

How sociology, moral philosophy and the new social studies of childhood challenge and might contribute to development of social work practice with children

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Through the last three decades, the new social studies has wrested from the development psychological its monopoly on knowledge and research about children and childhood. Nevertheless, social work practice with children remains mainly informed by development psychology. Our presentation address how sociology, moral philosophy and the insights from the new social studies of childhood can facilitate critical reflectiveness, responsiveness and recognition in the field of social work with children.

The presentation will be based on the newly started project 'Deviation as a potential resource' taking its starting point from the following observations: Neglected children often develop in a way which deviates from the norm of 'normal development'. Thus, they can develop unique characteristics such as responsibility, reflexivity and the ability to read other persons' needs, albeit also disorders such as anxiety, loneliness and self-hatred. However, it is extremely rare that the qualities, which these children have developed, are recognized as competencies and supported as resources. Instead, they are regarded as symptoms of "mal-development", that has to be compensated and countered, before the child can take the route of a 'healthy' and 'normal' development. Normality is constructed as the ultimate and most ambitious goal, albeit this goal is often experienced as being unrealistic and too ambitious. The result is downgrading of the expectations and experiences of defeat (both children and the professionals) and not being recognized (especially the children). In our presentation, we argue, that the goal of normality - rather than too ambitious – is mistaken.

The presentation starts with an outline of how sociological theory and insights from the new social studies challenge the social work theories informed by development psychology, including the goal of normality, and through this make basis for a more critical reflective practice. Next, we argue that though philosophical and theoretical based critical reflections over practice and the taken-for-granted theories and goals are crucial to develop a more responsive and recognizing practice, such reflections also risk leaving social workers in paralysis. To overcome this, we suggest different methods of creative thinking. These methods can serve to develop ideas and examples in cooperation with the children categorized as deviant and the social workers themselves of how social workers can deal with the deviation of these children in a more creative, responsive and recognizing manner. However, such ideas and examples should be used only as inspiration rather

than as 'new generalized methods'. Otherwise the responsiveness of social work will fail. Therefore we suggest integrating the 'creative-thinking-methods self in social work practice.

In the project 'Deviation as a potential resource', these thoughts makes basis for a new social work method, which will be taught and implemented in two residential homes for children and the department of foster care in to case municipalities. However the project itself also offers a critical view on these ideas: Firstly through a research workshop in which invited researchers from different disciplines, including development psychology, will be asked to take on the role of 'devils' advocate'; secondly through ongoing and systematic accumulation of negative as well as positive experiences with the method.

Based on the above outlined presentation of our ideas and preliminary experiences from the project, we will set the stage for a discussion on the opportunities and challenges in taking such an approach to research and development of social work with children.