



Developing guidance counseling of vulnerable youths through research circles

The purpose of this research is to develop and analyze new counseling methods aimed at vulnerable youths in Denmark. In a perspective of social equity and inclusion we are especially interested in the development of methods that draw on narrative approaches to counseling and which are capable of contributing to the development of holistic counseling practices.

We argue that young people who do not get any upper secondary education degree are especially vulnerable. This group of young people is characterized by often coming from low-income households; by often being low achievers in primary education; by often having some kind of immigrant background; and by having a high proportion of parents without an upper secondary education.

In the transitional years prior to upper secondary education all students' formal and informal skills are evaluated. Over 20 percent of the young students at 15 years are being evaluated as 'not ready' for any secondary education. This creates new challenges for guidance counselors and their methodologies, since some kind of upper secondary education is mandatory in Denmark.

The 'Need for all youngsters' program, which is part of the Danish Ministry of Education, has funded the 'Research Circle Project', where we invited the counselors to explore relevant theories in their fields; to look at their own and other's practices; to test their own and other's ideas; and to develop new common practices and guidance methods that can support the vulnerable students to become 'ready' for secondary education.

In the 'Research Circle Project' we introduced relevant theoretical and practice oriented material to support the guidance counselors in their work. We have drawn on sociological approaches to learning e.g. Gert Biesta Thomas Ziehe and Pierre Bourdieu and on guidance research e.g. Bill Law, Norman E. Amundson and Rie Thomsen.

The presentation draws upon practical examples from the 'Research Circle Project', where we have had access to address the inequalities produced in the educational systems; the individual student's vulnerability and abilities for becoming ready for secondary education; and the competence development of counselors through research circles.