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

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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