

# Learning together: Teaching practice research through partnerships with field educators, social work communities and university

ESWRA SIG: Social Work Practice Research

8th of November

Laura Yliruka, Dr., docent UEF (PR in social work)  
Development manager  
The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare

Based on:

- Yliruka & Heinonen & Tapola-Haapala & Isokuortti (2020) Teaching practice research through partnerships with field educators, social work communities and university. Routledge Handbook of Practice Research.
- Satka, Kääriäinen & Yliruka (2016) Teaching Social Work Practice Research to Enhance Research-Minded Expertise. Journal of Teaching in Social Work (36), 84-101.



# Presentation

- The presentation will discuss about the practice research as a way for mutual, contextual learning in partnership between different stakeholders.
- **Case:** Co-learning about systemic social work model in the context of Helsinki.
- Based on my role both as a PR teacher (Uni. of Helsinki) and a national actor (development manager in the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare; national co-ordinator of the SPM-model in Finland →2022).

# The themes of the presentation

1. The background of the PR model
2. The Praxis-model; PR-course, web of mutual learning
3. Trialogical learning model
4. Case: thematic PR groups of SPM model.
5. Outcomes

A magnifying glass is positioned over a document. The lens is focused on the words "Practice Work" written in a cursive font. The background is a warm, brownish-orange color, suggesting a desk or a book cover. The magnifying glass has a dark frame and a light-colored handle.

## Background for the birth of the Finnish model

- The need for clinical (practical) training as an element in social work university education was suggested and widely discussed since 1972.
- 1986-86 City and University of Helsinki had a joint research program '*Social worker as knowledge producer*' with the aim to gain practice-based knowledge for a social political strategy of the City (1989).
- It was followed by the joint planning of the Heikki Waris Institute 2000-2001 for urban social work.
- The Praxis started in 2003 → still going on.
- Heikki Waris Institute and Matilda Wrede Institute formed Helsinki Practice Research Centre:  
<https://www.helsinki.fi/en/networks/helsinki-practice-research-centre>

# Mutual interests behind Heikki Waris institute & Praksis in 2000 (Kananaja 2010)

- University: need for a new structure which could intermediate in the social relations of research, teaching and social work practices.
- City: need for knowledge and innovative interventions in urban social issues; need for skillful practitioners.
- Social work profession: need for new methods for transforming urban social work practices.

# Web of collaboration in social work education



# How does Praxis cross the Boundary between education and training?

1. Practice courses (5) are organised together with university teachers & social work agencies & Socca's Praxis network & HPRC.
2. *Triological learning* (Paavola et al. 2012) is enhanced in different processes.
3. Also social workers participate in co-production processes that transform both education and practice itself.
4. Processes enhance continuous learning in social work organisations.
5. Outcomes both material - research reports, teaching material, academic articles and immaterial – “breathing”, dynamic and innovative organisations and its' actors. Outcomes by 'research minded' social work , see:
  - Reports of PR:  
[https://www.socca.fi/kehittamishankkeet\\_ja\\_verkostot/yliopistoyhteisty\\_ja\\_praxis/opiskelijoiden\\_kaytantotutkimuksia](https://www.socca.fi/kehittamishankkeet_ja_verkostot/yliopistoyhteisty_ja_praxis/opiskelijoiden_kaytantotutkimuksia)
  - Praxis thematic developmental processes:  
[https://www.socca.fi/kehittamishankkeet\\_ja\\_verkostot/yliopistoyhteisty\\_ja\\_praxis/aiempaa\\_kehittamista](https://www.socca.fi/kehittamishankkeet_ja_verkostot/yliopistoyhteisty_ja_praxis/aiempaa_kehittamista)



