

## **A communal knowledge base for social work education**

Dr. Ed de Jonge,  
Utrecht University of Applied Sciences  
[Ed.deJonge@hu.nl](mailto:Ed.deJonge@hu.nl)

Dr. Marijke van Bommel,  
HAN University of Applied Sciences  
[M.vanBommel@Han.nl](mailto:M.vanBommel@Han.nl)

Jan-Willem Bruins MSc.  
Windesheim University of Applied Sciences  
[JW.Bruins@windesheim.nl](mailto:JW.Bruins@windesheim.nl)

Dr. Raymond Kloppenburg (contributor)  
Utrecht University of Applied Sciences  
[Raymond.Kloppenburg@hu.nl](mailto:Raymond.Kloppenburg@hu.nl)

Theme 2 Development of curriculum and course contents in social work

Workshop  
Language: English  
Equipment: Power Point

The Netherlands, like other Western European countries, has been developing and implementing major welfare state reforms. The commonly used term in The Netherlands to refer to these reforms is “participatory society”, but its impact and outcome is quite similar to those of the big society agenda. According to Winsemius and Steyaert (2015), this agenda is characterized by the transfer of responsibility for social and health services to local communities, the reform of public services in favour of voluntary organizations, and the promotion of a more active involvement of citizens.

The transition leads also to a reappraisal of the role of social work. One of the conclusions is that the complexity and unpredictability of social problems in society require reflective social professionals supported by a solid knowledge base. A body of knowledge that contributes (a) to the sustainable improvement of the quality of social work, and (b) to a strong profile and position of social work and social work education.

The Dutch association of schools of social work started a project in order to develop a shared body of knowledge for the core curriculum of all social work education in the Netherlands. The project group approached educators of universities of applied sciences, researchers of knowledge centres and practitioners of social work organizations, and used the Delphi-method to define, demarcate and design the structure of the body of knowledge and ultimately to fill it with content. The body of knowledge had to be practice based, science based, applicable in education and sustainable for the future. The project resulted in a body of knowledge which will be implemented by all Dutch schools for social work.

A model was constructed consisting of seven building blocks, partly based on the categorization of Malcolm Payne of social work theories in what social work is, how to do social work and the service users of social work. The model was completed with building blocks about: social work organizations and social policy; the historical and societal background of social work; social work research and innovation, and finally professionalization of social work. Each building block consists of three themes, each theme containing several topics.

The development and construction of the body of knowledge also raises questions. For example: epistemological questions about the existence of a knowledge base apart from social work practice, the tension between generalised and indigenous knowledge, the inclusion of tacit knowledge in education. Also a discussion started about the extent to which schools for social work education are free to develop their own body of knowledge related to their mission and vision.

We think the debate about a generic body of knowledge in social work education is not exclusively Dutch and the exchange of ideas and practices can be helpful to improve social work education in Europe. During the workshop an introduction of the Dutch model of the body of knowledge will be presented followed by questions and statements concerning the epistemological and educational debate as mentioned above. The attendants will be invited to discuss in small groups and present their opinion and suggestions for the further development of the knowledge base in social work education. Opportunities for further cooperation on this topic within a European network will be invested.