Using a difference-centred approach to understand deviation as a potential resource among children placed in care

Manon Lavaud
Research assistant at Social Science,
Roskilde University
(manon@ruc.dk)
Introduction

• Children growing up under difficult conditions develop differently than other children.

• Research and development project (2012-2017)
  Symptoms of ‘deviant’ development ➔ A special (potential) resource?

• A difference-centred approach as an alternative to comparing these children against “normal” childhood.
Outline

• Introduction

• Moosa-Mitha’s difference-centred approach

• Tension between equality and difference

• Applied on social work with children in care

• Conclusion: Is it possible to move beyond normality?
Critique of the marginalisation of children as ‘not-yet-citizens’
- due to:

1) Universalist claim about the ‘citizen’

2) Normative ideals of participation

3) Citizenship rights predicated on sameness.
A difference-centred approach to children’s citizenship

Acknowledging the different lived realities.

**Liberty** → the right to participate differently

“This broader definition of participation as the expressions of one’s agency in the multiple relationships within which citizens are present in society is very important to a re-definition of children’s right of freedom of participation as it recognizes different ways of participating.” (Moosa-Mitha, 2005: 375)

**Equality** → all citizens as differently-equal (Yuval-Davies & Werbner, 1999)

“… it is through difference that equality is defined, rather than difference being transcended through a claim to equality” (Moosa-Mitha, 2005: 377).
Tension between equality and difference

- Differentiated universalism (Lister, 1997/2003)
  “... the achievement of the universal is contingent upon attention to difference.” (Lister, 2003: 92).

- Tension between inclusion and exclusion (see Yuval-Davies & Werbner, 1999) → The janus-face of citizenship (Stychin in Lister, 2003)

- Need for a continuous reflection
A momentum concept and a yardstick

- **Citizenship as a momentum concept:**
  “Momentum concepts unfold so that we must continuously rework them in a way that realizes more and more of their egalitarian and anti-hierarchical potential” (Hoffman, 2004: 138, in Lister, 2007: 49).

- **Citizenship as a ‘yardstick’:**
  “… an image of an ideal citizenship against which achievement can be measured and towards which aspirations can be directed.” (Marshall, 1950: 29, in Lister, 2007: 50).
Applied to social work with children in care

- Double side of both citizenship and social work
- Focus on lived citizenship and experiences of everyday life
- Challenge the views on deviant/normal child behaviour
- Trying to turn things upside down
### Applied to social work with children in care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critics</th>
<th>Positive side / the potential resource</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crave recognition</td>
<td>Sharpens the ability to perform and gives ambitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of connection between the head and body</td>
<td>Good to shift focus - when, for instance you shall perform. Do not go down. Can set aside his own needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant alert</td>
<td>Better prepared. Thinking of scenarios. Two steps ahead all the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can not obey</td>
<td>Able to say no. One does not become a follower. Breaks down prejudices and break boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make constantly aware of them themselves</td>
<td>You will be heard and seen -&gt; can make changes. A leader</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Is it possible to beyond the concept of normality?

• To recognise “that all of us are different in many different ways, and that being “different” is the norm” (Lister, 2003: 79)

• An invitation to a continuous reflection and to accept paradoxes.


• **Website about the project:** www.saerlig.ruc.dk
Thank you 😊