# How is practice research taught at the University of Helsinki?



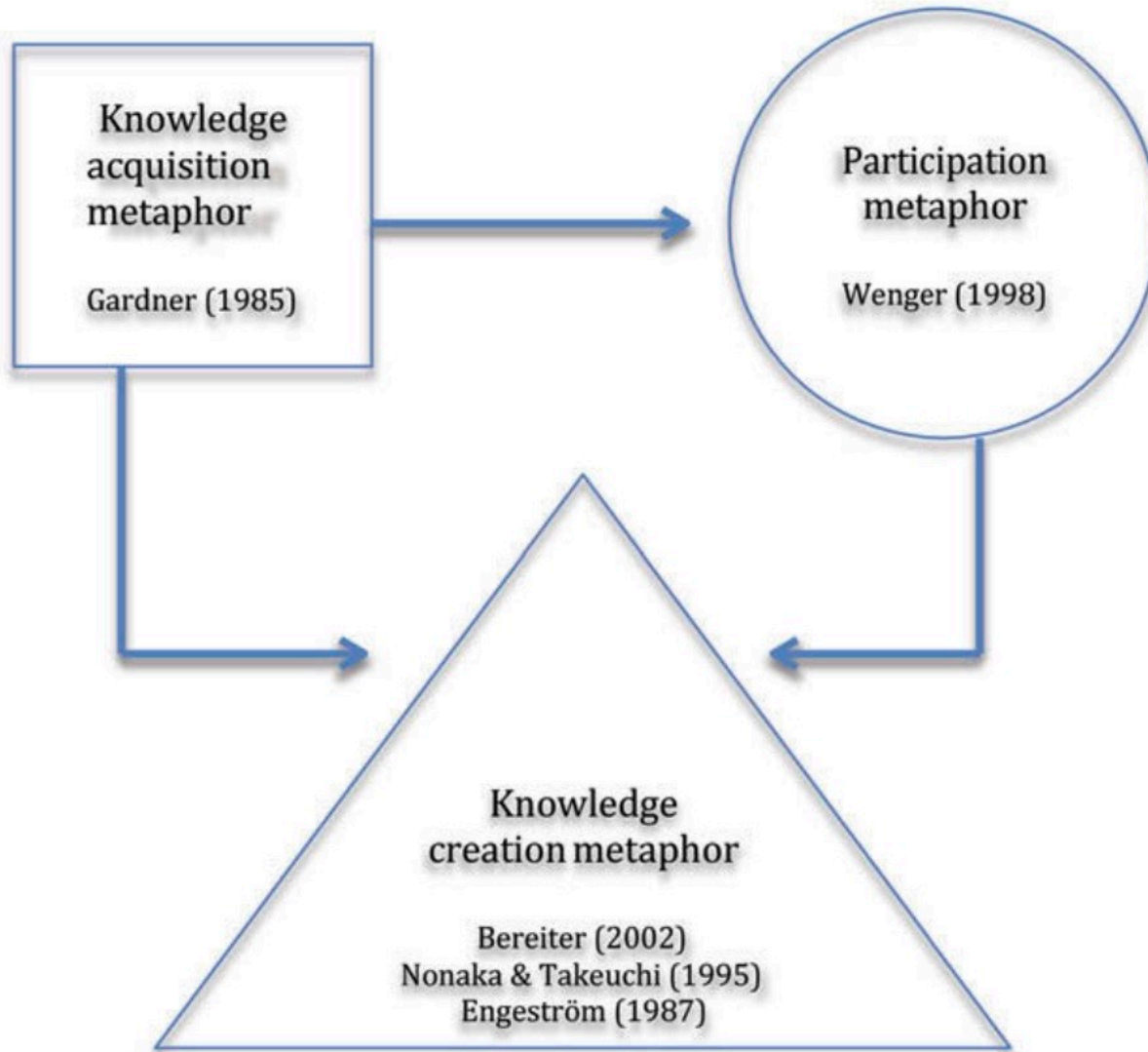
- Practice research study unit is one part of getting a Master's degree.
- The unit is equivalent to 16 credits and the work takes about 8 to 10 months to complete.
- The study period contains three phases: 1) lectures in doing practice research and making a study plan, 2) students gather material during a two-month period and 3) students write a research report.
- A further goal and objective is to create 'research mindedness' in our students.

