Obsessed with the Doctoral Theses

Supervision and Support during the Dissertation Process

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After having supervised the 30th doctoral thesis at the University of Lapland, Finland, Professor Kaarina Määttä invited the doctoral graduates and their circle of acquaintances to talk about their experiences of the process of writing a doctoral thesis and their opinions on good supervision and support. What did the dissertation process give and demand? Those who can answer this question are the ones who have defended their doctoral theses as well as the candidates’ spouses and professionals in the scientific community. This book introduces explicitly all the phases of graduating as a doctor, reveals the personal matters concerning doctoral theses, and concretizes the pedagogy of supervising doctoral theses.

This book is aimed at doctoral students and their professors as well as everyone who is somehow connected to the dissertation process. The aim of this anthology is to support prospective doctoral students and their supervisors in their dissertation processes.

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A dissertation process represents an immemorial and special phase in life to everyone who has defended his/her doctoral thesis. It appears the same way to doctoral candidates’ families, friends, children, employers, and everyone else who is close to the candidate.

Doctoral students’ everyday lives are formed into a new mold for the years of writing a doctoral thesis; it demands adjustment, effort, solutions to cope with everyday life, support, and empathy not only from the doctoral students themselves but also from their circle of acquaintances.

The dissertation process is also a significant experience and an eventful chain for the supervisor. Every path to becoming a doctor is unique.

Thus, the relationship between the doctoral student and the supervising professor is important and built together representing a personal connection that the academic world keeps quiet about. A supervising relationship resembles a multidimensional, personally touching, and unforgettable interdependency as opposed to the activities controlled by the objectives of a doctoral degree.

What fascinates in writing a doctoral thesis? What makes a master graduate want to become a doctor and struggle at his/her limits? Furthermore, what inspires the supervisor or the doctoral student’s family and friends to exert themselves by the doctoral student’s side while aware of the fact that working with a doctoral thesis is not just sunshine?

I have worked at the University of Lapland for thirty years—since it was established. The university is located in northern Finland, Rovaniemi. I started as an assistant of education in the Faculty of Education and graduated as a doctor from the University of Lapland in 1989. The first doctor of education who graduated under my supervision had her public defence in 2002. Ever since, my work with supervising doctoral theses has increased so that my 36th task as a custos will be on June 3, 2011. I will carry on supervising, and I am happy for the opportunity to do this kind of work.

After the 30th doctoral thesis, I invited the doctoral graduates and their circle of acquaintances to talk about their experiences of the process of writing a doctoral thesis and their opinions on good supervision and support. What did the dissertation process give and demand? Those who can answer this question are the ones who have defended their doctoral theses as well as the candidates’ spouses and professionals in the scientific community. This book introduces explicitly all the phases of graduating as a doctor, reveals the personal matters concerning doctoral theses, and concretizes the pedagogy of supervising doctoral theses.
This book consists of the doctors’ (N=15) descriptions of how their doctoral theses sprang up and what the whole process required. The articles reveal the personal experiences of the dissertation process that are often not discussed in the academic world. Until now, only the prefaces of doctoral theses have opened the curtains to the scene of a doctoral student’s personal experiences; and analyzing personal experiences has been considered unnecessary or insignificant compared to the scientific writing. The stories about dissertations are filled with feelings of excitement and relief, and the experiences vary from the most extreme efforts to incomparable delight. Additionally, the doctoral students’ spouses (N=5) describe what the dissertation process demands from significant others who have to live their everyday lives with a doctoral student and the significance of their support and encouragement.

The aim of this anthology is to support prospective doctoral students and their supervisors. Thus, the voice of the experience of supervising doctoral theses is brought out in the book. I hope that the articles written by my colleagues about the nature of the pre-examination, the public defence, and the writing process as well as applying for funding make prospective doctors’ dissertation process easier. In my own article, I concretize the pedagogy of supervising doctoral theses.

Few books about the dissertation process have been published, at least not ones revealing personal experiences as openly as this book does—and there could not be as there have not been enough describers. Now, since the number of doctors has increased in Finland and internationally (see Chambaz et al., 2006, “Developing the doctorate”, in Bologna Handbook, pp. 1-18), help, advice, information, and understanding about how to write a doctoral thesis as well as how to supervise this process are greatly needed. This book is aimed at doctoral students and their professors as well as everyone who is somehow connected to the dissertation process.

THE MAIN TERMS

As the form of procedure and terminology varies by country, I will briefly introduce the terms used in Finland. In this book, the word dissertation process covers the whole process of conducting doctoral research from the very beginning to the end that culminates—under the chairmanship of a custos—in a dissertation and the public defence of one’s doctoral research. Doctoral candidate thus refers to a doctoral student who is defending his/her thesis. After the actual public defence, a post-doctoral party in the opponent’s honor takes place.

MY COMPLIMENTS

I am grateful to all the authors for their strong support and willingness to talk about the various phases and meanings of completing a doctoral thesis and becoming a doctor. Their effort, kindness, courage, and positivity have been the most crucial for the genesis of the book. I am happy about the positive reception of the idea of
the book, and I hope that the personal stories about the dissertation experience will support ongoing and prospective academically formalized dissertation processes.

I thank the Rector of the University of Lapland, Professor Mauri Ylä-Kotola, for his valuable support and encouragement to complete the book. Similarly, I want to thank the Lapland Regional Fund of the Finnish Cultural Foundation for providing the grant to translate the book.

I also thank the publisher, Mr. Peter de Liefde, who is the founder and owner of Sense Publishers, for his bold decision to print and publish experiential knowledge from the northernmost university of the European Union—the University of Lapland—that functions in the arctic area in Finland for an international readership and the scientific community.

Especially, I want to thank Satu Uusiautti, Ed.D., for our fantastic collaboration. Satu translated this book from Finnish into English and describes her dissertation experience in the postscript. I made Satu’s acquaintance when she was doing her master’s thesis under my supervision at the University of Lapland. She continued her studies by graduating as a licentiate of education and a doctor of education quickly, staying focused on her target, and expressing her careful dedication and versatile giftedness. Our mutual positive and appreciative collaboration has been extremely rewarding and delightful. Now, we have become co-researchers to start and carry out many new and promising projects. Without Satu’s enthusiasm and initiative as well as language proficiency, this book would not be available for an international audience.

