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STEP BY STEP TO A MORE INDEPENDENT EVERYDAY LIFE: EXPANDING HORIZONS AND SHARED EXPERIENCE

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From lived experience to research

- Background as an occupational therapist (OTR) and O&M specialist (special teacher)
- In Sweden we have low vision rehabilitation clinics for all ages
- PhD studies with the aim to develop concepts and a practice based theory about life-changes and learning processes when becoming visually impaired or blind
- A special interest in lifeworld phenomenology and philosophy as a tool to understand how people can again lead an active life, after the onset of visual impairment or blindness
- Qualitative research based on lived experience and narratives
- The research also includes the disabling aspects of blindness



Aims of two empirical studies

- Study 1: To understand changes which people undergo when struck by severe visual impairment or blindness, focusing on how people learn to handle their changed life-situation
- Study 2: To understand and clarify pedagogical processes that occur during vision rehabilitation
- This presentation will particularly deal with how a group based rehabilitation programme inspired the participants to encourage each other to take further steps to independence



Methodology and methods

- Study I: 8 participants, aged 33–72
- Study II: 6 participants, aged 30–63
- Methods: life stories, qualitative interviews and narratives, participant observations
- Hermeneutic analyses based on lived experiences and lifeworld phenomenological theory



The lifeworld phenomenological approach

- Lifeworld phenomenological theory and philosophy
- The lifeworld means the world where we live our daily lives
- The research is based on lived experiences
- The use of tools and activity
- Shared lifeworlds
- The theory of the lived body (M. Merleau-Ponty)

- "I shall suggest that much time and effort, as well as culture, have been needed in order to lay this world bare and that one of the great achievements of modern art and philosophy ... has been to allow us to rediscover the world in which we live, yet which we are always prone to forget" (Merleau-Ponty, 1948/2004, s. 39).



The gap between life and world

- Visual impairment or blindness have been interpreted as a gap or vacuum between life and world
- Changed experience of the time dimension; experience of here and now (present time)
- Experience of the body as an object
- Diminished possibilities to use habitual activity
- Sometimes viewed as a stereotype for blindness
- A break in life in relation to dimensions of time, space, other people and the performance of activities



Cornerstones in understanding life changes and learning

- Lived time and lived space
- The lived body (M. Merleau-Ponty)
- The concept horizon
- The everyday lifeworld (A. Schutz) – a social world



Lifeworld body-concepts within rehabilitation

- Existential, perceptual and social dimensions and aspects of activity
- Existential body – how the subject relates to time dimensions
- Perceptual body – how the lived body uses various senses to relate to the surrounding
- Social body – the intersubjective dimensions of everyday life and societal attitudes
- Acting body – relates to the human and lived body being active in everyday life



Learning to handle a new life situation

- Learning and rehabilitation deals with how to bridge the gap between life and world and make the new world to one's own world
- Content • individual • world (Bengtsson & Berndtsson, 2015)
- The pedagogy of in-betweenness
- The world is re-created mainly through activity
- Learning is based on intentionality

- Bengtsson, J. & Berndtsson, I. C. (Eds.). (2015). *Lärande ur ett livsvärldsperspektiv*. Malmö: Gleerups. (in Swedish)



Lived body, lived time and lived room

- Widening the horizon of time; being in the flow of time
- Being again a subject

- Relate to room dimensions in a new way; the perceptual body



Rehabilitation, learning and sociality

- The importance of the social world for learning
- Shared experience and lifeworlds in the rehabilitation context
- Widening the horizon of possibilities
- Changed identity



Learning activities: the acting body

- Widen the horizon of activities
- Re-learning of activities
- Learning new activities
- Embodied learning, social learning and reflective learning
- Rehabilitation should take these aspects of learning into consideration



Conclusions: lifeworld based rehabilitation

- Guiding people in learning to know their new world can be expressed as lifeworld rehabilitation where one has to take into consideration the individual and his or her world. Not least is to challenge stereotypes when working within the field of disability.
- The group rehabilitation programme inspired the participants to encourage each other to take further steps to independence
- A core category of success was related to the participants sharing of similar lived body experiences, in accordance with the theory of Merleau-Ponty
- Rehabilitation as a social activity, something people formed together



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