# Documentation in social work concerned with child protection

The primary task of this study is to clarify the significance of documentation in professional practices and information formation involved in social work concerning child protection. The document texts under study were examined from three angles: 1) How were the documents written? 2) What information did the documents contain? 3) Why were the documents written as they were? The research material consisted of information from a database of client information compiled from notes and custody decisions by social workers involved in child protection.

Documents relating to twenty children of varying ages and their families were selected for this study, a total of 1613 pages. The texts are dated between 1989 and 2000.

The method of study is discourse analytical and is based on a three-dimensional model developed by Fairclough (1997) in which discourse is defined as the interaction between texts, practices and socio-cultural environment. The model used for the analysis consists of rhetoric and thematic material as well as investigation from the pragmatic point of view.

Categorizing the documents into speaker categories revealed the polyphony of the texts, text-structures including viewpoints and opinions of several people. The rhetorical analysis showed that documents pertaining to social work involving child protection contain a large amount of dynamic description of the work. The polyphony of the texts adds to their credibility and is one way to influence the meaning by using rhetoric.

The thematic study showed that the content of the themes in the documents and the empirical themes repeat themselves as dynamically interchanging concentric and superimposed threads. Social workers introduce many simultaneous themes into their documents, which help them to form a professional judgement of the case at hand. Studying the documents from the pragmatic angle revealed the contextual dimensions of reading and writing and the process of information formation. The drawing up of documents is one of the practices employed in social work. It is also a crucial part of the creation and maintenance of professional understanding.

The dynamics of information forming that is revealed in documents originates in writing practices, and in the common areas of writing and reading and occupational practices.

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