At the University of Lapland, in Rovaniemi, on the 1st of May 2011

Kaarina Määttä
SEIJA KANGAS

SUPPORTING AUTISTIC SPECIAL STUDENTS AT MY WORK COMMUNITY

“AM I ABLE TO DO IT”

When the Supervisor of my master’s thesis hinted the first time that I should continue with this research as a post-graduate student, I was confused: Me having a dissertation some day? Although, this thought had not even crossed my mind previously, I was thinking of my situation. I would have time for adult education as my own children were older now and in addition, I had the exceptional chance as a special education teacher to do research among autistic special students relatively easily. Would my resources be sufficient for studying this extensively? I asked this my Supervisor who was certain of my abilities and supported me. Without her belief on my chances, I would not have ever thought of continuing to post-graduate education.

Basically, the dissertation process started when I dared to meet my future Supervisor with my newly printed master’s thesis. She appreciated the importance of my research theme and supported and advised me to draw up a research plan immediately in order to get the permission for post-graduate studies. Getting started with the post-graduate education was made as easy as possible for me giving an impetus to this hesitating student’s decision making.

In that first meeting my Supervisor stated that I was an expert on the substance and she, for her part, knew researching and writing a research report. This was the working division through the whole research process.

“DO NOT PHOTOGRAPH ME… NOW YOU CAN PHOTOGRAPH ME”

My research consisted of the observation of autistic children’s interaction at my own work place, where the permission procedures were distinct. The permission was needed from the children participating in the research and their parents as well as from the community where the observation took place.

Doing research at one’s own work place induces several things to reflect. A researcher has to consider what kind of researches can be carried out on or with children and when it is adults’ duty to make decisions on children’s behalf. How could I reach the parents who brought their children to the rehabilitation period? I was talking about this at one psychologist’s presence and she offered to transmit the permission inquiry to the parents at the beginning of the rehabilitation period. That psychologist acted as an important advisor and supporter also otherwise.

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during the whole research. Her positive participation probably increased the parents’ trust on my research. Getting these kinds of key persons to participate is of primary importance, especially when the work community has not got used to a member who does research.

In addition, accepting the observation in the field may be difficult. Fortunately, my observation periods took place in a sheltered home where everyone was used to guests. The children’s parents were also welcome to familiarize themselves with the activities and to spend time with their children at the sheltered home. However, I approached the nurses sensitively asking for permission to come to observe the children’s activities. I emphasized the fact that I do not observe or evaluate their work but the autistic children’s interaction with them. I was also authorized to use their comments and our discussions as source material for my doctoral thesis. After all, they did know the children better than I as a researcher did. Afterwards, in the post-doctoral party, I was especially pleased by one nurse’s words: Also the nurses had extracted plenty from our discussions and were missing those after my field work ended.

How to inform the children of the research, whose main deficit is the problem with communication and interaction? Not all the children are literate and understanding and the nature of the information requires various tactics as the group in question is a special one. Regardless of having permission from the parents, one is not allowed to do research with a child if he/she is against it (Mäkinen, 2006, p. 65). Beforehand, I thought that informing the children would go the best when they were observed and video shot. Usually, they just came to see what I was doing and continued on their activities thereafter. Always, when a child was able to give permission to video shoot or observe, I asked that and respected the answer.

In the observation situation, something that a researcher is not prepared for can occur. For me, these kinds of situations were those when a child took off all the clothes or behaved aggressively. In a situation like the preceding, I stopped video shooting or turned the camera in another direction. A behavior that could be classified aggressive, posed me a major ethical problem: Could I report it? What kind of impression would I create of the children who were already otherwise special? Could I ignore that thing and neglect reporting it? Finally, I asked the right question myself: What was the reason for the behavior I was observing? Would I be able to explain it on the grounds of my data? From this point of view, I saw the problem at scale and it became an important part of my research.

“SHE IS OUR SEIJA, NOT ANY RESEARCHER”

When going to the sheltered home, I was thinking of my own role: shall I be sucked into nurse’s work as there is lack of employees? Am I able to take an observer’s role or shall I take a familiar nurse’s role instead? In my own class, my observation focused on the free-floating playtime when the adult’s control was exiguous. Thus, I could concentrate on observation and avoid a teacher’s role. At the sheltered home, I asked the nurses to act as if I was not present. Particularly at
the beginning of the observation period and with substitutes, these matters were frequently discussed. I did not want to bother their work in any way. Still, they tended to bypass the camera and were shy at the beginning. When video shooting preschool children also Pramling Samuelsson, and Lindahl noticed that the adults reacted more to the presence of a video camera than the children did. Some of the adults feel themselves important when somebody is video shooting their actions, while the others feel self-conscious. The fact that a researcher is a member of the work community may be experienced as more uncomfortable or more pleasing if the cameraman was an outsider. If the work community is open-minded, video shooting inside the group may be fun and developing (Pramling, Samuelsson, & Lindahl, 1999, pp. 40-41).

Fortunately, I was seen as one of them, as one of the nurses told how she saw me regardless of the researcher’s role.

LIISA – SEIJA: “…Has that researcher visited yet, the camerawoman? She is our Seija, not any researcher.” (The parents are asking LIISA about me…) All the adults laugh.

SEIJA – LIISA: “Right.”

LIISA – SEIJA: “Of course they think of, mm, the doctoral thesis, and all great. Of course it is great, but as you are so familiar, it feels so strange when someone asks whether that researcher has been here already.” (Researcher’s diary 21 Sep 2005)

This openness in the work community to take me inside the group helped me to think over things and the phenomenon together with the personnel. These conversations, for their part, helped me to understand my observations. Mutual discussions about the observations also strengthened the reliability of the observations and conclusions. (see e.g., Metsämuuronen, 2006, p. 206.)

