

**REPORT from fieldwork at the
2nd International Disability Studies Conference – “The Art of Belonging”
(31 October – 2 November 2013)
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The Graduate School provided me with the opportunity on short notice, to attend the conference hosted by VU Amsterdam [Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam/Free University Amsterdam], as it brought together a range of disability scholars and practitioners I intended to interview. In the course of my brief stay I was able to exchange views and opinions with academics from institutions in the USA, Ecuador, the Netherlands, Croatia, Spain, India and others, as well as conduct interviews with persons working in DPOs and the overlap of their action and research in different countries – India, the Netherlands, Indonesia and Canada. Thereby, the information I have been able to gather as to the international community’s agenda on policies and rights has been crucially expanded. What is more, I have been invited to partake in a research group of the IASSID (International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual Disability) by the keynote speakers, and to further prospective translation of an American university project dealing with making children with disabilities’ perspectives more accessible to their educators.

The conference itself dealt with the connecting points and interfacing between scientific research, questions of disability rights and creative subjectivities. Therein lies an important nexus of investigation at the core of my dissertation work, as it underscores questions regarding communication. The sociological perspectives purported by some of the academics regarding acts of performativity in issues of disability and reactions to them extend clearly into much of what my personal research has brought to light thus far. Additional weight being put on matters of ‘belonging’ with respect to societal, and therefore also linguistic inclusion, brought with it many further questions as to the constitution of social roles wagered among individuals and groups. The answers of scholars and politically involved persons from such disciplines as anthropology, sociology, psychiatry, law and pedagogics made it clear to me once more that the direction I am taking will bring additional insight into an investigative area barely touched upon with regard to disability. What I have taken away from the experience is particularly a) the focus on matters of reflexivity and the manifold points of view and theoretical stances that should hence be kept in view (Foucault, Jakobson, Bakhtin, Geertz) and applied to cultural perspectivity; also b) the notion of non-verbal forms of communication with the help of movement, art(ifacts) and haptic interaction is to remain an essential form of human encounter.

Overall, I am very grateful for the information I was able to gather, and also the talks I had with the DPO members providing me with unexpected insight into current political developments and the fact that not only my dissertation research has been

strongly furthered, but that the seed for future international collaboration has been sown.