(Satka, Kääriäinen, Yliruka 2016)

**Table 1.** Elements of the Practice Research Study Module at the University of Helsinki.

Elements and their timing	Participants	Function
The Metropolitan Day for Practice Research <i>September–October</i>	University lecturers Students Organizational representatives Praxis social workers	Exchange of knowledge between the academic community and organizations Introduction of new ideas for students' practice research Maintain, strengthen partnerships
Classroom teaching <i>September–October</i>	University lecturers Students	Clarify the idea of practice research (the shared object)
Peer groups as learning communities <i>September–February</i>	Students, self- organized	Mentoring, problem solving  Support self-regulation and student autonomy
Group supervision of research at the university <i>October–January</i>	University lecturers Group of students	Identify innovative research problems and methods  Co-construct the shared object
Learning–researching–reporting in the field community Supervision by the field agents	Student Learning community in the field	Co-development and negotiation of the shared object with various partners Co-working for the research report (artifact) and reflecting on one's learning process
Writing final research reports and learning essays <i>October–February</i>	Responsible field supervisors Praxis social workers	
Practice research seminar Peer evaluation of the oral presentation of the research <i>February</i>	Group of students University lecturers Representatives of learning communities in the field	Share the outcome and the learning process Co-develop the meaning of the new knowledge for different partners in research and practice
Evaluation and dissemination of practice research reports and reflective learning essays <i>March–April</i>	Student University lecturers Learning organizations Praxis social workers	Reflect on further developments for the study module Develop innovative pedagogical artifacts Publish the research results

(Satka, Kääriäinen, 'Yliruka 2016)

