The Use of Case Studies in Training Vocational Rehabilitation Trainers

INTRODUCTION

For many centuries story-telling has recorded man’s history and given order and meaning to man’s experiences. Story-telling has been man’s way to communicate and impart knowledge. Aristotle described how the ideal verbal presentation ought to be structured; an entire story, but one with three parts including an introduction, a main body and a conclusion (Aristotle, 1961) as in the story below told by a Trainer of vocational rehabilitation. In the introduction the characters and settings are presented:

In my job as a counselor at Ideum, I got a phone call from the vocational counsellor at Sandbakken Upper Secondary School. She wanted to place student at our school, a student who according to her had completely lost his motivation for school, who skipped a lot, and was difficult to reach. He was a racer in the workshop, and interested in working on cars, she said. She felt that Ideum would be a good place for him. We decided that Ola would begin at our school the following Monday.

The main body describes the action, conflict and thought:

When Ola entered through the doors at Ideum, I recognized him immediately. In my other job as a bouncer at the town’s only pub, I have often run into Ola. “Oh no – not him! No that cocky drunk that I threw out of the pub a few weeks ago. An unmotivated half gangster – at my workplace!” Ola recognized me, too. He jerked around when I approached him. There was tension in the air when we greeted one another. “Welcome to Ideum”, I said and laughed.

The story ends with a description of something that affects the action, something intervenes, and the persons are perhaps leaving the arena:

Today Ola quit Ideum and started taking a welding course. He got his certificate with no problem. Watching Ola grow as a person and take responsibility, seeing the happiness in his face when he got the certificate in his hand has taught me a lot. I negatively judged a person who I didn’t know. I was wrong, and I’m glad. Now I’m trying not to have predetermined opinions about the students who come to our school.

This paper presents experiences from a project which developed a Training Program and worked with case-stories such as the one above as a basic method in the program. This was a Leonardo da Vinci pilot project, “Train the Trainers in Vocational Rehabilitation” (TTT), contracted and run by Attføringsbedriftene: The project was a partnership among 8 countries (France, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and Norway) and 14 partners. The partner roles were the following: an Educational Partner responsible for developing and managing of the training program, a Try-Out-Partner responsible for the supply of trainers and participating in the development and a National Coordinator responsible for coordination on the national level. The starting point of the project derived from the reality that the number of people who are vocationally disabled and/or disadvantaged is growing. Moreover, the barriers to participating in the open labour market are increasingly complex. In addition, changes in the European labour market from manufacturing to service production and a growing political will to mainstream aims and measures in vocational
rehabilitation were influential. These concerns have put new demands on vocational Trainers. The objectives of the project were to enhance the skill levels of vocational specialists in the sector and, in so doing, provide better vocational rehabilitation services to working persons with disabilities. The project was anchored in a philosophical basis that supports the idea that the Trainer's role is to empower (Rapaport, 1984) those with vocational disabilities/disadvantages.

The training programme is structured as 50% on-site training and 50% online, IT-based training. The program consists of 4 modules in each country, and these are the Norwegian and Swedish modules: Modul I is named “Different strategies in vocational counselling and motivation”. This is a European module in the sense that the module is developed and tried out in all participating countries. Modul II is named “Normality, Identity and Coping”, and module III is named “Building Target Persons Network”. Module II and III are national modules in the sense that they are developed and tried out in each country. Module IV is a transnational module in the sense that it is developed and tried out in one country (as module II and III) and then adapted and tested in another country. In Norway and Sweden this module is taken from Italy: "Quality Management and Health and Safety for Trainers". In sum, this resulted in 13 training modules that were developed and tried out on more than 120 Trainers.

The paper focuses on one method used in the training program case-studies. This is how the method was conducted in Module 1; introducing how to tell a case-story and making a case-story into a case-study:

On-site
Discussion of how to write a case-story and develop it into a case study.

On-line
The Trainers write a case-story; a description of a story about the person in question included demographic data, interests, hindrances, needs etc. The students work individually or in pairs. The Trainers read each others case-stories on the net. Educational Partner presents literature.

