

Responsibility and participation in transition to university – voices of young people with disabilities

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Students with disabilities are quantitatively under-represented in higher education. In this paper, focus is on access to and processes in transition to the initial period at university. The article is based on an empirical study examining young people's points of view, and the overall aim is to draw attention to experiences regarding responsibility and participation. Four narrative configurations represent the voices of how young people with disabilities experience the nature of the responsibility, the distribution of the responsibility and the timing that emerges. Experiences in the university context are categorized into proactive, ambivalent, reactive and non-existent community structures. Representatives of the universities are perceived as taking various levels of responsibility for the difficulties experienced by the young people. Genuine participation seems to be affected by collaboration qualities involving both the surrounding environment and the individual. This could have long-term consequences for the individual identity of a young person, as well as for society.

Keywords: higher education; narrative configurations; participation; responsibility; voices of young people

Introduction

Historically, Scandinavian countries have been regarded as being rather similar in terms of access to education in general. In order to promote an inclusive welfare state that emphasizes participation and prevents exclusion, policies on inclusion have been reformulated and made more precise. Central governance and a strengthening economic-utilitarian situation have characterized the educational field (Arnesen and Lundahl 2006). In view of the expansion of student numbers in Swedish higher education, parallel with economic restrictions in recent years, a shift has become apparent. The Swedish state's role as provider and guarantor has decreased, thereby opening up for differentiation in and between universities and individuals (Askling 2001).

The principal value of smooth educational transitions, regardless of disability, ethnicity, gender or other diversity issues, is emphasized in various international contexts. International conventions and declarations (UNESCO 1994; United Nations 2006a, etc.) emphasize the value of smoothing the transition to higher education, as a stage in young people becoming independent and contributing

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members of society. Necessary steps must be taken to ensure that all individuals can participate in higher education (UNESCO 1994). Universities in Sweden must treat all students equally and work against discrimination (SFS 2001:1286).

The numbers of adults with disabilities is growing in Sweden (Askling 2001; Danermark, Antonson, and Lundström 2001), but the group has an unjustifiably low educational level compared with adults without disabilities (SOU 2012; Swedish National Social Insurance Board). Students with disabilities may also encounter qualitative barriers within the higher education. The ideal that proclaims the value of smoothing the transition to higher education (UNESCO 1994) is difficult to detect in practice. Other factors affecting education, such as housing, finances, work, leisure and health conditions, are also unequal (National Board of Health and Welfare 2010), which can widen the gap between the ideal and the experienced reality. Even if not all barriers comprise discrimination, groups of young people with disabilities may be at risk of discrimination in terms of equality and access to higher education.

In Scandinavia, there has been little research adopting an educational perspective when investigating problems relating to uncommon higher education study situations, and very limited education-oriented research that focuses on higher education in Sweden (Emanuelsson, Persson, and Rosenqvist 2001). Studies of disabilities and university education are often limited to a single Swedish university and lack any in-depth or general perspective. Interest in this issue seems to be growing in the field of Swedish secondary education (e.g. Hultqvist 2001; Lang 2004; Hugo 2007; Johansson 2009) but, overall, the issue of disability in relation to university study situations has so far been limited in educational and disability studies research in Sweden. The situation now appears to be changing. The number of studies in recent years indicates growing interest in this field (Rydberg, Coniavitis Gellerstedt, and Danermark 2009; Eriksson Gustavsson and Holme 2009; Hallberg et al. 2012; Simmeborn Fleischer 2012).

The overall aim of this study article is to draw attention to experiences regarding responsibility and participation, with a focus on how young people experience access to university studies and processes in the transition to the initial period at university. The analysis and discussion is based on an empirical study examining the views of young people with disabilities.

Although individual, organizational and societal levels are generally represented in special education research and practice (Skidmore 1996), this study primarily focuses on experiences and attitudes on an organizational level. The main focus is on how young people perceive certain situations and the actions of professionals representing the university organization, and reports on how young people describe their experiences of encounters with a professional environment. Individual and societal levels that arise in the empirical data can be said to revolve around an organizational hub.

