
OUTLINES - CRITICAL PRACTICE STUDIES

• No. 1 • 2010 • 1-2 •
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Editorial

In much of the literature on disability, the main interest is to extend our knowledge about biological causes of different types of disabilities and their associated deficits. This type of research is based in the medical model of disability, which assumes that a direct relationship exists between the biological defect and the disability. This special issue of *Critical Practice Studies on Disability and Cultural-Historical Activity Theory* presents an alternative approach. From the point of view of cultural-historical activity theory, the medical understanding of disability fails to acknowledge how a person with disability has to act in social practices adapted to individuals without disabilities. This mismatch between person and practice implicates that the presence of a defect or disability reorganises the development of that particular individual as a whole. The impact can be found in many aspects of life; the lack of a suitable local school making it necessary to attend a special school far away, decreased possibilities of the individual to participate in the same activities as peers and friends without disability and hesitation from employers to engage an adult with disability despite relevant competencies. Cultural-historical activity theory provides a theoretical basis for understanding disability. The developmental trajectory of children with disabilities is a complex interaction between biological development and the child's participation in social and cultural practices. *The match* between a practice and the child's ability to act in the practice is not naturally given, but can be seen as *the result of an ongoing development of the organisation of the practice and the development of the children* in the practice. Due to their biological deficits, many children with disabilities differs from their peers in ways, which cause a *breakdown* in the usual match between age and ways of organising different social practices. In the three articles in this special issue, different aspects of breakdown will be examined: In social development, reading abilities, family life etc.

All articles depart in the assumption that cultural historical activity theory offers a useful theoretical framework to understand the life of people with disabilities. Vygotsky and Luria conducted research on different groups of people with disabilities, and this work is still useful for inspiration. The emphasis on the dialectical nature of the relation between the biological defect and the development of the child offers a new way of thinking about intervention and pedagogic approaches to children, adolescents and adults with disabilities. Cultural-historical interventions aim at the area between the person with the disability and other persons; family, therapists, and focus on the activities all of them are involved in. This is an important difference from interventions from the medical approach, where the focus is mainly on the person with the disability; on hers or his biological shortcomings and possible ways of mending these with medication or remedies. Remediation also plays an important role in understanding disability from a cultural historical approach. Here, the focus is on how the person is able to use the remedy, how

other persons contribute to the inclusion of the remedy and how the use of the remedy transforms the shared activities.

By this special issue, we hope to show how cultural-historical activity theory offers very different approaches to understand disability and to inspire new research and practice using the cultural-historical perspective in this area.