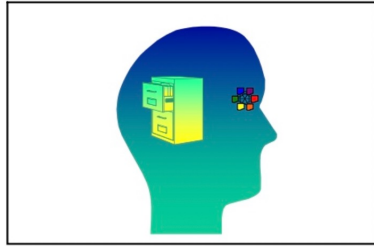


**Figure 1** Toward a triological approach to learning (Hakkarainen, 2008).

**Table 1. Typical Characteristics of the Three Metaphors of Learning**

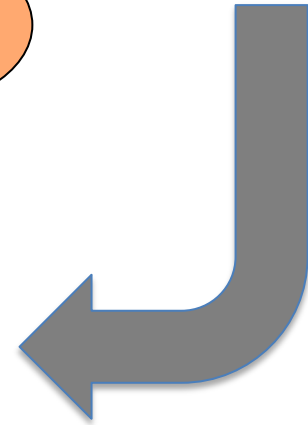
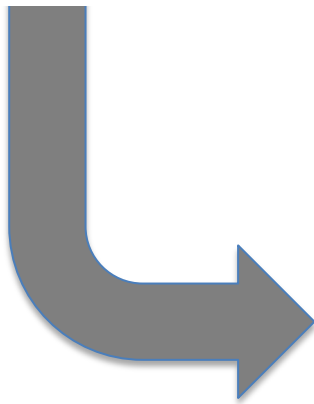
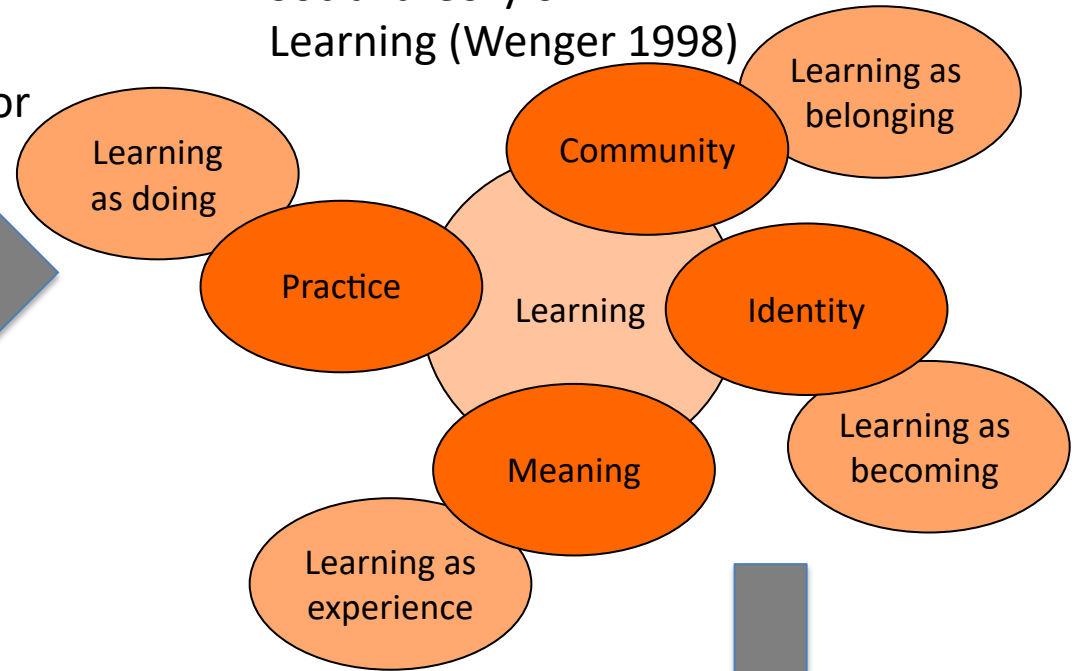
	<b>Knowledge acquisition</b>	<b>Participation</b>	<b>Knowledge creation</b>
<b>Main focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A process of adopting or constructing subject-matter knowledge and mental representations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A process of participating in social communities</li> <li>▪ Enculturation, cognitive socialization</li> <li>▪ Norms, values, and identities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A process of creating and developing collaboratively new material and conceptual artifacts</li> <li>▪ Conscious knowledge advancement, discovery, and innovation</li> </ul>
<b>Theoretical foundations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Theories of knowledge structures and schemata,</li> <li>▪ Individual expertise</li> <li>▪ Traditional cognitivist theories</li> <li>▪ Logically-oriented epistemology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Situated and distributed cognition</li> <li>▪ Communities of practice</li> <li>▪ Sociologically-oriented epistemology</li> <li>▪ Epistemology emphasizing dialogic interaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Knowledge-creating organizations</li> <li>▪ Activity theory</li> <li>▪ Knowledge-building theory</li> <li>▪ Epistemology of mediation</li> </ul>
<b>Unit of analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Individuals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Groups, communities, networks, and cultures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Individuals and groups creating mediating objects and artifacts within cultural settings</li> </ul>

Learning seen as an individual cognitive process, aquisition metaphor

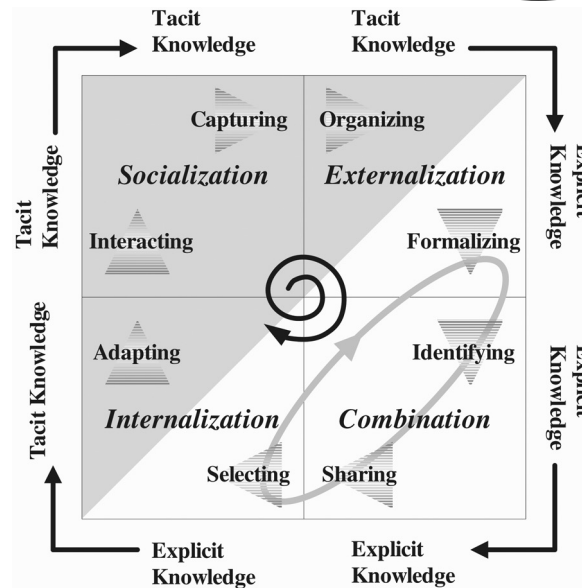


Knowledge-acquisition metaphor (within-mind monologue)

Social theory of Learning (Wenger 1998)