In research in the field of special education, attention is often directed towards where responsibility for the difficulties that arise in an educational system can be placed (Gustavsson 1998). One focus in this study is the perspective of external responsibility, but without detracting from individuals' own responsibility for phenomena in their lives. In brief, the relationship between responsibility and participation could be motivated by the young person's perception that the quality of responsibility may impact their ability to participate. The dynamic between responsibility and conditions for participation – how the young person is seen and

respected by the outside world – is discussed using the concept of recognition (Honneth 2000, 2003, 2006).

The study – giving a voice to young people

Since the aim was to draw attention to experiences about responsibility and participation in the transition from upper-secondary school to university start, a natural approach seemed to be to listen to the voices of young people and analyse their narratives for a deeper interpretation. The basic premise was that voices that are seldom heard could produce knowledge in a field in which data may otherwise be difficult to obtain. The first task was to select a sample of a group that could be at risk in the transition to university. Listening to these voices seemed an appropriate way to draw attention to the problem, and to relate the views to responsibility and participation in the university field.

In the same way as a study of students with disabilities in the British higher education system (Beauchamp-Pryor 2012), this interview-based study involved a smaller group selected from a larger group that had participated in a questionnaire-based study. From a full population questionnaire-based study (Lang 2008) of ‘students with severe physical disabilities’ (SFS 2002:137), 10 were chosen for this study and all of them had met the entry requirements for university studies by completing upper-secondary education in the first decade of the 2000s. The first criterion for selection the 10 was their interest in sharing their experiences indicated by in the questionnaire study. A sub-group was selected on the basis of (1) contact with different universities, geographically spread over the whole of Sweden, (2) individuals that had started and not started university studies and (3) variation in gender.

The interviewees all used wheelchairs and, in addition to motor-related disabilities, had various other limitations that could affect a learning situation, such as complex communicational, linguistic, visual, auditory and structural limitations. All satisfied the entry requirements for university studies, which was a fundamental criterion for participation in the study. The interviewees had applied to and were studying on a wide variety university programmes and courses, with specializations in science, technology, social studies, language and humanities. Eight of the ten had studied for up to 3 years at geographically dispersed universities in Sweden. Two members of the study group had a lot to say about access and the transition to university studies, even though they had yet to start university studies. Both had a lot of contacts in preparation for university studies and one of them had been accepted onto a university programme, but had not yet started. Overall, the group was regarded as being able to provide a breadth of experiences about access to university studies and processes in the transition to the initial period at university. Some had experiences relating to more than one university. The overall experiences could be related to around 10 Swedish universities. The study took place 2–5 years after the students had left upper-secondary school, in the first decade of the 2000s.

Narrative approach with focus on responsibility and participation

The study comprised a social constructive framework and used a narrative approach. The latter can be regarded as one that creates social structures that, in this context, are based on how young people describe their experiences of certain phenomena in

their environment. Consequently, this does not involve a reality that actually exists. A narrative approach offered a way to acquire knowledge about how young people experience certain actions. The narrative can also be viewed as an action with the aim of presenting what is told (cf. Pérez Prieto 2007). In the interviews, both the researcher and the interviewees were regarded as constructors (Goodson and Sikes 2001), even though the main points of interest were the views of the interviewees.

In the initial analysis of all the transcribed interview texts, three themes developed from the data. Within these three themes, what arose was how the young people experienced responsibility for the study situation. These three themes can be said to contain aspects of a whole where the responsibility issues appear, are distributed, and changed in various ways:

1. The nature of the responsibility – how the surrounding environment encountered and managed the uncommon study situations.
2. The distribution of the responsibility – how the responsibility for the study situation seems to be divided between the young person and the surrounding environment.
3. The timing that emerges – phases in which the necessary changes in the study situation took place.