The mix-up between the roles of an employer and a researcher may cause confusion at a researcher’s own work place. This is why I tried to keep these roles separately. When working as a teacher, I did not do any research tasks, and when working as a researcher I tried to avoid impeding the nurses’ work. The confidentiality is worth special attention, because it is different for a researcher and, for instance, for a teacher. From my perspective, this issue occurred as having access to various documents. As a teacher I could have read several documents that could have brought more background information about the research subjects. As a researcher I had asked permission from the parents to check the diagnoses of the children and nothing else. In these situations, I was decisive not to utilize my teacher’s rights when doing this research.

There is one role that a researcher observing children is unable to avoid; the one of a safe adult. A researcher has his/her own ethical responsibility for intervening in disadvantages or injustices (Metsämuuronen, 2006, p. 241). A few dangerous or controversial situations occurred during the observation period, to which I as an adult had to adhere. Also Corsaro (1985, p. 31) notes that despite his decision of
intervening in children’s activities in the research group as little as possible, he had to navigate situations that were physically threatening.

“SHOULD I QUIT…”

Observation took considerably time and my field work period was prolonged over a year length being quite hard from time to time. This period was followed by a period of emptiness. Even the transcription of the video material felt hard for me to get finished. When the new challenges took place at my work, I seriously considered quitting my studies. After all, I had promised to my family not to burn myself out. Then I received an email from my Supervisor: “Would you like to introduce the current phase of your research in the next seminar?” This message made me think: should I write that I am going to quit or should I have a look of what I have accomplished so far? I was thinking of all the children, their families, and the personnel who had contributed to my observation data collection. I could not let them down. Therefore, I promised to introduce the present phase of my research.

When coming to the seminar, it was like I had participated in all the preceding seminars. After my presentation, my Supervisor inquired about the schedule of finishing my research, I told her that it will be finished when it is ready. She did not pressure me but told me about the rector’s grant that I could apply in order to finish my doctoral thesis. Thanks to it, I could be able to concentrate on writing the research report. Previously, I had been persistent that I want to work all the time and do the research as a side work. Now, the thought of the study leave seemed good. The facts that no one pressured me or made me feel guilty for my absence and that my Supervisor timed her suggestions at the right time from my point of view, meant the goal to be specified and clarified: My data would comprise a doctoral thesis. Until now, it was certain. This far my research work was striven by the desire to know more about the theme. The decision about writing a doctoral thesis and conquering all the obstacles, turned out to be crucial for me.

“IF I WAS FOLLOWING THIS FROM OUTSIDE, I WOULD SAY THAT THIS IS INSANE”

After the goal had clarified and the study leave had started, my day schedule changed totally. At seven o’clock I started doing the transcription and analyzing the video films. At nine in the evening, I stopped. The work was lonely; only the rabbits jumping in the back yard that I saw through the window were my company. Sometimes, I felt like my head was just humming. Almost all the rooms were strewed with papers and printouts. There were books in the kitchen to read while eating, and books next to pc to help writing the report, and some books on the night desk to read before falling asleep. The thing that resulted from all of this could be called the first version of a manuscript. Its structure was agreed together with the Supervisor. I had tried to revise my research in a way that was agreed but while doing that, it seemed to me that the structure was not working. After sending my
manuscript to my Supervisor, she invited me to her office. I started to feel suspicious and I was wondering of what is going on. My Supervisor welcomed me in a friendly way but as the conversation went on it became obvious that she wanted to change the structure of the research report. She had noticed the same problem as I did while reading: the structure did not value the latter observation period enough. It must be precarious to tell the student that the guidelines given in the supervision are not working and the structure of the manuscript has to be renewed. However, I was relieved, because now I knew what to do. Quite quickly, I was able to send a new version of the manuscript which was accepted by my Supervisor.

“I HOPE THAT YOU WILL NOT READ THIS UNTIL ON MONDAY, BUT I’LL ASK ANYWAY”

I appreciate that I was able to share all the worries immediately, even the smallest and simplest ones, with my Supervisor. Especially, in the writing phase of the research report I confronted plenty of questions that seemed minor afterwards but which could have prevented me from proceeding without quick answers from my Supervisor. My co-post-graduate students', including myself, most active time for questions occurred on the weekends; this made me feel guilty. Namely, I was expecting to have an answer on Monday and when I received it in one hour’s time from asking, I was caught up thinking of the coping of my Supervisor. Quick answering worked as a source for my own coping and motivation: my Supervisor valued my work and its progress.

Email conversation was the busiest at the home straight of writing the manuscript. When sending my research to be reviewed, it still needed to be refined and improved. The Supervisor softened partly quite critical review statements; and I was not depressed by them in any way. Critical and accurate statements helped me to improve the outcome. I thought that I owed that to the autistic children and their parents, and my colleagues as well. I would not have dared to publish a poor work.

“IS THERE LIFE AFTER THE POST-DOCTORAL PARTY”

My Supervisor’s work did not end when we got the review statements. I asked advice from her several times relating to the practicalities. I was totally surprised about the work that related to getting the doctoral thesis printable and arranging the public defence of my thesis and post-doctoral party. The simple questions such as “Who will design the binding?” “Should I invite the language consultant to the post-doctoral party?” and so on, needed to be answered by the Supervisor. Although, these questions had been considered in the seminars, the answers had slipped from my mind. Luckily, I had the Supervisor who answered these questions.

I still remember how my Supervisor described me how to enter the auditorium where the public defence took place: “The doctoral candidate goes first, then the
Custos, and the Opponent as the last one. We leave the auditorium in reverse order. My duty as a custos (and as a supervisor) is to protect the doctoral candidate.” Although, I did not consider the Opponent intimidating, I am able to understand the Supervisor’s task as a protective one: Firstly, a supervisor protects a doctoral student by supervising during a research process in order to achieve a fine result, then by supporting and encouraging when receiving critical review statements, and last, advising how to publish a book, that is the first one for the most doctoral students, and how to arrange this academic occasion. Nor is the least the support that a custos gives with looks and expressions during an actual public defence of one’s doctoral thesis. In other words, a supervisor takes care of a post-graduate student through the traps of a dissertation process to an honorable end.

“What will there be life after the post-doctoral party?” asked my husband about a week before the public defence of my doctoral thesis. I was not able to discern time or commit myself to the next week’s activities. Life went on and goes on furthermore. Although, many things seem unchanged from outside, I changed during this process; and along with it, my environment changed as well. Still, it is thrilling to think back the phases of the dissertation process, also the hard ones, and answer prospective doctoral students’ questions now after having experienced that all. There are not any small or insignificant questions.

