

Intellectually Disabled as a "Competent Citizen"? Discussions on methodological challenges in studying discourses on special paths in vocational education

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# Changing Focus; intertwining projects

1. Being special in the learning society? "Competent citizen" and the discursive practices of the vocational special needs education and training (Katariina Hakala, Reetta Mietola and Anna-Maija Niemi)

"OWN" PROJECT: Intellectually disabled as "Competent Citizens"? Special paths in vocational education (Katariina Hakala)

2. Solutions for challenging situations in the individual housing of people with developmental disability (RATTI)

→ Encounters in the service system ; a case study on constructions of "challenging situations"; cases for ethnographic fieldwork to be chosen in the spring - 09

# Starting point 1

2007 PhD in education; Teacher's pedagogical position in the historical and cultural school institution

- Teacher as the one who knows better; OR: Who knows? Whose knowledge? Pedagogical mode of address (Elizabeth Ellsworth) constructing spaces for knowing '*otherwise*'
- Feminist post-structuralist theory; differences and power relations as discursive practices constructing subject positions; subjectification; feminist critical pedagogy
- Empirical study with four classroom teachers in a Finnish comprehensive school; Dialogical ethnography

# Starting point 2

CuFe; Research Unit of cultural and feminist studies in education  
(University of Helsinki)

[http://www.helsinki.fi/ktl/kufe/index\\_english.htm](http://www.helsinki.fi/ktl/kufe/index_english.htm)

→ research project (started 2007):

*Citizenship, agency and difference in upper secondary education -  
with special focus on vocational institutions*

→ personal point of view: motherhood, single parent of the  
daughter with Down's syndrome; in the birth 1989 diagnosed as  
developmentally disabled "caused by basic rationale" and as having  
"retardatio mentalis levis"

- We are in the middle of a process to find her future path in  
post-compulsory education and in adult life, as "competent  
citizen"
- Daughter defined as "not suitable at the moment" (2007)  
for vocational education and situated in the "preparatory and  
rehabilitative education for work and independent life"  
differentiated from the preparation for "vocational  
education"; applications for vocational education in process
- The ongoing study: *Intellectually disabled as "Competent  
Citizens"? Special paths in vocational education*

# Starting point 3

16.3.2009 started as a researcher in FAIDD, in the RATTI-project; *Solutions for challenging situations in the individual housing of people with developmental disability*

So – at the moment, an interesting chaos in mind, crabbling for new focus; now zooming in the service system as a whole and in the individual encounterings with it; ethnographic cases to be chosen in negotiations within the project

# Discussions on methodological challenges

Personal is political – and theoretically interesting; ethics and politics in research intertwined with epistemology

- ◇ post-structuralist theory on discursive constructions of subjectivity – to do research with instead of on disabled persons
- ◇ Wanda Pillow (2003): Confession, catharsis or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. (QSE 16:2)
  - explicated differences in perspectives; power relations in seeing and representing the “other”; negotiations in research practices that are:

“[I]ncorporating a reflexivity that accounts for multiplicity without making it singular and that acknowledges the unknowable without making it familiar.” (Pillow 2003, 181)

# Reflexivity of discomforts

- ◇ Psychological, special education, medical views of disability vs. social and cultural studies, disability studies
- ◇ Developmental vs. critical orientation
- ◇ Professionals vs. "customer" (mother, daughter) perspectives
- ◇ Public vs. private; objective / subjective; biased? danger of revealing "too much" – too personal?
- ◇ systematic othering; research from other perspective; – PhD; pedagogical mode of address as a theory of interaction in the service system
- ◇ Is it good or bad to have a researcher as mother? The daughter's perspective present but absent... mother talking about the child – exploitation? collaboration?...?

# The research plan in other words – other's words? Whose words?

Developmentally disabled young person is equal with other people. Developmentally disabled have right to be free and live independent life. Too much care is not good. Caring is good but it should not be too much. Every human being also developmentally disabled is capable of taking care of herself. Every human being may go in the city alone. Can go to movies and concerts. Developmentally disabled can learn themselves to travel with buses with help of a guide. After that they can travel alone. If you are teased it is other's shame not yours. And it is not worth while to bother about that. I am an ordinary young who wants to have friends from the streets of Helsinki.

(Noora Hakala 26.11.2007, translated by K.H., presented with permission of the author)