

«Here we are together, at home you are alone»  
- *The role of peer relations in a group-based rehabilitation program*

&

**Dynamics of Courage**

- *(Personal) processes of learning in a rehabilitation context*



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# Disclosure

**Mette Miklos**

I have No financial disclosure or conflicts of interests with the presented material in this presentation.

# Background



Young people with disabilities often report feeling alone in their experience of living with a disability, limiting their opportunities for exchanging their experiences and getting important knowledge, resources and resilience to negotiate their position in society and life (Hammel et al. 2008, Stewart et al. 2002)

Young people living a with disabilities often experience alienation, limitations and feelings of being different when participating in social, recreational and physical activities together with peers not sharing the experience of living a disability (Kramer et al. 2012, Stewart et al. 2002).



# Rehabilitation programs as complex social systems



Rehabilitation programs should be understood and explored as a complex social system where various social and personal ingredients act together or simultaneously to form individual developmental processes (G. King et al., 2018; Whyte, Hart, & Whyte, 2003).

***Aim of study: “Explore the dynamic transactions between social contextual elements, interactional relations and personal processes of learning and self-exploration during an intensive APA rehabilitation intervention for young adults with disabilities.”***

# Method and participant demographics



Data were sourced through an ethnographic approach consisting of participatory observation and in-field interviews.

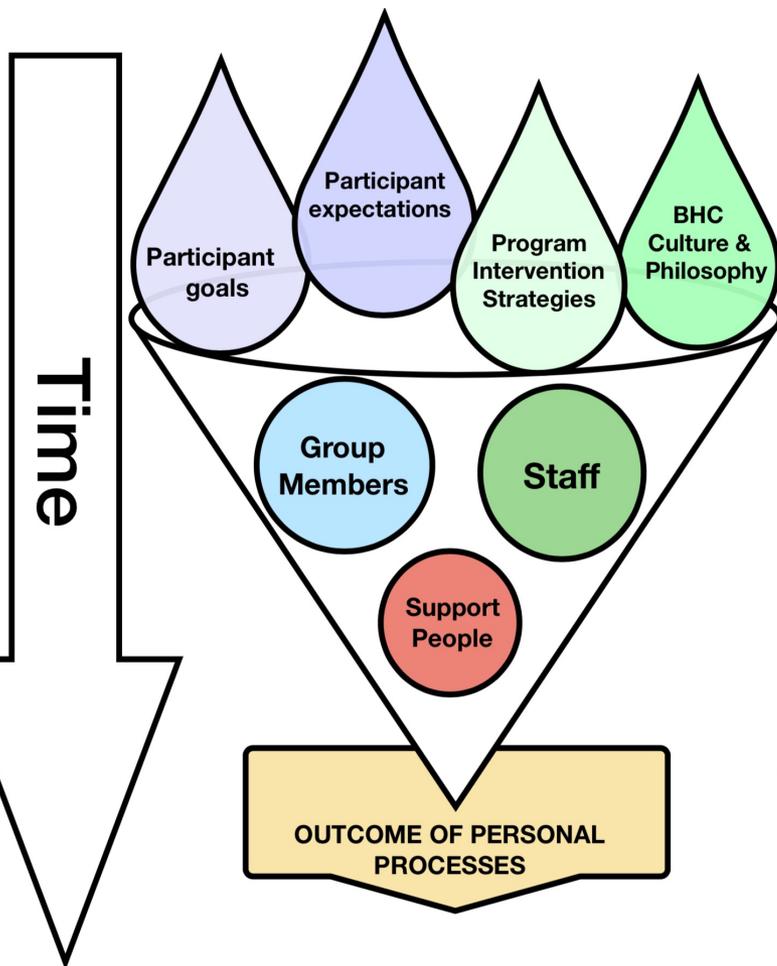
- Grounded theory methodology was used to explore the links between personal actions, social interactions and wider cultural formations.

A total of 54 young adults (17-34 years) with a variety of disabilities participated in the study.

- 21 young adults were in need of personal assistance and were accompanied by either parents or professional support people/aid.
- 23 young adults participated in their first stay, while 31 had one or more previous stays at BHC.



# Results



*"The staff here are the best, they know a lot and their attitudes are so important. They are to the point; their feedback is specific and straight-forward. [...]. It is real, no pity or excessive compassion, bad excuses are rejected, but they still recognize when you have a bad day or struggle. They are fair, definite and friendly -no nonsense."*

- Young man

*"Being with peers with similar challenges - it gives you a feeling of togetherness, it's more fun. We are in the same place [in life] and share interests. So you become more open."*

- Young woman

## Peer relations and self-exploration



*“Talking with some of the others have got me start thinking about reducing my work hours. I know my body needs it, or I will wear it down, but until now I haven’t been ready to take that step.....”*

-Young man

*It is nice to be here [at BHC], to talk with people who understand and listen. During the years I have met many [teachers, support workers, therapists, peers] who have read a book, and therefore they think they know everything about me and my body,[...]. So it is good to meet people who actually care and are interested in you.*