The content values in the three themes were presented in the form of four narrative configurations. Four fictional young people – Eugene, Ian, Nora and Buck – were created on the basis of the total interview data. Consequently, the narrative configurations (see ‘Four voices’) are based on real-life experiences relating to university studies in Sweden, provided by the 10 and presented through the eyes of four fictional characters. A configuration was created from several concordant voices, so a single individual did not necessarily experience all the qualities described in the narrative configurations. A narrative approach often emphasizes the value of, initially, presenting the narrative configuration empirically on the basis of raw data. This justifies the narrative configurations, and the content of the individual voices is confirmed and illustrated in direct quotations. The configurations then comprise the background to the subsequent stages in the analysis (see the section ‘Experience pattern and community structures’).

The main focus was on attitudes based on encounters with professionals and informal and formal academic activities at universities. An interest was to discover the experiences of young people regarding how the surrounding environment understood them and acted, whether it made them feel visible, invisible, etc. In a holistic view of life and learning, encounters outside the educational organization could also have an impact on the study conditions, such as with professionals in care and rehabilitation organizations.

The main focus in encounters between individuals and representatives of organizations involves an interaction perspective, applied here according to Honneth (2000, 2003, 2006). In brief, the perspective could be seen as a discussion about how social constructions, created in the encounter between individuals, affect the individual’s ability for self-awareness in a postmodern society. For individuals to develop a positive relationship to themselves and, by extension, to attain a good life in a postmodern society, multidimensional confirmation is needed. This must be based on different forms of recognition. Individual self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem develop through this various forms of recognition from the outside

world. However, in this study, the main focus was on the solidarity form of recognition. This is based on reciprocity, where individuals are valued for their unique and particular identity. The community, including the individual, strives for common goals and values (Honneth 2000). This solidarity form of recognition is particularly housed in an interaction that can be related to a community structure, here understood as the individual's encounters with representatives of organizations that are involved in university-related issues.

When individuals observe themselves in relation to the surrounding environment, an identity and a standpoint are created. Reflexivity, where identity develops through interaction with others, means that the self-reference can also be related to organizational and communal systems. In connection with recognition theory, Honneth (2000), supported by Dewey, proposes ideas about democracy and reflexive interaction, where individuals, in communal interaction, contribute to the whole through their activity. All community members comprise a 'vital embodiment' of communal goals via individual activities. A concentration of the reflexive forces is emphasized by Honneth, such as the communal effort involved in attaining communal goals, for example by the ultimate governing body in a society. Dewey links the individual's ability and freedom to develop self-realization to what is desirable for society in order to attain a democratic ideal. This ideal incorporates mutual trust between the individual and the surrounding environment. Here, the individual finds a function and a place in society through free development of a personality, and the common collective goal is based on the individual person (Honneth 2000).

The guiding principal has been, in the best possible way, to communicate the content of some of the voices that are seldom heard in research contexts. The four fictional characters demonstrate the results and analytical concepts, thereby making it easy to communicate the findings to the reader while keeping the individual contributors anonymous. An alternative method, i.e. presenting 'real' personal portraits, could have entailed a risk that individual could be identified on the basis of disability, gender, educational programme, course, place of study and parts of their reported experiences (cf. Bjarnason 2009). The ways in which I as a researcher exerted influence in this study include the challenge involved in, at every stage, trying to listen actively in order to incorporate as far as possible the voices in subsequent analysis. My role involved proximity, yet distance, to the young people's voices, and understanding, summarizing, analysing and making explicit all 10 persons' voices via text and direct quotations (described in more detail in Lang and Ohlsson 2009).

Four voices

In the narratives below, the young people shows their experience of the nature of and distribution of responsibility, and when necessary changes are made.

Eugene said that, from the very start of his university studies, he felt that professionals showed an awareness of the processes involved in responsibility for his studies. He felt that young people with disabilities were seen as an integral part of the university organization. Eugene was treated like any other student and he felt that he shared responsibility for the relationship between the study situation and the surrounding structure. He knew that he could contact specific people on various study-related issues. Much of the study situation suited Eugene well from the very beginning, as did time-related issues. There was a long-term plan for his studies.

When a difficulty arose, and Eugene brought it to the attention of people around him, appropriate changes were made immediately:

The professionals are open and want to fix things...I know that they have been absolutely open to this, so everything should work out fine... Nothing should stop me. I told her, the teacher, so she would be prepared in case I couldn't do it in time. That was fine, so I don't need to rush.