The knowledge creation process in social work team



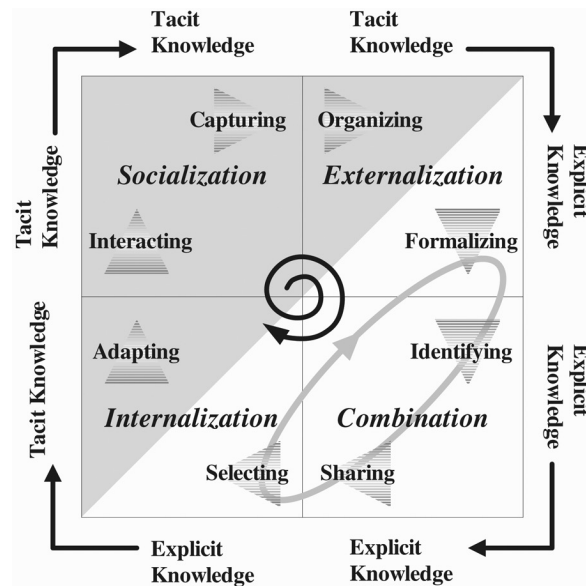
Conscious work with objects of knowledge; triological learning (Paavola ym. 2008)

(Nonaka ym. 2000)

# SECI-model (Nonaka ym. 2000)

S=socialization  
E=externalisation  
C=combination  
I= Internalization

Knowledge can be  
created in process of SECI



- Knowledge-creation becomes co-creative in a social work team when connecting PR process to the dialogical learning (SECI) of the team.
- It is also a way to connect student's trajectories of learning (becoming, belonging, doing and making of meanings) to the PR process.

# Case: Systemic social work

- National project of co-developing Systemic Practice model (SPM) to Finland.
- Thematic PR groups in Uni of Helsinki (2022)
- Cities of Helsinki and Vantaa have implemented SPM since 2018.
- Two social work teams were involved the process: **they developed three research tasks** for the students:
  - 1) **Clients' experiences** of a systemic weekly meeting in child welfare.
  - 2) The experiences of **social workers** regarding systemic weekly meetings in child protection
  - 3) The role and importance of the **family therapist** in the systemic approach: the perspective of child welfare social work.
  - 4) **Experiences of the adaptation** of the SPM model in Vantaa

- "The weekly meeting is the place where we learn an 'awful' lot about ourselves and each other." Practice research on the experiences of social workers in child protection regarding systemic weekly meetings.

# Feedback from the PR final seminar

- Student 1: The research process -**requires patience.**
- Student 2: Nice to follow other people's work, **peer learning.**
- Student 3: **Well planned is half done...**you learn in the process about your mistakes. Busy...and jobs, coordination. Finished in good spirits. Base and foundation.
- Student 4: Able to mirror and learn from the choices of others. Concrete experience in licensing matters. Busy in autumn..independent work became more prominent..and you had to support yourself. A firmer grip right at the start. It's been an educational episode.
- Student 5: **The realities of life. I have learned to use humor.** Easier to combine studies and work.
- Student 6: **The research permit process, cooperation...**working cooperatively with students is nice.
- Student 7: **Smooth process. Even though I was in a hurry.** A new perspective for cooperation..
- Student 8: research depends on many factors.
- Student 9: interesting course. **Research helps in your own work.**
- **Tutor in the field** ; this enables dialogue between University and social work communities.