-Young woman

## Rehabilitation as learning processes



*“I never thought it would be so hard to drive the sit ski. I mean, I actually never got to the driving part today. I was just sitting there at the bottom of the slope trying to find my balance. [...]. I just had this idea that it would be easier, that I could go home and be the cool kid on the slopes. I mean it is hard enough to be the guy on the weird ski, I don't really fancy being bad at it as well.”*

- Young man, after his first sit ski lesson

# Learning as an act of Courage

The three dimensions of courage (Nelson Goud, 2005):



PURPOSE



FEAR

ACTION

PURPOSE

FEAR

ACTIONS

**Aim: Explore the role of courage in learning processes within an adapted physical activity rehabilitation program for young adults with disabilities.**

# Method and participant demographics



A single case was purposely chosen from the larger data set, and consisted of participatory observations of six sessions in a climbing wall and in-field interviews. This opened for an in-depth exploration of rehabilitation-based learning processes.

The case chosen followed a young woman, here called Anne, on her way towards achieving one of her goals for the rehabilitation stay:

- Mastering the activity of climbing



# Results



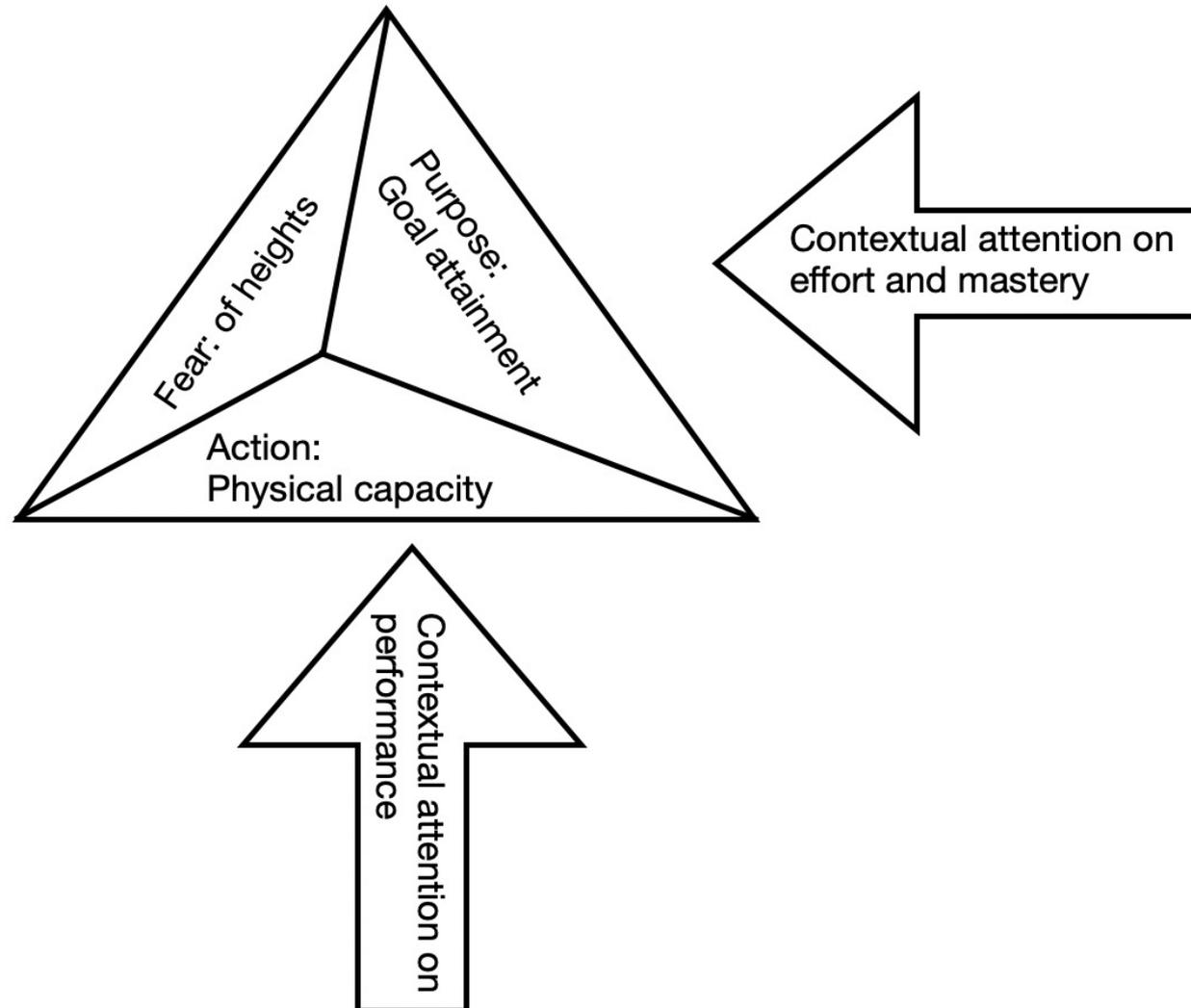
Anne's body started to shake, and quietly she asked to be lowered down. To encourage her, a staff member responded «*You can do it, if you want to*»