REFERENCES
OUTI KYRÖ-ÄMMÄLÄ

RESEARCHER-TEACHER AS THE SUPPORTER
OF VARIOUS PUPILS

“There would be quite quiet in a forest if only those birds who would sing the best could sing.”
- Henry van Dyke

THE BACKGROUND FOR THE BIRTH OF MY THESIS

The roots of my research are in my work as a teacher due which I have been able to meet a variety of pupils. Already after graduating as a special teacher at the beginning of the 1990s, I came up with an idea about a doctoral thesis about supporting pupils’ cognitive skills. As I was working with children, I many times had to think whether there was any “sense” trying to increase the contents in subjects for children because often the reason that slows learning down is the lack of attentiveness or slow cognitive development. Would it not be more important to pursue developing children’s basic learning-to-learn skills and information processing skills, would it? Along with my teaching experience and in-service training, my interest in this research theme strengthened. However, I did work over ten years until my dream of doing research came true.

In my research, my purpose was to meet the challenge that originates in practical work: how could a teacher support in an optimal way in general education those pupils who underachieve and how to remediate their cognitive skills, and simultaneously, their learning and working skills? I still consider this challenge concerns the whole teacher corps: supporting various pupils cannot be defined as concerning only teachers in general education or only special teachers. Pupils are different and need different kind of teaching. However, diversity does not necessarily mean that a pupil was that “special” that he/she would need special education separately from general education. When approximately every fourth pupil at elementary schools in Finland is in special education (see Statistics Finland, 2009), can we even talk about “special” education any longer?

COMBINING RESEARCH WITH OTHER LIFE

When I started my doctoral research, I worked as a special teacher and my roles as a mother and a teacher did not leave me much free time. An obligatory pause for working as a teacher – namely, infected vocal cords – turned into a deciding factor for starting the doctoral research. My sick leave became epochal as I contacted the future custos of my public defence whose way of supervising had become familiar.

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to me already when I wrote my master’s thesis. Her quick reply and warm welcome also in a doctoral seminar inspired me to embark the job. After having got started, my research process advanced relatively fast. The theme with its background theories was firmed up. Since I already had considered research methods, my work started well. Indeed, my Supervisor said at the end of my research that “Outi’s research has been going on all the time like a train: constantly chugging and along the select rails”. I had wondered and deliberated the theme and gathered practical experience for a long time, over ten years, and I believe that is the reason why starting and implementing the research fared painlessly – yet, not in a totally straightforward way.

The everyday life and summers of our family went during the research process almost wholly on the researcher-mother’s terms by giving space, supporting, and understanding the mother’s dream. As the mother of the family, I often felt guilty because I spent almost all my free time with the research work. My six-year-old daughter’s words for her visiting friends still ring in my ears: “Yes, sure you can come to play in my house but you have to be quiet because my mom does research.” Hearing that utterance stopped my thoughts several times in the midst of research work: what is important in life and whose terms we live on? Similarly, the moment is etched in my memory when my youngest child after my doctoral process told her friend “my mom and I, we went swimming” – without knowing that it is probably quite a usual way of spending time together in many families. However, it had not been something our family did in the summers during my doctoral process.

Alongside working in my position as a special teacher, my doctoral process took about three and a half years, altogether. Of that time period, I was on leave two spring semesters as I luckily got The Rector Grant from the University of Lapland twice. I was able to concentrate on my doctoral thesis free of work and at least my daughter’s school days’ worth. In addition, I got a peaceful study from the Lapland University Library to do my thinking and writing work.

When working as a teacher, I was able to collect the data as well as carry out my research as an action research at my own school. I got the research permission from the director of education of Rovaniemi, the school rector, and the pupils’ parents. In addition, I agreed about the implementation of my research with those two class teachers whose pupils participated in the research. When doing the research, I was, at the same time, a researcher and a teacher whose one goal was to develop her own work. The starting point originated in practice: a researcher-teacher’s desire to develop in her work professionally and simultaneously develop her work as well.

A TEACHER AS A RESEARCHER

In the school world, action research has been known for a long time. Among others, John Dewey implemented this methodology in his research work already in the 1910s and 1920s. His pragmatic educational thinking focused on the role of action, experimentation, and repetitious experience as the bases of learning and developing knowledge. According to the master of action research, Kurt Lewin, science should not be buried in universities but it should be practiced among
ordinary people and connected with everyday life: “Research that produce nothing but books will not suffice” (Lewin, 1946, p. 34).

Based on Lawrence Stenhouse’s work, an actual movement “Teachers as Researchers” was born in England in the 1970s (Stenhouse, 1975). According to him, both research and curriculum work are particularly teacher’s specific field and all teaching should be based on research. An opposite point of view could be analyzed as well: how could a teacher besides all his/her other tasks act as a researcher as well? Can a teacher who studies his/her own work be objective? How reliable information can a teacher/researcher acquire?

A researcher who works at school with an action research approach has two roles: on the one hand, he/she works as a researcher and on the other hand, as a teacher. The double-role is not unproblematic. These roles cannot be considered totally separate from each other: teacherhood affects research and doing research molds teacherhood as well.

Action research is also effectiveness research that aims at evaluating the effectiveness of remediation and teaching methods in the school world and thus, at providing carefully evaluated methods for practical work and for those who work with learning problems. Without systematic research, progress in teaching and remediation work is often random and slow.

Action research pursues positive change. A researcher looks for solutions in the practice that he/she studies together with other participants. Crucial is to involve in the research process those people the research concerns. In my own research, we had, between the teacher-researcher and pupils, an intensive interaction where the pupils learned from their teacher as did the teacher learn from her pupils as well. As a teacher-researcher, I got some information about the adaptation of the teaching method and, at the same time, I could develop my professional expertise during the research process.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF REFLECTION IN TEACHING AND RESEARCH WORK

A teacher-researcher’s self-reflection and self-assessment based on the reasoning that originates in practice is crucial in action research during the whole research process (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001).