On-site
Educational partner selects some of the case-stories for presentation, simulation and discussion in plenum, and initiates discussions about how basic communication skills can be used regarding to the stories, and what motivates the person in question? The Educational Partner presents different guidance or counselling approaches and communication methods which were used to identify and discuss challenges and resources in the case-stories. These approaches are tried out on the case-stories. The stories are told from different angles and in different genres.

On-line
The Trainers are starting to develop the case-story into a case-study. How do alternative guidance/counselling approaches appear relevant? Students get feedback from Educational Partner. The students then write the case-story from the angle of the disabled.

On-line
Continued analysis of the case-story, containing demographic information, identification of resources, interests, challenges, and hindrances, description of relevant guidance/counselling approaches and relevant theories. Then there is presentation and discussion of good examples of case-studies. Educational Partner presents a basic theory of motivation; theory which is discussed along with the case-stories.

On-Line
The students write the final case-study, including answering questions like: How are the guidance/counselling approaches connected to the case-story? What motivates the person in question? What theoretical knowledge can illustrate the case-story? Feedback is given continuously from the Educational Partner, and then the case-study is evaluated by the Educational Partner. The case-study, when approved from the educational partner, is put into folders on the net as part of the Trainers portfolio.
The case-study was both an educational method and a documentation of the Trainers’ skills, and used after each module as final exam material. The research question in this paper is: *How did case-studies contribute to fulfil the basic pedagogical principles for the project?* The basic pedagogical principles for the project were defined as:

1. The arena for education is the workplace rather than the school, college, or university.
2. An inductive, participative approach, in contrast to a hypothetical, deductive approach, is of greater benefit
3. Adults learn through practice and reflection on practise.

These pedagogical principals follow the tradition from Freire (1997) regarding people/students working with each other and developing consciousness in order to act informed and transform reality. Schön’s (1995) concepts of reflection-in action and reflection on-action are central, and also Illeris’ (2000) suggestion to widen the learning concepts because of the claim for competency in society today: the student is creating understanding from his own experiences, learning is a social process, the context is essential, learning depends on the pupils’ approach to the learning-material, reflection is of significance.

Two Norwegian teachers and researchers (included the author of this paper) participated in the project by developing the curriculum together with the other partners; teaching parts of the modules, and guided the students when writing case-studies. This implies that the researcher occupy several roles in the project. However the research focus is the written case-studies, and this puts a distinction between the teacher role and the researcher role. But the approach nevertheless includes methodological challenges: the researchers have been active in changing the research arena, the results depend on the teachers’ (researchers’) teaching skills, etc. The purpose of the project is to enhance practice and is seated in a tradition “teacher as researcher” as described by Carr and Kemmis (1986), and could probably be characterized as action research. The paper will discuss how the case-studies contributed to fulfil the pedagogical principles of the project by showing specific portions of individual case studies, the students' reflections on the case studies, and how theory was connected to the particular stories. The paper also lean upon the report in the project (Attføringsbedriftene, 2004).

**DISCUSSION OF HOW THE CASE-STUDY CONTRIBUTED TO FULFIL THE PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLES OF THE PROJECT**

1). **The arena for education is the workplace rather than the school, college, or university.**

When the arena for education is the workplace rather than school, college or university, it becomes crucial to find a method that take care of this standing so that it does not mean only which building the education is conducted within. The case stories ensure that the education is about the trainer’s daily work as they are asked to tell a story about a person at work and include demographic data, interests, hindrances, needs, etc. How the workplace becomes the arena for education is illustrated in the story which is presented in the introduction. The story shows that when the trainers themselves tell the story, the arena for education automatically becomes the workplace, and that the participants’ experiences become the starting point for the learning process, and it also signalizes the value of the participants’ experiences.