From field notes on the 1st session in the climbing wall

«*I understand it was ment as encouragement and support. However, it kind of made me feel like I was being pushed to cross my boundaries, instead of gradually moving them.*»

Anne, the day after her first attempt in the climbing wall

# The dynamic relation between social structures and personal courage



## Developing activity autonomy



«Her hand slipped, and startled Anne asked to be lowered down. *'OK, let go of the wall'* the staff member responded, intentionally spending time to prepare the decent, leaving her hanging for a moment. This allowed Anne to regain control [...]. *'Stop, just leave me hanging, I want to try again'.*»

From field notes on the 3rd session in the climbing wall

«*Why can't I do like yesterday?*»

Anne during her 4th session in the climbing wall

«*Today is not my day*»

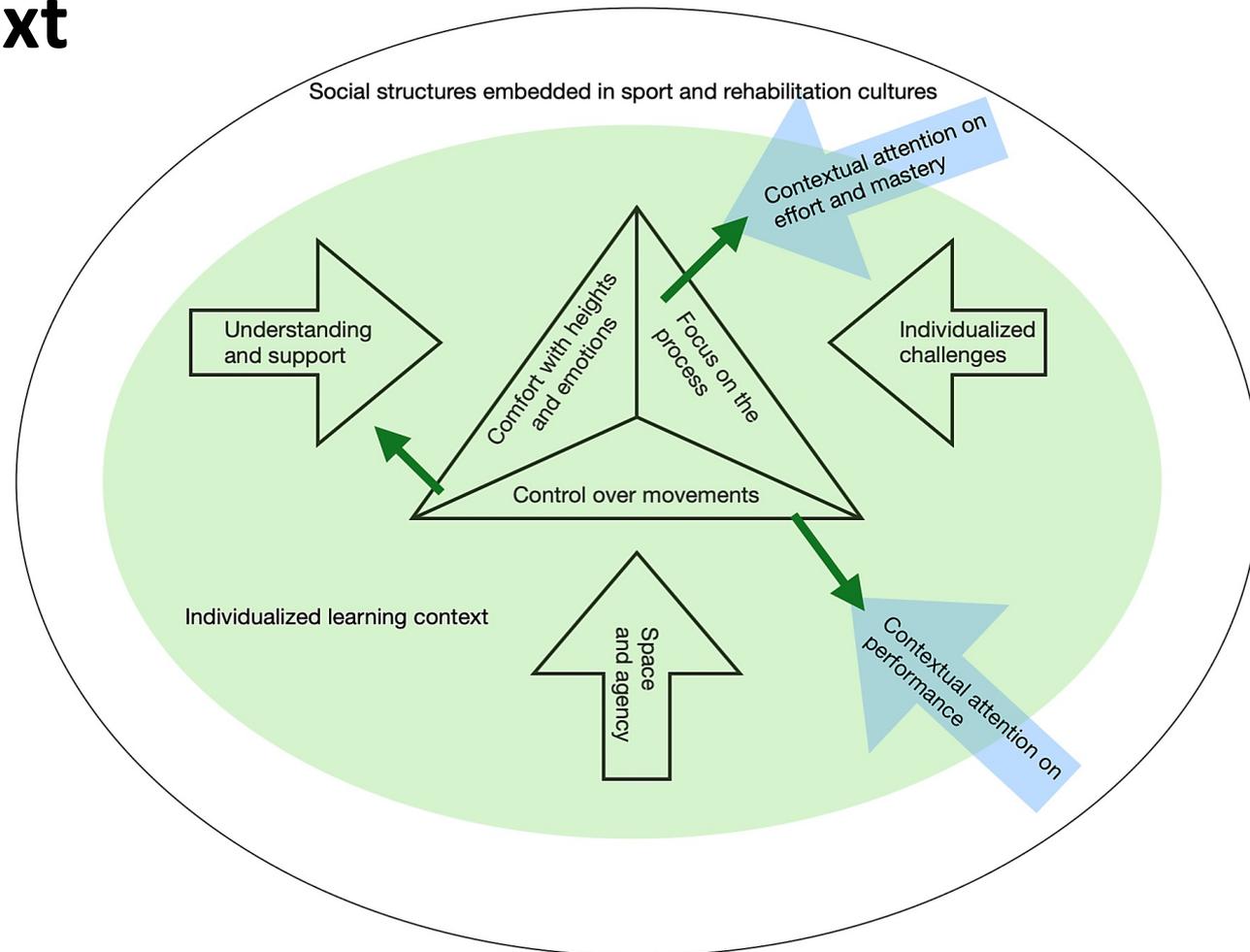
Anne, during her last (6th) session in the climbing wall

# Rehabilitation programs as individualized learning context



*“Here [at BHC] we are taken seriously. They [staff] are realistic, and expect you to put in the effort, nothing is given for free, but always with respect.”*

Young man



*"I need to know, because they don't know how to help me..."* Anne, during her 5<sup>th</sup> session in the climbing wall



*«Here we are together, at home you are alone»*  
Young man

## Thank you for your attention

For more information about the program at BHC visit: [www.bhss.no](http://www.bhss.no)

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