It had a salient meaning also in my own research. I documented my self-reflection in my research diary. Already from the start, my Supervisor encouraged me to write down my thoughts and experiences in a diary. At that point, I had not yet understood the fundamental reason for writing but I “nicely” obeyed my supervisor. Not until at the analyzing phase of my research, I realized the meaning of the diary: by reading it, I could recall my own thoughts, the happenings in the lessons, and the pupils’ reactions; and at the same time, I could analyze their connections in the light of the research problems. Furthermore, it became clear to me how my teaching and certain actions had affected the pupils. (Cf. Niikko, 2001, pp. 186-202.) According to Niemi (1993, p. 53), action research is a tool for a teacher to dissect his/her own work and development by critically analyzing. Then, a teacher-researcher questions the prevailing practices and searches new and more adjustable solutions. As a teacher-researcher, I started to use in my research certain
teaching methods in order to improve my own teaching practices. However, my purpose was not just to develop this teacher-researcher’s own practices but to examine a teaching method in order it to be adapted in a wider context among school-entrants.

TEACHERHOOD AND QUALIFYING AS A DOCTOR – WHAT DID I LEARN FROM THIS?

The motto introduced at the beginning of my paper means two things for me. Firstly, it relates to my research theme about how I consider pupils’ diversity as richness. Today’s inclusive school aims at noticing every pupil’s needs and qualifications and, at the same time, rearing to tolerate dissimilarity.

On the other hand, this motto is connected with doing the research and doctoral thesis. According to my experience, I can say that – unlike it is commonly assumed – a doctoral student does not have to be a top-performer or expert, a so-called A-grade student. A doctoral process requires persistent and determined work and most of all passion for getting acquainted and studying one’s own subject. Naturally, working requires also time and resources that might then be absent from other areas of life – but only temporarily. When a research is completed, the permission for the public defence received, and the doctoral thesis printed, it is time to enjoy. Of course, the public defence of your doctoral thesis makes you feel excited beforehand but the thought that no one can know as much about the content of the research as the doctoral candidate self does – not even the opponent – calms you down in a big way. A doctoral student is the best expert of his/her research.

When I was doing my doctoral research, I worked as a special teacher in general education. I was a so-called much-watcher. I often contemplated my responsibility. Even if a teacher knew the best what should be taught at our schools, I think it is much more important to know how the actual teaching takes place at school. During my research, I considered my own action and tried to become more and more aware of the purposes of my actions and their interpretations, even of those that seemed as obviousness. I may even state that this reflection as well as conversations about the dimensions of teacherhood with my colleagues became a natural part of my teacherhood. At the same time, I noticed the development of my teacherhood: during the research process, I developed not only as a researcher but as a teacher as well.

Along with the research process, I also learned something about supervision. During the whole research process, my Supervisor’s support was more than great: she always answered my questions really quickly and her warm and encouraging attitude led the research process forwards also in bad days. She was also able to help the beginning researcher to proceed when the research seemed to be stuck: one encouraging email from her and I could address the subject with a new enthusiasm again. Afterwards, I have many times wondered whether my doctoral thesis had been completed – at least not at this pace – without my Supervisor’s empathic and competent support. A supervisor’s role in working with theses is always significant, sometimes even definitive. A student – whether he/she was a
RESEARCHER-TEACHER AS THE SUPPORTER OF VARIOUS PUPILS

graduate or post-graduate student – will certainly experience the feelings of despair and insufficiency at some work phase and exactly in that kind of situation, a supervisor’s active role is needed. Nowadays, I also supervise theses and can sincerely admit that I have copied the model of supervision from the Supervisor of my doctoral thesis. Empathetic supervisors who take care of students are needed also in universities!

Besides completing my thesis, my goal was, from the beginning of my research, that my research would arouse discussion when teaching services and solutions are evaluated. Especially, I want to analyze the nature of general and special education and how they are interconnected. Based on my research and experience, I am more and more certain that pupils’ cognitive skills can be improved with general education and at the same time the need for special education can be reduced.

REFERENCES

SUVI LAKKALA

MY DOCTORAL THESIS WAS ABOUT
INCLUSION – EMOTIONS AND TECHNIQUE

As all the significant things in my life, also the doctoral process involved powerful emotions. Those feelings cannot be described just by their depth but also polarity. I experienced courage, passion, and excitement but also fear, insecurity, and boredom. Besides emotional experiences, doing a doctoral research involves routines or technical matters, such as taking care of funding, securing smooth everyday life, regular and disciplined working, as well as studying things carefully, taking notes, and documenting.

A dissertation process enhances professional and personal development little by little. However, professional growth does not take place not steadily. Development involves learning that renews people during which small “crises” actually come with the territory. Development does not occur without change. Changes can be demanding, emotionally touching, and even threatening; and therefore, they mold students’ identity. My doctoral thesis raised me both professionally and personally.

COMPREHENDING SUPERVISION

A professionally skilled supervisor does not address his/her supervisee just technically but exploits the theories of learning and identity development in supervision. My Supervisor had a central role in my dissertation process. She recognized the developmental demands for my personality concerning my studying. During her supervision, she did not notice just the contents of the research and methodological perspectives but she paid attention to my feelings when she had to give feedback that demanded changes. In several situations, she told about other doctoral students’ experiences and reactions. She discreetly anticipated the emotional reactions that the various phases would cause. Along with the process, I had to learn that the feelings of incapability and being wounded were inevitable. She also reminded me how many times a high-quality text has to be written until it becomes polished. My Supervisor provided me with opportunities to confront “crises” that lead to learning something new both at personal and professional level.

ACTION!

My research theme covered inclusive teacherhood. I came up with the topic because many paradoxical questions about inclusion had occupied my mind for a long time. I did my doctoral research by studying my own work as a teacher. I started my
SUVI LAKKALA

research in the spring 2004 and had the public defence of my doctoral thesis in the
fall 2008. I carried out the empirical research within two years in collaboration with
my colleagues and teacher students. After the fieldwork period, I spent a year on
study leave financed by a research grant and adult education subsidy.