According to Illeris (2000), it is the learning person who himself must build new understanding from earlier experiences. It is when the case-story becomes a case-study that the participants build new understanding. When the story is told, the participants’ earlier experiences are discussed, reflected on and seen in the light of theory, and the case-story ensures that the theme in module II “Normality, Identity and Coping” for example, emerge from the Trainer’s daily work:
David has most likely also fallen outside the moral normality curve, based on his somewhat strange behaviour – he’s dropping out of school – he just doesn’t fit into the normality frameworks that society around him had. But that type of observational model is constantly being changed. Laws, rules and regulations have become more integrated, especially with regard to the group “functionally challenged”, this has again done something to cause our values and attitudes in society have also changed. In today’s school and learning environments for children and adolescents, I truly believe that David would experience a larger degree of normality than what he experienced 20 years ago!

The stories are about the lives of the vocationally disabled and their trainers within rehabilitation. In this story the trainer encounters Rosita from Bosnia. In the story it is obvious how Rosita and the trainer think and act in accordance with their different life worlds, which have been influenced by different countries. This story can start a debate regarding a theoretical concept, such as Habermas’s (1987) “lifeworld”:

I see pictures from a country where everything at one time was very good. Pictures from Bosnia and Croatia, where they once had many friends. I hear about Tito’s welfare system. About Serbs and Croats who were intermarried, about Christians, Muslims and Catholics. People were friends and respected one another. I see pictures of law professors, doctors and architects who are dressed up for different occasions. Rosita tells about her friends, visits to the café, theater experiences and trips. Some pictures are from trips made in Europe. The man has been a Yugoslavian champion in a well-know sport. Then came the day when everything stopped...

When the case-story is the starting-point, it becomes impossible to start to discuss the theoretical concept “life-world”. It is the story told by the trainer that actualized the concept, and then different concepts and theories are introduced in order to enhance the Trainer’s professional skills. The end goal is that the Trainers should act informed when they work with the vocationally disabled and enhance their quality of life; transforming their reality as described by Freire (1997).

2). An inductive, participative approach, in contrast to a hypothetical, deductive approach, is of greater benefit.

One of the basic pedagogical principles in the project was an inductive, participating approach. This approach is in contrast to a hypothetical, deductive approach, and was defined by the project in this way (Attføringsbedriftene, 2004) at p7:

**Hypothetical-deductive:**
- Planning for the student
- Oriented towards theory
- Subject limited
- Organized around the individual
- Measured by grades
- Oriented through reproduction of knowledge
- Move from theory to practice
- From the abstract to the concrete
- From the general to the specific

**Inductive- participative:**
- Planning with the students
- Oriented towards tasks
- Multi-subject
- Organised around the group
- Measured by competence
- Oriented towards production of knowledge
- Move from practice to theory
- From the concrete to the abstract
- From the specific to the general

The question here is how the case-story and case-study contributed to fulfil the inductive-participating approach in the project. The programme was organized through the stories told by the students; stories about a vocational disabled at their workplace. The planning of making the case-story into a case-study is conducted by the Educational Partner together with the Trainers. The programme is not planned in detail by the Educational partner although the
Educational Partner must be prepared within relevant theoretical issues connected to the modules in order to connect concepts and theories of interest to the stories told by the students.

The case –stories assures that the educational activities are oriented through tasks for the vocationally disabled rather than theory. The starting point is stories like the one presented in the introduction. This story also shows that the case-story always is multi-subjected, never limited to one issue, as is the case when the Trainers meet the vocationally disabled in their work. The stories illustrate that it is difficult for the Trainer to be occupied only by parts of the life of the person seeking employment: “seeking employment” cannot be isolated from the rest of the life. They are, with an expression from Schapp (in Habermas, 1987, p 149) “entangled” in their (hi)stories. This story shows that the stories are multi-subjected and it is illustrated that Rosita’s need for work is entangled in her life-story:

On the third day of the course, Rosita comes in 10 minutes late. Most of the time she sits with her head in her hands and seems unwell. I go over to her during the first break, and then the tears start flowing. It’s a good thing that there are two of us course leaders, so that Rosita and I could talk undisturbed in my office. She continues to cry while she tells about her son who has significant psychological problems because of the lack of contact with his far. He gets teased at school and can’t concentrate on his studies. And yet Rosita does not want to move back to Bosnia. She feels that her son will have a better future in Norway. She has to get a job quickly, because then her husband can move here. Right now she needs money so that she can see her husband during summer vacation. When I ask if she has gotten any help at the welfare office, she answers no. I call the welfare office right away and find out that she has a caseworker there, who has followed both her and her son for a long time. After about 30 minutes, the caseworker arrives in his car and fetches Rosita.