Ian felt that he could not trust that the interaction would work in such a way that he could count on sharing the responsibility for the study situation with people around him. Collaboration on creating a positive study situation sometimes worked and sometimes did not. Ian took most of the responsibility for his study situation. Parallel with his studies, he had a function as an informal skill-developer in the field of university studies and students with disabilities. This was a deliberate strategy to prevent him from feeling that he was part of an experiment. Ian said that he made great demands on the study situation and that he took his own responsibility for it. He experienced the initial university period as intense and chaotic. A new way of studying, moving to a new city and home, be employer of new assistants 24 hours a day and to assume responsibility for adaptation of the teaching facilities. He did not find the studies difficult, but when he pointed out the need for changes in order to make the study situation satisfactory, he felt that his voice was not heard. Changes were made later:

I think that we students have a lot of responsibility... I don't think you should say 'Why have you not fixed this?' It's hard if they [professionals] know nothing... I was the first in my department with a disability so I was a bit of a guinea pig... I don't think that they knew much before, I don't know what previous knowledge they had [about university studies for students with disabilities], it's a feeling I had... I had written about my limitations at an early stage.

Nora described her university studies as being so random that she had given up. She felt that she was mostly regarded as a problem. Several different operations in a learning situation had to be managed simultaneously, and a given learning situation did not have an acceptable time structure. Professionals at her university suppressed a deeper understanding of a complicated learning situation, and focused instead on an individual care perspective. The fact that she had to fight for an equivalent study situation had an impact on the actual studies. With all-day lectures plus 5 hours of homework each day, she had no time and energy to change her study situation. When she tried to face the challenges and change the situation together with the study environment, she felt that those around her showed no interest. There was no one with whom to share responsibility for the study situation. Desired changes were not generally made and any changes that were made did not take place unless Nora had been exerting pressure for a long time. There was no planning of the study situation:

There are a lot of questions from teachers. Can you handle it? Do you have someone who can help you? We [students with disabilities] should not allow this type of people [professionals] to become mothers and fathers. It is not me as a person who comes first, it's my disability that comes first... You have to show 'here I am'. I must have next year's reading list already this year. I don't know if this is discrimination or whether it's a condition that you are always responsible for being one step ahead all the time, no matter what.

Buck reported that everyone except himself seemed to regard it as a utopia that he should begin university studies. More than a year previously, he had been accepted for the university programme of his dreams. Since the study environment could not meet his basic requirements, he had to request a deferral. He described a year-long unsuccessful struggle with and between community organizations on educational, rehabilitation and care issues. There was no discussion about cooperation on any division of responsibility. He felt that his view of the difficulties of the study situation did not correspond with the views of people around him. They had opinions and gave advice about motor limitations even in cases when he could claim other, less visible, difficulties. It seemed as if the outside world could not look beyond the visible disability. He gave an impression of hopelessness when he described negative forces at societal, organizational and individual levels. Buck was frustrated that the year passed with no sign of getting any closer to university studies. In relation to further education, the years after upper-secondary school were characterized by indifference, inertia and slow decision-making:

The whole thing is that I have been accepted onto my university education programme. Now I've been waiting a year to start. It's not easy... it's not just about university, it's about society as a whole. It's about getting all the pieces to work. The problem is often that the university itself is competent and the municipality is competent. And then you're in contact with the rehabilitation organisation, they are also competent. But there is no one who coordinates everything, takes responsibility, and it's hard to get it to work. It's about all elements of society needing to take greater responsibility. Otherwise it's difficult to get it to work, no-one has a complete picture. It involves all elements working together, it's not just some people who have responsibility, it's many parts together. Very dangerous.