Writing a doctoral thesis is such a huge work that I seriously had to examine
how to keep all the acquired information organized. Luckily, I was wise enough to
carry a note book (a pedagogical diary) with me. At first, the content of it seemed
like unconnected notes or boring, repetitious descriptions of lessons. However,
already after a few months, I could find notes that seemed to have a significant role
in teaching. The guidelines towards theories started to emerge. In action research,
practice and theory are in dialogue all the time.

Writing up the data was exhausting and required systematic work. I used plenty
of time with it even though I was already impatient and wanted to move on. As
writing up the main data, I dissected the other data as well and was bogged down
with some parts for a long time. I examined various data at the same time and
analyzed the connections between different phenomena. I wrote down some
theories that appeared relevant to more careful examination later on. Thorough
work was worth it. When starting of rearranging the data, I remembered the
contents accurately and was able to do tentative interpretations and place the
results within new contexts.

FROM HARDSHIPS TO VICTORY

Afterwards, it seemed surprising how many times I had changed my mind until the
wholeness started to become clarified. I did not know beforehand how hard it would
be to do a doctoral research. I faced the most critical moments after having written a
long separate theoretical section. I returned it to my Supervisor but she did not
understand my intentions. She asked me to rewrite the whole text in order to better fit
it with the overall structure of the research – which had to be revised as well. The
same week, I had dinner with my colleagues. When one of them asked about the
progress of my project, I huffed that I guess I do not even know how to do research. I
remember my feeling of powerlessness but also my colleague’s response. “Hard?”
he exclaimed and continued: “Of course, it is difficult! That’s why it is so top-rated.
Remarkable studies are not conducted just like that.” The encouragement from my
respected colleague restored my self-confidence. The following morning, I started to
work with new enthusiasm. I wrote only a little section from a new perspective and
sent it to my Supervisor. Soon, I received an encouraging reply: “Now you are back
on track!” After all hard work, it was amazing how easy doing the research became
eventually. After the contents had organized, text sprang up almost by itself. All the
matters I had studied started to show a profit.

SCIENCE AND POPULARISM

At the beginning of the process, I was worried about the publicity of the doctoral
thesis. I found it frightening and repulsive to present my own research results in
public. After deliberations, I learned to distinguish scientific criticism from the assessments of the uninitiated. In the scientific community, public discussion about research results improves theories and practice. My own doctoral thesis about inclusive teaching enhances, for its part, prospective research on inclusion and teaching. At the beginning of my dissertation process, the scientific community was comprised of the people in our own doctoral seminar. I shared the topical matters of the time there and learned how to discuss. The Supervisor’s role as a creator of safe and inspiring conversation culture in the seminar was essential.

Finding common ground with the public nature of science in my mind gave me strength for the public defence of my doctoral thesis. Due to my husband’s support, I thought that I had an audience to which I had something important to say in my dissertation day. I had a unique opportunity to express the things that had troubled my mind as well as present the results. My opponent turned the dissertation as an intensive and interesting dialogue between two experts. The listeners found the ceremony enjoyable and useful.

**NEW SKILLS AND HOBBIES**

After graduating as a doctor, my conception of myself as a learner has changed. I am surprised of my development within many areas: I have learned patience at comprehensive entities. I know how to start familiarizing with matters and proceed step by step. My self-confidence has strengthened because now I can trust in my capability of discovering things I find interesting.

At first, writing was scarce and troublesome. It took time to learn that texts will be shaped through several revisions. I have developed as a writer and learned to express myself better than before.

After graduation, I have faced new challenges. There has been call for my research results; thus, I have a new role as a lecturer and educator. I am very happy that my research is exploited in teacher education and it is useful in practical pedagogical work. My new hobbies are research work, research-related expertise, and writing articles. They deepen and motivate me in my work as a teacher.

Every doctoral student experiences a dissertation process his/her own way. Doctoral students’ research themes differ greatly: for some, the theme is quite personal while for others more professional. Their life situations, age, and personalities vary. Nevertheless, the most important thing is to create one’s own practices, move on with one’s work in a way that suits the best, and execute the research according to one’s own schedule. One has to be prepared for a long-span but rewarding process. What would I have lost if I had not had the courage to give the research process and the dissertation day my soul!
EEVA-LIISA PELTOKORPI

LEARNING HOW TO SEE

An author told he had met a hunter in Columbia. Special about the hunter was that he could interpret other things as well in addition to what he could see with his eyes when walking in the wilds. He could read the nature like a book. Where other people would see only trees, bushes, and land, the hunter saw much more. He knew the paths of foxes as well as the routes of wolves and bobcats. He was a man who not only watched but also saw. One naturalist has indeed stated that people should become aware of the difference between looking and seeing when exploring the nature. You can watch the wonders of nature in the most careful way but seeing things is a totally different matter.

THE SUPERFLUITY OF RESEARCH LITERATURE

When I was to get started with my research work, I had to note several times that I did not seem to be able to see things accurately. Certainly, I had the enthusiasm for doing the research abundantly: I had a powerful desire to develop the primary pupils’ social skills from my class because I had, as a class teacher and a special teacher, detected some defects in those skills. The research theme appeared as the most topical and would develop my own work as well.

I had discovered numerous ideas and plans concerning my research theme and it seemed that I would come up with those more and more all the time. I found interesting studies about sociality, social skills, and empathy. I managed to gather so much information concerning my research that my desk was covered with papers and partly the floor as well. I tried to control and organize the piles of paper but disorder would just get worse and the piles would grow and grow. At that point, I had to shut down the computer and stop to think what I should do with the ever increasing amount of information that did not have space in my study any longer. As I was sorting the papers and reading the new resource books I discovered one figure that I had translated from an English book that concerned emotional coping. I studied the figure and gained an insight. I realized that this figure might be the central idea for my whole research. Being overwhelmed by inspiration, I heaped up almost all the other papers and packed them in the boxes. I even thought of throwing them all away in order to be able to focus on the new definition but just in case I eventually decided to keep the material gathered with hard work.
THE RESEARCH PHENOMENON WAS LIKE HOLDING A SCULPTURE ON MY PALM

Defining a research theme is hardly ever trouble-free but for me, it became almost insurmountable. The phenomenon I wanted to research expanded and widened in many directions; as if it was dissolved and drowned in the middle of various bypaths. “Social skills” was way too broad a subject to be a research theme. There was a flood of concepts, methods, research results, and neighboring phenomena concerning the theme. However, only by familiarizing myself with this wide background and reading, I was able to address the phenomenon of emotional regulation – which eventually formed the actual framework for my research.

