Changing Children and Families
Social Work

Mark Smith
13\textsuperscript{th} Nov 2013
From Research to Knowledge Exchange

- Traditional research
- Knowledge transfer
- Knowledge exchange (knowledge is co-constructed)
- Knowledge mobilisation (cf traditional ways of training)
Engaging with Scottish Local Authorities (ESLA)

- Knowledge Exchange project funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and "the Local Authorities and Research Councils' Initiative" (LARCI) under the Engaging with Scottish Local Authorities Scheme.
- Six partner local authorities
- The theme, Engaging with Involuntary Service Users was co-produced with local authority partners who identified it as being of particular practice relevance. Its policy relevance is apparent in major policy documents such as Changing Lives, the 21st Century Review of Social Work (Scottish Executive, 2006)
- The grant awarded was £100,000.
- Local authority partners had to contribute 20% of this total amount. Grant holders were Dr Heather Wilkinson from CRFR and Mark Smith from Social Work. Dr. Michael Gallagher was Research Fellow.
- Ran from November 2009 until February 2011
Aims

• Twofold
• 1) to explore the complexities of involving involuntary clients as partners in the social work process, and to identify pointers as to how this might best be done and
• 2) to report on findings about effective knowledge exchange in such collaborative ventures.
What we did

• A scoping review of existing research. This was presented as a short, accessible briefing and two literature reviews. See [http://bit.ly/jbfXtj](http://bit.ly/jbfXtj)

• Three knowledge sharing seminars, bringing together academics and social work staff from six local authorities. A range of knowledge exchange activities were utilised to gather data around practitioner knowledge and around impact

• Practitioner research projects (PRPs). Practitioners carried out small studies on topics relating to the project theme, with mentoring and training from academics at the University. Six projects were completed between May and September 2010.

Findings

• Relationships were central to both good social work practice and to knowledge exchange
• Key elements within this included the establishment of trust, a sense of credibility and a sense of timeliness and meaningfulness to participants.
• Timing – starts to resonate with Munro, Christie ...
Outputs

• Six peer reviewed journal articles, three co-authored with practitioners
• Two practitioners writing piece for Community Care
• (book)
• Conference presentations
• Seminars
• Edinburgh Practice Panel
CCFSW

• Edinburgh and East Lothian
• to 'review and redesign the ways in which child and family social work is delivered, drawing on evidence of effectiveness of helping methods where appropriate and supporting practice that can implement evidence based ways of working with children and families' (2011, p.13).
• c£48,000
Three strands

- Critical reflection groups
- Practitioner research strand
- Managers training
Critical Reflection Workshops

Viv Cree & Mark Smith with Social Workers from City of Edinburgh and East Lothian Councils
What is critical reflection?

- ‘A process of analysing practice in order to reframe the practice in a way that represents the complexity and integrated nature of that experience’ (Fook and Askeland, 2007)
- Small peer groups work together to assist one another to reflect on an example of professional practice
- These examples may be called ‘critical incidents’ – specific and concrete examples of practice that are significant
- Critical reflection aims to connect the ‘personal’ experiences of day-to-day practice with wider, ‘professional’ and ‘political’ issues
What is critical reflection NOT?

- It is not group supervision
- It is not therapy
- It is not focused on finding solutions or solving problems
What did we do?

• 12 social workers took part, 8 from City of Edinburgh and 4 from East Lothian

• We met 5 mornings between April and June, with a 6th session in October to look back over the process

• Participants were expected to read articles and research literature in advance; the first part of the session was taken up with reviewing this and talking about what had been learned since last time

• Then someone offered a ‘case’ example for the group to discuss

• Each session ended with time for individual reflection, focusing on ‘what I have learned’ and ‘how I will use this learning’ followed by a shared lunch
What were our findings?

• Social workers got a lot from the sessions: they enjoyed the reading, ‘case’ discussions and encouragement to reflect on what they were learning

• They appreciated hearing each others’ stories and felt supported within the group

• They welcomed the opportunity to meet with academic staff as ‘co-constructors of knowledge’ on a regular basis

• Each tried to take some of their learning back to their workplace, but with limited success
Some key observations included

• On the one hand –
  – ‘it just evaporates!’ – it’s difficult to keep new ideas alive on returning to the pressures of the ‘real world’
  – The CR workshops (and reading around them) were an additional pressure – there was little or no scope for doing this in ‘work time’
  – Organisational issues can make it very difficult to retain/maintain one’s sense of professional identity – metaphor of ‘the box’ and the ‘linear metre’

• And on the other hand –
  – ‘it fractals’ – new ideas/contacts ‘seep out’ in all kinds of ways
  – We are all inevitably changed in a positive way by this experience of co-learning and can build on this
Further thoughts from two critical reflectors

• Elaine Wallace
• Douglas Sharp
• Critical reflection workshops have raised lots of questions for me...
• So what’s next?
Fractals

• ‘a curve or geometrical figure, each part of which has the same statistical character as the whole. They are useful in modelling structures (such as snowflakes) in which similar patterns recur at progressively smaller scales, and in describing partly random or chaotic phenomena such as crystal growth and galaxy formation’.