Experience pattern and community structures

As shown in the descriptions above, the young people have widely varying experiences of (1) how Swedish university organizations view and manage uncommon study situations, (2) how the responsibility for the study situation is divided between the young person and the surrounding organization and (3) when the necessary changes in the young person's study situation take place. In order to clarify and compare the values in the four configurations, the analysis tried to find a focus. In identifying the core of the different values, this phase of the analysis meant that the content of the three themes in [Table 1](#) – (A) the nature of responsibility processes, (B) how responsibility is distributed and (C) the phase in which necessary changes take place – were crystallized into four descriptions of experience-based viewpoints. The various elements in the four-fold experience pattern show the different values in the three themes A–C (e.g. Eugene's experience of conscious processes concerning studies).

In the second stage of the analysis, the content in each of the narrative configurations was related to the content in themes A–C, i.e. all values arising in the configurations of Eugene, Ian, Nora and Buck. This concluding phase led to four summarizing concepts about the qualitative context that the young people feel they are part of, here defined as proactive, ambivalent, reactive and non-existent community structures ([Table 1](#)). Each of the four structures should be seen as the overall environment in which an individual is to study. A community structure is seen as a key concept for how the content is experienced and the values that characterize the context of which the individual is part. The community structures have been

Table 1. Nature, distribution, responsibility and timing/changes.

Narrative	A. Nature of responsibility (quality)	B. Distribution of responsibility	C. Timing/changes	Community structure
Eugene	Conscious processes concerning studies	Social and interaction responsibility	Proactive, gradual	Proactive
Ian	Random, meetings may occur, ambivalence	Individual responsibility	Change comes later	Ambivalent
Nora	Characterized by random qualities	Atomistic responsibility/lack of responsibility	Few or no changes	Reactive
Buck	Lack of collaboration between individual/society/organizations	No social responsibility/out-dated perspective	Vacuum	Non-existent

created in an attempt to identify the qualities that are experienced in university studies in Sweden. Consequently, who experiences what and in relation to which university is secondary and an individual person need not experience all qualities in a community structure. At a single university, the qualities of several community structures can be manifested in parallel.

Proactive, ambivalent, reactive and non-existent community structures

In a proactive structure, the long-term issues of university studies are clarified and combined with awareness about the student's life and learning situation. In a proactive structure, all students are viewed as students, and a disability becomes relevant only when the barriers of the situation emerge. The proactive structure has developed sensitivity to critical elements, where the system reacts to the situation before it escalates into difficulties. Professionals are aware of the precarious situation that can quickly arise, but the disability is not constantly in focus. Eugene experiences that his surrounding environment create a good situation for life and learning. Eugene's description of conscious study processes, experiences of social responsibility, and proactive and gradual change, comes across as desirable qualities for the others in the study.

When university studies begin in a proactive structure, disability-related issues seem to have a rather low profile, and the structure is characterized by a coherent preventive approach. Potential difficulties are not amplified and those that do arise are smoothly eliminated, sometimes in collaboration between several players. Representatives of the university organizational level seem to adopt a preventive approach, without taking over the individual's responsibility situation. The longitudinal issues, and the dynamic awareness in the proactive structure, are close to the qualities Skrtic (1995) calls an adhocratic organizational system. Study-related difficulties are continuously debated between different professional categories in collaboration with the individual. The proactive structure also seems to satisfy the need for the educational and organizational development advocated by Clough and Corbett (2000). The study shows that a learning and life situation in a proactive structure reaches advanced levels on its way to an inclusive ideal (UNESCO 1994; United Nations 2006b).

Ian finds himself in an ambivalent study environment in which the desired situation is sometimes found and sometimes not. Nora's study environment seems to

be reactive, with constantly random qualities. Solutions are always responses to situations that arise. The study situation is perceived as anomalous. The qualities of the ambivalent and reactive structures (Table 1) could be related to the more fixed and static tendencies in the bureaucratic system of an organization (Skrtic 1995). In the ambivalent structure, the static tendencies appear as an indication, while in the reactive they are a clear tendency. The environment-related circumstances in everyday activities at university could change without any clear motive and professional from different areas often took place independently in parallel without collaboration. This also seems to create a barrier that prevents the young person from taking responsibility and participating.

