoring support for reflexive learning through independent work in practice is the key starting point. Finding the balance between the certainty that closes off the space for collaboration with people but means working from a position of power, and complete uncertainty where we depend on a good heart and common sense, is the art of social work education, work in practice and the development of new knowledge.
- It is important that students experience concepts they are learning about. This should be done also within the mentoring group (e.g. if we are teaching students, how to establish a working relationship with families, mentor is using this concept, when leading the group).

#### ***Model of Collaborative Processes of Social Work with Families in the Community:***

- Families verbalised the related experience with concepts such as: new experience, trust (established only on the basis of good experience in the relationship), good contact, collaboration, the method of keeping up the conversation, open space for discussion, co-creation of solutions, personal relationship, surpassing official relationship, time for collaboration, connectivity, persistence, that a social worker does not give up.
- The working relationship and the IWPH contribute to the co-creation of the desired outcomes and strengthen family resilience. In a co-creative working relationship, all of the participants contribute to solutions, while the social worker is responsible for leading the process of help and creating a safe space for collaboration. A good outcome is one that is co-created with all participants and derives from principle of multiple, all-sided gain, strengthening the resilience of participants in the IWPH.
- In social work, it is essential that agreements co-created with people are translated into concrete steps. In the IWPH, we translate them into action, into acts that realise agreements. For families in the project, the student's help with concrete steps to achieve desired changes was a significant new experience (e.g. filling out forms, help with learning, and conversation with the mayor).
- When the social worker joins the family with a positive attitude, this attitude is internalized by family members. As an appreciative and accountable ally, the social worker brings new hope to the family, acting as a motivation to overcome distress. The presence of a social worker who persists in a joint project even in the case of failure represents an important new experience for the family. Only this can overcome the despair that is a common companion of people in difficult life situations, including multi-challenged families.
- Even in families where it seems that risks predominate in relation to protective factors, collaboration with the family can always highlight many resources. Although families are resilient, they sometimes need an interlocutor to help them recognize and strengthen that resilience. On the first level, family resilience is strengthened through the experience of collaborating in a co-creative working relationship when solving a complex psychosocial issue. It is also increased on the second level, when contributing to the increased visibility of family processes and exploring the desired changes in relationships. The

experience of good school performance, which we are obliged to ensure for children, strengthens the child's resilience and the resilience of the entire family.

- Life in poverty and related unfavorable circumstances should not define children's life stories. The experience of good school performance is an important protective factor in a child's life. Good school performance is the strongest predictor of a child's future. Knowing this, adults are obliged to enable good school performance for every child. Parents who face many stresses want to help their children and support them in improving school performance, but they often need assistance. The co-creative working relationship and the IWPH, co-created by all of the participants, support children and parents, enabling them to fulfil their desire for success. The project needs to connect resources in the community and to conceive a joint project. The child's role as an expert on experience whose voice is protected and appreciated is important for collaboration.
- Multi-challenged families have answers on what kind of social work they need; we only have to make space for them to be heard. The survey results support the idea that it is necessary to return social work back into the community where people live. The context of helping families in their homes is an opportunity to get to know family members on an everyday human level. Working at home helps discover family resources when searching for answers to the challenges of life circumstances. Social work with families at home is no longer an abstract idea, but is becoming an everyday practice. We believe that this is the answer to the question of how to develop social work in the future.

### Social Innovations with Multi-Challenged Families in relation to the Knowledge Triangle – the Portuguese case

The Portuguese partner in LIFE have developed and adapted the Knowledge Triangle (KT) as a conceptual tool for linking together Research, Education and Innovation. The model comprises processes on three sides and orchestration tools at its heart. In order to achieve this APCC worked together with 3 Faculties of Social Work - ISCTE –IUL<sup>2</sup>, FPCE-UC<sup>3</sup> and ISMT<sup>4</sup>. The model is based in the reflexive approach and the collaborative production of new knowledge (Ferreira, Amaro, Pena & Alvarez-Pérez, 2017).

