

# Empowerment Evaluation and Social Work in Greenland

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## Introduction

The focus of a newly started ph.d.-project (start 01.01.2011 end 31.12.2013) is on the professional knowledge and the personal knowledge among social workers whom are working with marginalized children and their families in the welfare department in Sermersooq Kommune, Greenland's biggest municipality located in Nuuk.



Nuuk Capital of Greenland

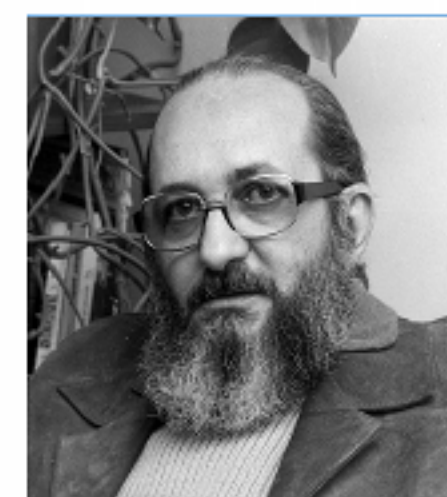
The research has got two apparent purposes. One is to create an empirical foundation for the obtaining of knowledge of the ongoing everyday social work with marginalized families. The other is an action research oriented approach on how to empower social work with marginalized children and families using evaluation to enhance reflexion on professionalism within the welfare system.

## Background

An empowerment perspective on social work is a very new topic within the social studies in Greenland and the polar areas as well (Graham et. al. 2008).

Greenland has experienced many social problems to name a few alcoholism, unemployment and domestic abuse which to some extent can be explained by a very fast modernization process. Earlier scientific reports (Kristensen et. al. 2008, Wulf & Nielsen 2007, Niclasen 2007) have shown the consequences of these problems on an individual level but none of the current research deals with these before mentioned issues from the perspective of the social worker. This is essential because this particular profession has the mandate to get directly involved with the improvement of welfare within the marginalized families. Evaluation in the project is empowerment oriented. The focus is therefore on "development and learning" instead of "control and impact measurement". The agenda of empowerment in this project is to rely a great deal on the social workers as a source of information. The analytic perspective is the experienced created in everyday work life. The role of the researchers is to facilitate an empowerment process and viewing the social workers as experts on their own work life.

This approach is parallel to when Paulo Freire worked with the pedagogy of the oppressed during the 1970's in Brazil (Freire 2007/1970).



Paulo Freire

The liberating or emancipatorical, with connotations to critical theory, in this approach is the perspective on social work as a disempowerment area. The argument is that we know very little, from a scientific and professional perspective, about the conditions under which social work is conducted in Greenland today.

## A Qualitative Approach

The main issue in this empowerment process is to ensure that the level of participation is high. To ensure participation we used individual qualitative interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). This ensured that every single social worker was given a possibility to communicate his or her own view of their work life and professional challenges. Further two focus groups were conducted. Using focus groups puts the social workers in a situation where values and professional aspects are compared (Pollack 2003). From a scientific view point this gave a possibility to ask them questions as a group giving them a chance to respond as a collective. Further more field work was conducted during meetings and informal talks among the social workers to get a feel of the environment of the everyday work life.



## Results so far...

We have gained access to the field and gathered roughly 500 pages of interview data. A first initial analysis reveals a very motivated and competent group of social workers. It also hints to a conflict of working within an ideological version of the welfare system and a realistic version of the Welfare system. The research will lead to further focus groups and seminars concerning the subject. After the initial analytical phase in Nuuk is over a new one will take place for comparative purposes in Ilulissat in Northern Greenland.

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