When a researcher manages to find in the space of his/her research theme such a core that can be approached by a research something remarkable has been achieved. When I got to this phase, the research phenomenon was like a sculpture on my palm. I was able to observe the target of my interest, emotional regulation, from the various directions; and even to peep to the inside the phenomenon with a small light. Sometimes, I imagined being inside the sculpture and tried to see the phenomenon from inside. I could twirl the sculpture and sometimes it seemed luminous but often partly dark as well – and totally black every now and then.

A SKILLFUL TEACHER DOES NOT REVEAL ANSWERS STRAIGHT AWAY

As I was wandering in the jungle of my large research theme, I felt exhausted from time to time. My feelings varied from enthusiasm to the powerful experiences of disappointment. During the first year, I was about to quit several times. I even remember sitting in the doctoral seminar with my excessive research theme about social skills and trying to explain the core idea of my research to others. At first, due to my enthusiasm, I did not understand why those present did not get on the same wavelength with my thoughts by any stretch of their imagination. After the seminar, I decided to quit the doctoral studies and concentrate on my practical work as a teacher. Indeed, I had already earlier noticed that I did not have the makings of a doctor. However, my tenacity did not allow me to throw up my hands. I still thought about it at home and my Supervisor’s encouraging emails made me try one more time.

As an educator, a teacher, and as a student, I have found the following phrase to be true: “A skillful teacher does not reveal the answers directly to a pupil”. It proved to be true again during my dissertation process. My Supervisor was an excellent example of a teacher who has skill, experience, and genuine concern along a student’s learning path. She had figured out that a teacher’s task is to lead and help with various pedagogical solutions a student to learn in line with a certain direction. Finnish Philosopher Pekka Himanen has described it figuratively in his book The Finnish Dream (2007) saying that: “A teacher helps a learner to find in sparkle his/her flaring flame that, from then on, nourishes itself and strengthens the learner’s ability to interact with others. In a learning situation, a teacher can be like a stinging insect, for example a horsefly that makes a pupil’s lazy thinking move. Along with the sting, a pupil’s interest, wonder, and questions will be born.
LEARNING HOW TO SEE

because they are the starting point to all learning.” Himanen also compares a teacher with a midwife whose task is to help the other to bear. This midwife’s job also involves supporting a pupil to learn from the pupil’s own bases. Himanen does not refer only to interaction in a learning situation but he uses a more powerful expression “enriching interaction” which in his opinion necessitates a leader who provides participants with an opportunity to interact and who creates an enriching interaction.

The mutual cooperation between a student and a supervisor is based on enriching interaction that is about participation, caring, and trust. Participation and caring mean noticing both participants and engagement. I was able to experience this kind of caring especially when I was down not wanting to switch on my computer. American Researcher Burbules says in his book Dialogue in teaching. Theory and practice (1993) that participation means being interested in the other one; however, not just interest in the human being but in what he/she wants to say. The experience of participation became concrete in our doctoral seminar as well.

The relationship between a student and a supervisor develops little by little. A dissertation process often lasts even many years and within this period, a close relationship has the time and space to develop. Crucial is, however, that when working together, it is all about caring – which is strongly connected with mutual trust. On the other hand, engagement goes hand in hand with trust because when committing to something, an individual gives something from himself/herself and thus trusts in other people.

WAS IT POINTLESS TO COLLECT THE RESEARCH DATA?

I started doing my research in the fall 2005. I collected plenty of observational material about my pupils and I even had plenty of empirical material as well. In the summer 2006, I thought that the whole previous semester was wasted – or was it? Theoretical source books that I had stored at the bottom of the compartments of my desk gave comfort to my research work. English Researcher Somekh who has written much about action research has stated in his book Action research, a Methodology for Change and Development (2006) that as a result from combining reflection and practice, deep learning takes place through action research. Indeed, continuous reflection and becoming acquainted with the research theme seemed to having increased my self-comprehension.

I found out in the fall 2006 that my familiarity with the research phenomenon both at theoretical and practical level had deepened. More and more often, I also found myself exploring the boxes where I had packed the huge amount of papers I had gathered at the beginning of my research process. Every now and then, I remembered something that I had written down during the initial inspiration. I rewrote this text all over again, had supervision and email conversations with my Supervisor and my work progressed. Profound understanding about my research theme increased. Simultaneously, the secrets of scientific writing began to be revealed to me and my writing became more fluent.
Today, four years after my dissertation, I can say that this process has been one of the most significant phases of my life. Perhaps, my research would not have been completed if had not found my own research path after all the hardship and groping. I found it with the skilled Supervisor’s help and through constant self-reflection. I can, with all my heart, agree with Recognized Doctor Willam Osler’s statement: “The ability to see, not just watch, is the foundation of finding.”
ANNA-KAISA SIPILÄ

IN THE GRASP OF FACILITATED COMMUNICATION

I will always remember when I got a notice from the post office about a registered letter from the University of Lapland. The content of that letter was festive in all its plainness; a paper put within exquisitely bluish gray binding. With my fingertips, I could feel the university logo printed on the paper, in the middle of which was a burning flame. I had received the certificate of the doctoral degree in education.

A doctoral research is rewarding in many ways. The final reward is the degree certificate concretely legitimating the achievement of the most high-ranking scholarship. Previous to that moment, every researcher covers their own personal journey in the world of research. The starting point of my path goes back at the beginning of the 1990s when I got acquainted with my research theme, the facilitated communication method that concerns the marginal group of the disabled. When considering the length of my research, it took a long time; however, as a process it appears distinct and straightforward.

WHY TO SELECT FACILITATED COMMUNICATION AS A RESEARCH THEME?

The research subject had been settled for me already from the beginning: I wanted to study facilitated communication being subject to abundant, powerful, and even conflicting debate that awakened and confused people in the 1990s. I had become an all-rounder with the method in my work as a special teacher and educator. I did not fantasize of doctoral degree but I had a need to analyze this communication method both in theory and practice. My everyday observations about the life and communication of the mentally handicapped and autistic, as well as people diagnosed with cerebral palsy (CP) gave the impetus for my work. Various research results about supported communication and the fluctuating, often quite emotional discussion about the theme fired me with desire to grasp this disputed theme with research.