• (http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)
Critical reflection supported me to

• arrive with my chaos and complexity
• feel held by a structure
• share in ideas and stories
• experience support
• chew over, digest or spit out (dependent upon need)
• walk away, having changed, even just a little
• With thanks to all who took part, to all those who made the workshops possible (the ESRC, City of Edinburgh Council, East Lothian Council and the University of Edinburgh) and to you for your interest in our learning!
Changing Children and Families
Social Work: Practitioner
Research Strand
Rhoda MacRae November 2013
Aims of practitioner research
Benefits of practitioner research
Benefits of practitioner research (1)

- Produces research with direct relevance to practice concerns
- Improves the research capacity of individuals and organisations
- Strengthens the active role of practitioners in the research process
- Helps an organisation develop the capacity for critical inquiry
Benefits of practitioner research (2)

- Helps an organisation develop a learning orientation
- Reduces the distance knowledge has to travel from research to practice
- Provides a starting point for further research/practice collaborations

- Armstrong & Allsop 2010; Anderson & Jones, 2000; Roper, 2002
Experience

observing, encouraging, practical knowledge, skill, resulted in understanding of events participated in
# Maximising Learning Transfer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEFORE – Preparing the Organisation</th>
<th>DURING – Delivering the Training</th>
<th>AFTER – Using New Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Bring tog Pts/LMs/ Commissioners/Trainers</td>
<td>1 Give same message in different ways</td>
<td>1 Support practice opps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Agree learning needs</td>
<td>2 Use range of learning methods</td>
<td>2 Use opps to review learning and practice change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Agree Learning Objectives for prog.</td>
<td>3 Use back up materials</td>
<td>- team meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Agree practice opps.</td>
<td>4 Give opps. for review of learning</td>
<td>- supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Agree pre-course material</td>
<td>5 Link to job roles</td>
<td>- practice reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Agree evaluation methods</td>
<td>6 Agree re-inforcers</td>
<td>- use developmental groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 Start collecting evaluation data</td>
<td>3 Complete evaluation</td>
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Knowledge Exchange Project

Collective Group Reflections on participating in a Practitioner Research Project

November 2013
1. Conducting a Practitioner-research project

- Promoted professional growth and learning on many levels
- Out of comfort zone of familiar professional experience
- Stressful and demanding
- Potential to inform practice
2. Ownership

• A lot of work in one’s own time
• Useful for personal developmental
• Potential to improve practice on personal, team, and service levels
• Learning process of completing a coherent project through distinct stages
• The opportunity to do research in one’s own area of interest
3. Fusion

- Research and practice informing each other
- Links between practice teams and university
- Exciting to be back at university, engaging in an academic piece of work, and thinking more academically
4. Reflection on practice

• Facilitated reflecting on practice from a more research-based perspective
• Encouraged more objective reflection about what carers/clients need and want, to talk to carers about their experiences
• Added a different perspective of working/reflecting, as a ‘filter’ to thinking.
5. Individual and team learning

- Evidence-informed research helps individual learning and continuous professional development
- Hearing about and discussing other research projects was also good for learning
- ‘Can teach an old dog new tricks’ – new and various research techniques, including IT skills
- Facilitated discussions within the team through developing research tools and techniques, discussing potential participants, and colleagues participating in focus groups
- Helped develop a culture of learning in the team through involvement in teaching sessions and discussions
6. Time and timing

- Insufficient time-scales to complete the project
- Difficulty of finding time for research within busy timetable
- Process felt rushed - was bigger piece of work than originally expected
- The summer period was a difficult time to collect data.
7. Expectations and tensions

- Because managers were involved in supporting change and learning, some expected more acknowledgement and support.
- Potential tension in presenting findings that could be seen to be critical of practice and service provision.
- Want studies to open up rather than close down dialogue.
- Hope that research project will lead to better informed practice, and better directed service delivery.
Why is Knowledge Exchange Important?

Andy Jeffries, City of Edinburgh Council
The Journey from compliance to learning

Key messages:

• Munro 2011 – the move from a compliance culture towards a learning culture is key to effective intervention with children and families.

“This move from compliance to a learning culture will require those working in child protection to be given more scope to exercise professional judgment in deciding how best to help children and their families.”
• Changing Lives 2006 – “tomorrow's solutions will need to make the best use of skills across the public sector workforce, refocusing on the core values of social work. Social workers will need to make effective use of therapeutic relationships and find new ways to manage risk.”
The Edinburgh journey

- HMIE Inspection of Child Protection 2007
- Care Inspectorate Children’s Service Inspection 2013
- Service improvements 2008 – business process, finance, KPIs. Management focus on re-organising and measurable KPIs.
- Maintaining staff morale through a process of rapid and difficult change – “when will we talk about practice and outcomes?”
- Who leads practice development?
Edinburgh Children’s Social Work Practice Panel

- Partnership between managers, practitioners, training officers, and academics
- Knowledge Exchange – not top-down dissemination but nurturing and developing the practice wisdom of those at the front line
- Managers are not the experts in practice but must lead the culture change
- Statement of values
• Practitioner Events – Relationship Based Practice; Social Pedagogy; Systemic Family Work; Solution-Focussed approaches; Communicating with Children; Engagement with Fathers.
• Practitioner input to events and participative style has been central
• Local developments eg reading groups; book publication
• Knowledge Exchange project has been main focus this year – how do we promote this work more widely and where does the practice panel go from here?
The future

- Use direct practitioner feedback to inform training delivery
- Training alone is not enough and the assumption of “cascade” is flawed
- Our WLD strategy (and self evaluation) should promote and support learning through critical reflection on actual practice eg practice evaluation.
- Management and supervisory support is crucial
- Future challenge – shifting the balance of care through effective intervention