# Outcomes for agency

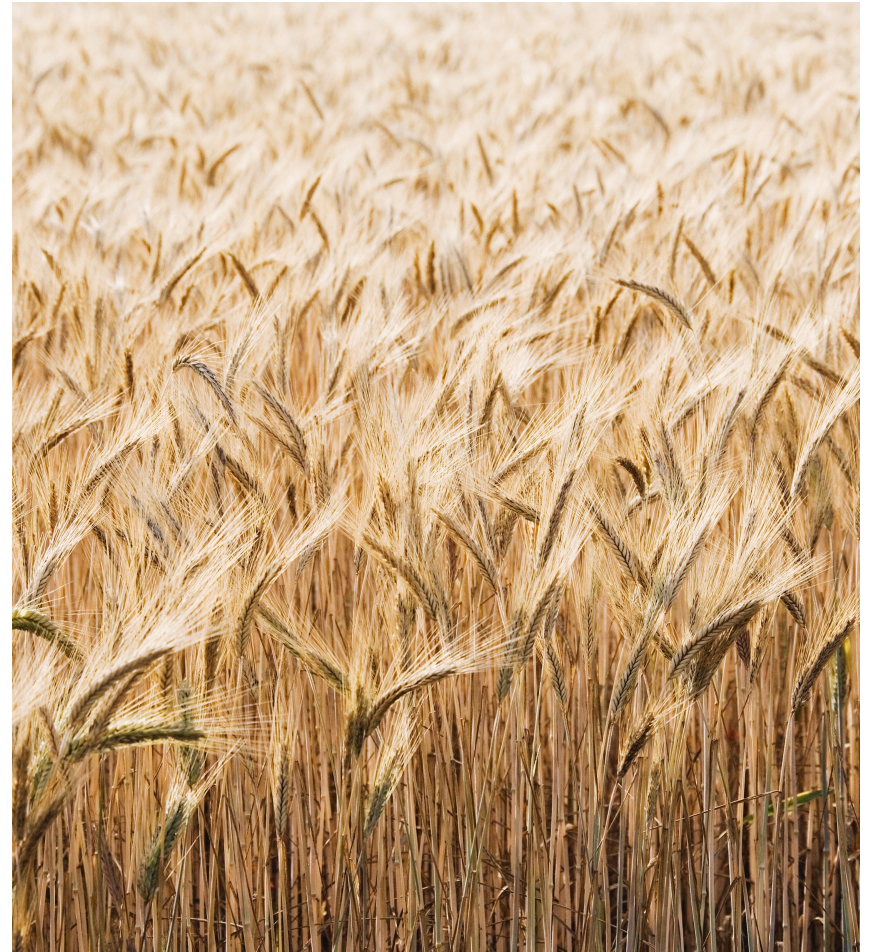
## Usability of PR

- directly to the working community.
- the results of a study were able to raise the importance of preparation for the weekly systemic meetings.
- the work community could use the results in the development of their own work and more widely.
- the focus group interviews served as a way to learn our common systemic work.
- the work communities can develop new study questions based on the results.

→ The results of the PR were also used in the national level ToT (training of trainers SPM).

# Preconditions: Viewpoint of the Agency

- Most learning happens in practice (10- individuals **obtain 70% of their knowledge from job-related experiences**, 20% from interactions with others, and 10% from formal educational events)
- The idea of supporting social work teams to become innovative knowledge communities.
- Research-mindedness: The transforming needs of citizens are responded better with appropriate knowledge and tools for evaluating the effects of interventions in everyday life.
- Valuing reflective thinking and dialogical problem solving; valuing equality of various expertises.
- In addition: Managers are eager and able to learn how to benefit from knowledge production processes and outcomes.