A prevailing organizational system that is based on values in individual needs and deviation requires 'special education' (Skrtic 1995). In a bureaucratic system, the need becomes evident through the support of special programmes offered by specific professionals, but the system does nothing about nor gives any guarantee about individuals' participation and responsibility. The 'norm' that only young, talented, healthy individuals are selected for homogeneous university groups (cf. Arnesen and Lundahl 2006; Askling 2001) is currently being challenged. Access to and continuation of university studies is also made difficult when representatives of other organizations are perceived as bureaucratic, especially when young people feel that their education- and health-related organizations work quite independently of, or even against, each other.

Buck experiences that the surrounding environment has a negative impact on his life and learning situation. Quite simply, he does not get access to the university studies for which he was accepted. Month after month, his wish to start university studies is met with disinterest, lack of cooperation and an out-dated perspective. A non-existent community structure (Table 1) contains no social responsibilities in the life and learning situation at all. The transformation to a situation in which everybody can find their place in an educational organization, an issue raised for many years by Skrtic (1991), Dyson (1999) and Tetler (2008), has not yet been achieved at university. In a non-existent structure, anomalous and uncommon situations have not been considered or anticipated. Young people have to take undivided individual responsibility for their democratic rights and must be constantly one step ahead in all processes. A non-existent community structure has no cooperation, at individual, organizational or a wider societal level. In this atomistic existence, young people's issues are passed around without any complete picture, and the young people are left in a life and learning vacuum.

Discussion

To sum up the experience pattern of young people, the contextual awareness of and preparedness for the nature of responsibility appears to vary, and affects the diverse situations that may arise in the young person's life. Views also vary of the types of responsibility involved in the distribution of responsibility processes. Different traditions and ambitions seem to affect collaboration, both within and between individual, organizational and societal levels. Various timing-related structures are also added in the young person's encounters with university representatives and others.

All the students in the study had satisfied the formal entry requirements for university studies, but this study shows that whether they will have access to and be

able to start their studies seems to be influenced by a number of factors in their surrounding environment. For those students starting university, the studies will involve various qualities relating to responsibility and participation. The ability of students to participate could be seen as one consequence of the qualities in the surrounding environment relating to responsibility. In particular, the individuals' genuine participation seems to be affected by collaboration qualities involving the individual and the surrounding environment. The discussion above considers both the surroundings and their effect on the study situation, and the qualities that affect the individual's ability to participate.

Effect of the surrounding environment in wider and narrower perspectives

The good, the collectively desirable, linked to a democratic ideal assumes mutual trust between the individual and the surrounding environment (Honneth 2000). The Swedish state's role as a provider and guarantor in and between universities (Askling 2001) and the rights perspective, i.e. whether universities in Sweden treat all students equally and work against discrimination (SFS 2001:1286), can be critically discussed, as shown by the empirical results of this study. However, as shown by Nora's quotation, it is difficult to determine what should be regarded as discrimination in reality, but the young persons' experiences of being treated first as people with disabilities and secondly as young students are clear, and bring consequences. The conditions that Honneth (2000) puts forward regarding the surrounding environment's trust in relation to the individual's importance for attainment and development of democratic societal goals do not seem to be shown. The wide variation – from the content of the proactive, through the ambivalent and reactive, to the non-existent community structures – seems to be a major challenge in the perspective of a holistic Swedish university context. The young people in this study, except in the proactive structure, simply did not know what to expect or require, and are rather at the mercy of chance and what others perceive as normality. They have realized that the external view of them is divided. While a physical disability is a permanent focus of interest in one situation, a disability arises dynamically in another (Lang 2004). While waiting for a smoother transition and a more permanently inclusive university environment, young people need to overcome a new situation in each new context.