During the work with the case-stories, the programme moves from one specific, concrete story to abstract, general theory. From the concrete situation, David is folding napkins, the narrator here expands the subject and includes in the case-study a theoretical passage about transforming historical concepts of the disabled:

The description of this group has changed significantly:
- David would have been labeled an “idiot” 150 years ago
- Around the turn of the century, he would have been a “disfiguration”
- Throughout the first half of the century, he would go from being ”mentally retarded” to ”physically disabled”, and today he will usually be labelled as a “person with learning difficulties”

The programme is oriented to producing knowledge, rather than re-production of knowledge in the sense that the Trainers themselves tells the case-story; one from their daily work. They also have to seek relevant concepts and theories and in this process they have to be creative, have initiative, use intuition, and use their ability to solve problems. Further, they have to use critical sense and reflect upon their findings when they apply the concepts and theories on the case-story. In this process the Trainers work together, with guidance from the Educational Partner. Here is an example where one of the Trainers discusses what was so special with Anne, so that “I as well as others put a mark on her”. The trainer is reflecting upon the person and the theory, and on this background probably understands Anne in a new way, and is able to create new solutions when they discuss employment for her:

Actually I myself was active in putting a “mark” on Anne. According to Lauvdal and Winger, (1989) it is pointed out: to “mark” in this case means to put labels on the behaviour of a person and on the person himself. When people come to the company via the social office, I have a tendency to place them in enclosures. Experience shows that such persons need more follow-up than others, and so it is more time-consuming to work with them. Many times they come from a background of alcoholics or narcotics, often combined with criminality. Anne,
however, seemed to be quite innocent, and nothing related to such problems was noted in the report. Furthermore, the same authors discuss the identity of aberration. In this connection they say, among other things that when we have attributed an identity of aberration to a person, then we focus especially upon the traits and actions of the person. In addition it often occur secondary expectations. In the case of Anne, this seems to describe the situation exactly. I had first noticed the negative traits with her, and I was not surprised when I heard about the suspicions when various items were missing at the department—a case of secondary expectations.

The creative process when the case-story is made into a case-study ends with a written presentation. This is the end-product of the module, and represents the exam in the module as well. However, due to formal claims from the school-system, the case-studies were evaluated with grades, and not solely by skill level as described within the inductive-participative approach.

The case-study above is written by one Trainer. However, the Trainers discussed the case-stories and made them into a case-study in groups in each module (and in plenum) regardless if the written documentation of their skills within the module were individual or group documentation. This is in accordance with Illeris’ (2000) thoughts of learning as a social process. Then they also have to argue for their stance which, according to Habermas (1984), enhances learning.

3). Adults learn through practice and reflection on practise.

The work with the case-stories also made it possible to realize the third pedagogical principle of the project: Adults learn through praxis and reflexion on praxis. Through the study of the stories the participants collected their experiences from practice, then organized and evaluated them. In the case-study the participants reflected on their own practise, what Schön (1995) calls ”reflection–over–action”. Such reflection is enhanced by asking questions like the ones posed by this Trainer:

*There are many side of my helping role I need to reflect over in my interaction with Lise. How are I go move forwards? How can I be sure that the plan of initiatives we are making will be hers and not mine? I see that Lise, based on my point of view, puts great limitations on herself with regard to moving on. Is it I or she who should define what is right for her? Is it my or her tempo that should be relevant in the future process?*