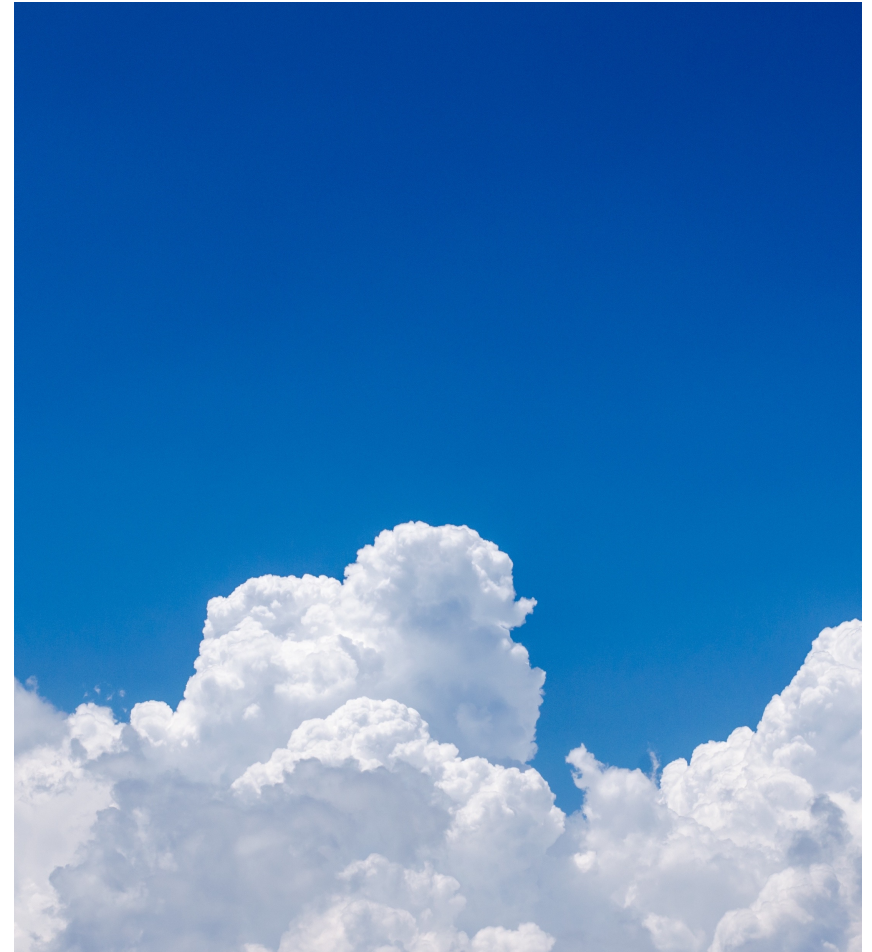
# Preconditions: Viewpoint of the University

- Giving up of dualism in thinking about University education; the view is rather *a web of social relations for collaborative learning*.
- Favouring enabling models of academic research to facilitate engagement with concerns in practice (including work-teams, managers, politicians and/or service users).
- Valuing reflective thinking and problem posing; valuing equality of various expertises.



# Outcomes for students

- The goal is to develop professional identity toward reflective, research-productive expertise.
- Practice research has mainly been a rewarding experience for social work students.
- Students need to find self-guidance in themselves and learn to carry the responsibility on their own.
- "My development towards professional social worker has been great. I feel how I can use my experience to develop my work later on in the future. The seeds of research have been planted in me."
- "As employer we greatly appreciate a social worker who is competent to produce research when needed, and able to deal with various data at workplace. Hereby we feel better equipped for the uncertain future."



# Outcomes

”We fully understand that when our students graduate, they soon move on to roles as mentors in their own social work organizations. When the next practice research study module starts, the **previous generation of practice researchers will likely work together with the new practice research students.** (Satka ym. 2016),

PR is a good way to strengthen knowledge partnership and agency in social work. It socialises both social work students and social worker in communities to a culture of transformative learning that is a main task of innovative knowledge communities (eg. Paavola & al. 2004)



# Literature

- Bereiter, C. (2002). Education and mind in the knowledge age. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Nonaka, I. & Toyama, R. & Konno, N. (2000) SECI, Ba and Leadership: a Unified Model of Dynamic Knowledge Creation. Long Range Planning 33, 5–34. Elsevier Science Ltd.
- Paavola, S., & Hakkarainen, K. (2005). The knowledge creation metaphor—An emergent epistemological approach to learning. Science & Education, 14, 535–557. doi:[10.1007/s11191-004-5157-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11191-004-5157-0)
- Paavola, S., Lipponen, L., & Hakkarainen, K. (2004). Models of innovative knowledge communities and three metaphors of learning. Review of Educational Research, 74, 557– 576. doi:[10.3102/00346543074004557](https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543074004557)
- Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity. Cambridge, UK: University Press.

Thank you!  
laura.yliruka@thl.fi