In an educational organization, there may be a desire to overcome the barriers that create marginalization (Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006). Scandinavian countries have a tradition of emphasizing participation and preventing exclusion of minority groups and young people with special needs. For every professional, there is always a first time for encountering uncommon situations. All individuals have to formulate their response to the consequences of shortcomings in a given context. The encounter can be complicated when someone becomes aware of a shortcoming for the very first time, and it may be difficult to adopt a neutral attitude in the interaction with the individual (Goffman 1972). Different social contexts relate to the unique and anomalous in various ways. There is no human activity or behaviour that cannot be constructed as the subject of a stigma. Everyone has to consider uncommon situations (Thomas and Loxley 2001; Goffman 1972). Special-education practice, seen as a way of organizing varied educational elements, could be seen from a categorically oriented, functionalistic perspective. In a professional bureaucracy, critical situations are attributed to an individual's need which, through screening,

should fit into some type of standard programme (Skrtic 1991, 1995). Such a bureaucracy comprises various professionals and is based upon a relationship between a specialist and an individually oriented problem. It means that professionals work quite independently of each other and an individual could meet different professionals for different reasons. The young people in the study have many years of experiences and understanding of professionals who state that they have not met 'anyone like them' before. It seems unreasonable that professionals are not given any qualitative support for how to understand actual values and how to act in the, for them, new situations. Because of this shortcoming, young people have to adopt a skill-enhancing role, in addition to their student role. Students bear a large responsibility for the skills enhancement of professionals who have not yet encountered diversity in their professional life.

Individual affected

Jenner (2004) points out the value of respect to the person who, in some way, can be regarded as subordinate in a meeting. A solidarity form of recognition is based on reciprocity, where individuals are valued for their unique and particular identity. The community, including the individual, strives for common goals and values (Honneth 2000). Some community structures in this study include the individual and strive for common values, while others do not. The four community structures together show a large contextual variation regarding how the individuals are perceived and valued for their unique and particular identity. Educational values are sometimes strictly cognitive and sometimes the value is strictly care-related and emotional. As highlighted in the solidarity form of recognition (Honneth 2006), educational and emotional involvement can be parallel, and there can be an active tolerance of other people's individual uniqueness. Acceptance into a community, such as entry to university studies, sometimes appears to be a utopia for everyone except the individual. Sometimes, the individual's contributions are welcomed in the community as a unique and important resource. However, in one community structure, the young person feels invisible and ignored (Honneth 2003), while in another the young person is given an opportunity to achieve recognition. A limited place in a community at the start of university studies could be seen as a limited solidarity form of recognition.

Participation is emphasized in a postmodern society (Thomas and Loxley 2001). The situation in question could have serious and long-term consequences for the individual identity. It could affect the individual's ability to attain full self-realization, to develop positive self-esteem and, by extension, a good life in a postmodern society. Qualities in one aspect of social life can spread and impact other parts of an individual life (Honneth 2000). An inadequate and inappropriate policy in one area can probably be spread across sectors (Oliver and Barnes 1998), such as between education, health, welfare, social conventions and accommodation. In particular, the non-existent community structure seems worrying in this respect, but the reactive and ambivalent community structures can also help to overlook the holistic qualities for the individual. In a longitudinal perspective, this could affect whether young people can take up their roles as active and participating adult members of society.

The future

This research project demonstrates the value of cooperation, the value of a dynamic distribution of responsibility, and the value of continuity and timing in the transition from upper-secondary school to the first period of university studies. There appears to be a discrepancy between the overall conditions in this study and the democratic ideals that Honneth (2000) proposes regarding aggregated activities of individuals contributing to attainment of desirable societal goals. Taking the messages of young people seriously and building on them satisfies both humanistic and democratic values. Biesta (2011) emphasized inclusion as the essence of democracy in the sense that everyone concerned is able to influence the process. Further research is needed outside the traditional areas of knowledge, focusing on environmental influences on learning and difficulties arising in education (Thomas and Loxley 2001). The study has shown that this environmental influence also applies to young people with disabilities tackling studies at university level. The life opportunities and the new challenges offered by a university career path would also be subjects for further research, with the student emerging with the ability to play a more significant role in a broader societal perspective. Qualities of active citizenship could play a significant role in a reformatted perspective on diversity, disability and an inclusive higher education (Alevriadou and Lang 2011), especially in a long-term perspective. In a longitudinal perspective, substantial efforts over a limited period could be a successful investment in the development of an individual (Bandura 1997). This applies both to a whole generation of young people and to society as a whole.

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