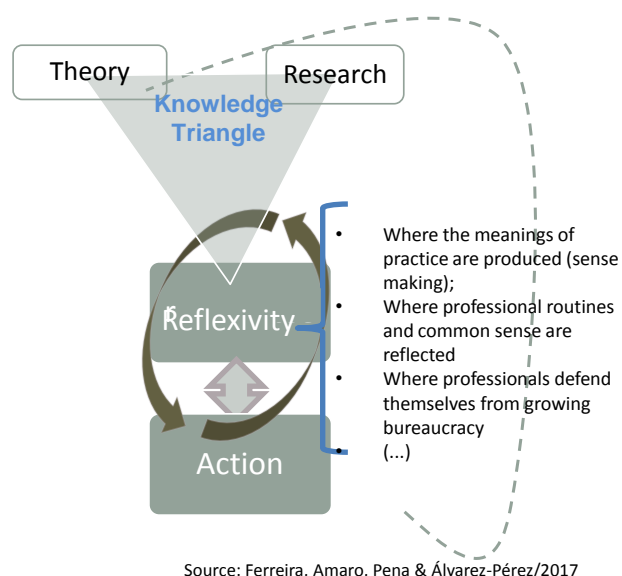


Figure 2. The Knowledge Triangle in practice – the Portuguese case.

<sup>2</sup> ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

<sup>3</sup> FPCE-UC – Psychology and Education Sciences – University of Coimbra

<sup>4</sup> ISMT – Instituto Superior Miguel Torga

The Universities were chosen because they possess excellent assets that can contribute to the training pilot in the context of the Knowledge Triangle. They are able to detect weak signals, potentialities to be explored by providing information based on research and related to topics of discussions, critical analysis, suggestions and joint validation of decisions within the scope of the project and so to help professionals to more effectively develop their strategies, as social workers are confronted with at an earlier stage of LIFE. By implementing the Knowledge Triangle from the beginning, education and discussion of practices contributes more strongly to focus on innovation with multi-challenged family aspects. The Forum of Stakeholders is also an important part of the model. In the model the Stakeholder forum operates in a multidisciplinary, critical friend and dialogue-oriented way allowing all participants collaborating in the pilot learning<sup>5</sup>. This cooperation helps to balance practice-based results with the need for new research-based knowledge and for new and better concepts for using both existing and new knowledge.

In the APCC Coimbra context, the Knowledge Triangle functions as a platform for learning, producing new knowledge, and co-creating actionable ideas for solving complex challenges of families and the practice of Social Work (Living Lab). Micro innovations were chosen in order to analyze the practice based knowledge obtained from the individual social workers work to think about and experiment with new solutions with families.

Conceptually, the Knowledge Triangle combines practice-based knowledge, education and innovation to enhance renewal capabilities and efficiency of interventions with multi-challenged families. The goal was to break the borders between traditional practices and create synergy by integrating teachers, researchers and social workers to think, reflect and work together. Thus Knowledge Triangle (Living Lab) experience acts as:

- Contributors of innovation methodologies: learning, research and enriching social work interaction
- Content contributor: APCC produces knowledge, solutions and innovation based on real-life needs and complex challenges of multi-challenged families
- Driver of change: whole concept as an operational mode is a driving force
- Booster for innovation culture of organization

In its simplest form, APCC Knowledge Triangle based concept consists of three basic elements:

1. Concrete Experience of multi-challenged families (practice based knowledge, research-based knowledge)
2. Ongoing training for updating and deepening of the necessary knowledge for professionals (knowledge in training and education)
3. Knowledge Production with process of reflectivity which promote the innovation process and its impact in MCF and professionals

The contextual dynamics of families was the fundamental basis of Portuguese pilot, and these processes were under continuous discuss & reflection concerning (a) the patterns and dynamics of schools of thought and (b) methods for accelerating contextual evolution of social work intervention. This approach ensures that pilot findings were easily translated into improved interventions with multi-challenged families, updated LIFE core content and new learning methodologies.