The goal is that the participants develop their skills in order to be able to reflect while they work together with the vocationally disabled, reflection-in-action as it is called by Schön (1995). To enhance the reflection on their case-stories, Trainers were asked to formulate specific reflection/analytical questions to the story like this regarding network:

*How can Pål create and new and closer network and get back order and quality in his everyday life?*

Here is another trainer making questions regarding a participant, David, who has ”permanent adapted work” and now is folding napkins for an airline:

*Is David a deviant?*

*Change of viewpoint on David and others like him throughout history*

*How has David created his self-image?*

*Mastering method and LIFT-method*

Another Trainer formulates this question regarding the theme of normality:

*But what was it about Anne that made it so that both I myself and others put a kind of labell on her?*
The questions emerged from the stories themselves, and this implied that a variety of questions were enlightened in both the groups and the plenum-discussions. However, the case-study was conducted in several ways to enhance reflection. Trainers were asked to tell some of the stories in different genres; genres as a criminal novel, news reportage, a story within a weekly-magazine, comic a strip, a letter, a diary, a folktale and a devotion. A trainer tells a story here as a professional report and as a news report. The theme is if it is the parents or the employed in the childminding entre who should decide how the child’s clothes should be treated. A heavy discussion about wet mittens is referred to in an internal report in the childminding centre:

*We discussed how we solve these kinds of difficult situations. We agree that we must not let ourselves be pushed around, but answer politely and ask the parents to give us proper messages.*

And this is how the trainer tells the story when making a report in the local newspaper:

"The message we have received in this unique case is incomplete and contradictory. We need to sort out the communication with parents”, says the director of the Trollungen Childminding Center, Anne Hansen (32).

Trainers experienced that alternative ways of telling the stories changed both insight into the problems and, above all, the emotions related to them. They discovered how problems can be weighted differently, and how the problems alter emotions. How the stories were told also led to alternative plans for further action. The same applied when the trainers told the story to different people and altered the narrating voice, telling the stories from different angles; from the Trainer’s angle, from the angle of the parents or partner to the story’s main character, etc. This “game” enhanced the trainers’ reflective skills; they experienced that different information arose from different stories, different values were enhanced, the persons were differently described, the stories varied in character because the emotions altered, etc. Particularly interesting perspectives came forth when the story first was told by the Trainer and then the by the vocational disabled. Here is a story told by the Trainer:

*Morten is interning in a recycling company and is doing tolerably well. They go around to the building sites, and he has a thoughtful and good manager who has adapted the work assignments to Morten’s ability level.*

When this story is told from Morten’s angle, the story changes:

*I’m sick of everything now. Have wandered around in this group for several days. Am supposed to like pick up bricks that are to be reused – go around here and work for no wages – they call it interning – and then they’re going to sell the bricks and make money on it, and I’m going around here working like a slave…*

The act of telling the stories in different genres and from different angles enhances the constructivist perspective, and opens up for different solutions regarding the themes discussed.

**FINAL COMMENTS**

The objective of the project TTT was to improve vocational rehabilitation services for the vocational disabled by enhancing the skill levels among the trainers in the sector. In this paper it is illustrated how the case-study became a strategy to develop skill levels by the trainers within vocational rehabilitation. The purpose of the paper is to show how case-studies can be used within similar programs, including delineating certain experiences from this approach to promote higher levels of learning among participants.
The presentation of how to make a case-story into a case-study shows how the Trainers did research on their own practise. The case-study gave the Trainers new insight and understanding about their daily work and by this a further possibility to use their qualifications. How the case-studies stimulated reflection is illustrated when this Trainer reflects upon her relationship with Lise:

*It may seem difficult to acquire a symmetrical relationship between helper and job-seeker when the person dependent upon help at the start is in a vulnerable situation. Applying for help can for some people be degrading enough in itself. I think this is obvious from Lise’s story in which she experiences the meetings with both school and doctor’s office as degrading. In my work at the employment office, I experience that many job applicants experience that turning to the employment office is degrading. They express that it affects their self-image, and meet attitudes from the surrounding world that make them feel devalued.*

**REFERENCES**


