Do we practice what we preach?
Ambivalence towards students with disabilities, as they struggle to demonstrate their capabilities in the academic and professional world

Eli Langørgen, PhD-candidate, NTNU, Norway
Supervisor: Eva Magnus, Associate Professor, NTNU, Norway
Do we practice what we preach?

- Background
- Study design
- Findings
- What is going on: Complex interactional processes
- Implications for OT’s
Students with disabilities in higher education

- HE most important link to work
- Increasing, particularly students with invisible impairments
- Barriers in academic and everyday life
- Reluctance to disclose disability and seek help
Professional educations

• Short courses:
  – frequent change of learning environment
• Conflicting roles:
  – facilitating students learning
  – assessing fitness for practice
• How to accommodate and what is reasonable?
• Professional competence standard
Aims of study

To explore different perspectives

• How students with disabilities experience to participate in their professional education
• How academic staff and practice educators experience their involvement with students with disabilities
Qualitative research design

Semi-structured interviews with 14 students

Focus groups with professional educators
• 13 academic staff
• 8 placement supervisors

Participants from 12 professional programmes within health care, social work and teaching
The students

Struggle for recognition

• Expect higher education to be challenging
• Work hard to fit in and demonstrate capabilities
• Bridging the gap ‘in silence’
The educators

Ambivalence towards involvement

Students with disabilities must convince their gatekeepers by being good students?
What is going on?

Complex interactions

• Accommodation depend on students’ request
• Students avoid drawing attention to their impairment – coping in silence
• Students seeking recognition – met by ambivalent educators
• Barriers to study participation remain invisible
hiding and hoping not to meet a student in need of extra attention…
Implications for practice

How do we create images around disability, ability and professional competency?

• How do we understand disability (theory vs practice)?
• What do we mean by professional standard?
• What does inclusion really mean – in our profession?