I have worked with the handicapped for a long time. According to my everyday observations and many studies, some seriously disabled as well as autistic people have benefitted from the facilitated communication method. The method helps especially when a person does not have a socially usable communication method. Those who possibly make use of the method do not speak in an ordinary way in order to become understood. They do not have other hope or satisfying way of self-expression or it has not been discovered regardless of attempts. Therefore, their only and thus quite limited opportunities for self-expression are uttering sounds, expressions, gestures, and action. Motoric problems make even the mentioned ways of self-expression difficult for many of the disabled.

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Lack of communication opportunities makes people frustrated. The unfortunate consequences appear as overall restlessness, introversion, depression, and challenging behavior such as hitting, biting, tearing, scratching, and hurting oneself and others. Facilitated communication seemed clearly improve some communication-disabled people’s self-expression and calm down their behavior. However, reasons for the functionality and unworkability of the method have not ever been studied in a satisfactory way and its position within the field of remediation and education is otherwise vague as well. It had to be studied in order to raise it at equal level with other communication methods that support and/or replace speech.

People who use this method need assistants whose task is to provide sufficient support for their assistees. In my research, I wanted to dissect the contents of this support and the assistants’ tasks when using the method. In addition, I analyzed how the method works for communication.

LONG-TERM PROGRESS AND SUPPORT

Facilitated communication had taken me. First, I completed my Master’s thesis about the theme followed by a doctoral thesis. At the phase of Master’s research, I approached the theme from the perspective of the people who communicated with it; whereas my postgraduate research addressed the assistants who used the method.

I studied alongside my actual work and from time to time, my research was set aside for a long time. Even then, the theme was in my thoughts, I followed the research results, and ripened the research in my mind. The slow progress of the process was advanced by many co-workers and friends who supported me to do this research. Especially, the pioneering Professor with facilitated communication in Finland as well as one of my friends and colleagues were my loyal supporters, knew the importance of my research theme, had encouraging and comprehending discussions with me, and inspired me to expand my work on the field of research.

I did my doctoral research in my free time. That was a choice that involved refusals as well. I gave up the long, fascinating vacations, several visits to my friends and relatives, and many other nice hobbies as I sat the late evenings and weekends at my computer. I spent my time with dissecting the papers sometimes endlessly, trying to understand as well as reading dictionaries and visiting the library. Surely, my labor offered me wonderful insights and that famous feeling of flow. Losing the sense of time and moving outside the time limits provided me with almost beatific experiences. And at the same time, the research usually progressed. The treasure trove of the university library was also substantial. The offering I got from there did not end just in research methods or the literature concerning my research theme, but contributed many other areas of my life as well.

THE SCIENCE TUNNEL OF THE LAST YEAR

The significance of supervision for the process of becoming a doctor cannot be emphasized too much. The beginning of the last year in my long research process was the turning point of my work. The principal of Tervaväylä School, my own
school, started to blaze a trail to advance our postgraduate studies. She contacted a Professor from the Faculty of Education, at the University of Lapland, who became inspired of our plans of doing doctoral research and agreed to become our supervisor.

Some of my colleagues and I had the opportunity to join the doctoral seminar led by the Professor. I participated in a large group of students from all over Finland. The group members supported each other and were able to experience the shared joy of the seminars. The seminars were extremely interesting and quite different research themes were dissected at the seminars. I was inspired by the encouraging atmosphere in our group as well as our Supervisor’s relentless intensity to go to town on various research themes and her ability to quickly come up with new kinds of perspectives, summaries, correctives, and suggestions. Some of the researchers had just started with their research whereas others were practicing their lections with our seminar as a test audience. The Supervisor’s active presence and proficiency reverberated to the group and inspired people even for far away to participate in seminar sessions. Our joint drives from Oulu to Rovaniemi, the location of the University of Lapland, and back sparked inspiring brain storms in a full car as we continued to discuss our studies after the seminars. Those drives advanced our postgraduate studies and were fun and useful extra-seminars.

The supervision I received was not restricted just in seminars. Within the personal relationship with only the Supervisor and Supervisee, I was able to step in something special, firmly gripping drive which did not save the Supervisor trouble or time. The process was intensive and sometimes like even a magical tunnel of happening that took its own steady course beside all other everyday life. Ah, the stream of emails and sparkle of brain work that I could enjoy during the final year of my research! The emails were sent thick and fast in several different times of day and altogether they comprised a three-figure number. I could not believe that research could advance so fast by email.

Due to emails and other contacts as well, I could notice that the Supervisor was interested in my research and appreciated it. She listened, gave space, and guided me gently but firmly back to the essential matters when I had lost in the maze of science. I also got some well-defined schedules that had an apparent meaning. Constant support, the joy of work and belief in completing the research were important emotional messages that I received from my Supervisor.

My work that involved plenty of travelling also spiced up the supervision process. At times, when I could not be reached by email, my Supervisor took care of the progress of my research with text-messages. Even at those times, I had a possibility to ask simple questions and receive short, helpful answers. My experience of the supervision during the last year was branded with a complete enthusiasm to research and the delight of discovery. Supported by these experiences, my research persistently proceeded towards completion step by step.

Pre-examiners come in at the final phase of a research. I was lucky to receive the review statements promptly. The intensive dissertation process culminated in
the public defence of my doctoral thesis in the World Environment Day, on the 5th of June 2009. Again, my Supervisor’s role was significant in my preparation for the public defence. Calmness, certain rituals, and highlighting a few important matters supported the doctoral student at this phase as well – indeed, the public defence of one’s doctoral thesis is a unique and exciting occasion for the most us. Concentrating on that particular moment demands its own attention without any unnecessary extras or pressures. In addition, the tips I got for arranging the ceremonies that took place after the event were worth their weight in gold.

Indulging in the supervision process expects many things from both the supervisee and the supervisor. I am glad that I dared to throw myself into this academic research work and I am grateful for all I have experienced.