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<sup>5</sup> The team was supported by multiform and timely facilitation. 1 coordinator, 5 social workers and 4 Professors of Social Work (PhD) represented field experts, researchers, and professionals from linking innovation and families facing multiple problems. The sessions has given the opportunity to reflect critically on working methods normally taken for granted, offering interesting insights and opening up wide spaces for reflection.

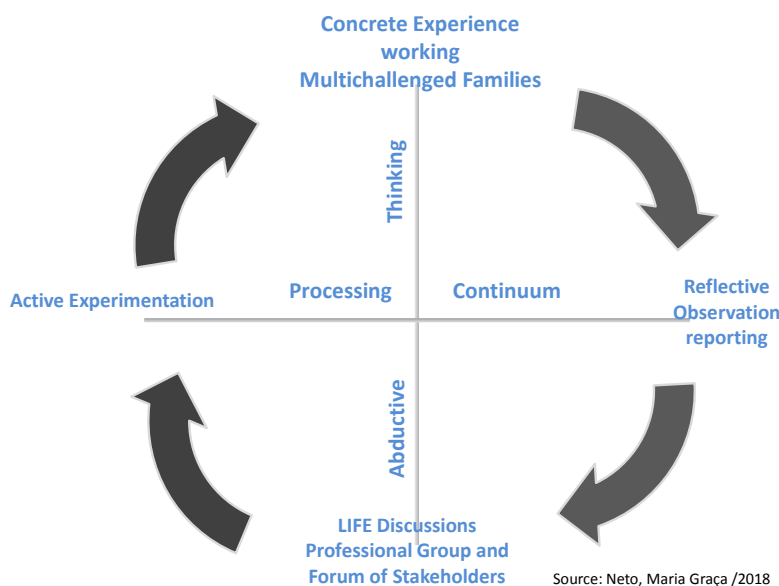


Figure 3. The Knowledge Triangle in Practice.

Learning outcomes are strengthened by collective, reflective and introspective learning processes. Participants benefit from the inspiring cognitive elements of the process. All educational activities are to be adjusted to produce focused results, such as the quality of families' life.

Coordination and facilitation support collaborative sense making and the generation of common purposes over the process. This will make for a supportive leadership process and an accelerator for both sides – social intervention and educational transition.

### 3. Conclusions

In this paper we have described the Knowledge Triangle and its function in LIFE. The ambition has been to shed light on the dynamics between the three aspects of the Knowledge Triangle, namely 1) practice-based knowledge, 2) knowledge in training and education, and 3) research-based knowledge. The research projects The New Child Welfare and Families in Social Services have contributed to the research-based knowledge about multi-challenged families. From the projects Family Pilot and the Co-creation project of FSW comes knowledge that also sheds light on practice-based knowledge of social work with multi-challenged families, and with regard to FSW also knowledge of the connection to education. And from APCC, finally, comes inspiration on how research-based, practice-based knowledge and training of professionals can be integrated and organized. All in all, this provides an opportunity to build a platform for the next step in LIFE, namely the Innovation Skills Development Program (IOP3) and by extension the Innovation Toolkit (IOP4).

Work on developing the Knowledge Triangle in the LIFE project should be seen as a process rather than a finished product. Practical knowledge creation needs stimulus for development and innovations, a critical perspective and scientific approach, support for implementation, systematic follow-up and evaluation, development of a learning organization and interaction with surrounding actors.

The participants in the training program must have enough scope to try out new and alternative solutions and to design alternative action strategies and solutions. Employee driven innovations assumes access to research-based knowledge to support the understanding and evaluation of the problems and phenomena that occur in everyday work. This requires ongoing dialogue between

practitioners and researchers. Furthermore, the relationship between research and practitioners based on an interactive design must balance a clear division of roles with an equal relationship where experience-based and scientific knowledge can enrich each other.

The national teams need to support the participants in the training program so that the development of practice-based knowledge is given optimal conditions and also documented and reported in such a way that it provides a good basis for the process of creating a Knowledge Triangle.

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