

Identity, a Quest in Words and Signs

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Educational options for DHH students in the Netherlands

- **Special education.** 4 organizations : Kentalis, Auris, VierTaal and Vitus-Zuid. Kentalis: 8 schools for primary (6) and secondary education (2), with bilingual education and DHH staff & a support service for mainstream education.
- **Mainstream education,** with or without interpreters and/or expert guidance. Parents and children (12+) decide what they want.
- **Mixed forms of education:**
 - school in school (SIS): 2 schools in the same building, DHH and hearing students are mostly educated separately and sometimes together.
 - co-enrollment: DHH and hearing students are educated together in mainstream schools, with an interpreter and a teacher from a cluster 2 school.

Identity and belonging

- DHH students in **special education**: all other students are also DHH, part of the staff is DHH, all staff masters NGT (Sign Language of the Netherlands).
- DHH students in **co-enrollment**: most other students are hearing, most of the staff is hearing, NGT is used with the interpreters and the NGT teacher (L1).

What do we see in the identity development of DHH students in these different school settings?

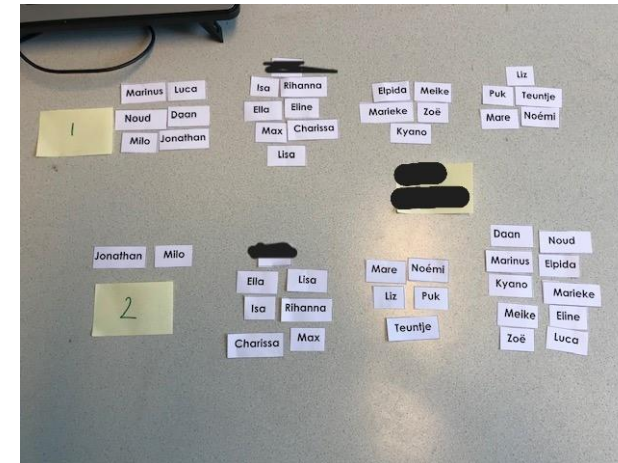
- **Research population**: students in the final grade of primary education, aged 11-12 years.
- **Research question**: how do DHH students think about their identity?
- **Identity as in**: to whom do they belong, with whom do they identify?

Research

Qualitative research, 10 students: 6 students co-enrollment, 4 students special education.

Method:

- **Mental mapping:** grouping of fellow students by placing name cards and explain why these students are often found together, and whether one belongs to a group and why, or why not.
- **Semi-structured questionnaire** with 3 themes:
 - Belonging
 - School life
 - Identity



Results – Mental mapping

Social networks in the classroom, according to DHH students.

Forming of groups mainly along the lines of:

- **Gender:** groups of boys and groups of girls, few mixed groups (age-appropriate behavior).
- **Communication:**
 - Both schools: being able to communicate with each other or willing to learn this.
 - Co-enrollment: mixed groups of DHH and hearing students with a positive attitude towards communication.

Results – theme Belonging

Students in both schools do not consider themselves different from non-DHH people: *"Everybody is equal"*.

At the same time, all students emphasize that their body is different as they are DHH, and they want others to be aware of that, as: *"Nobody is the same"*.

Students in the co-enrollment setting mentioned that wished for more DHH students: *"We don't want too few of us"*.

Results – theme School life

Students at both schools were happy about their school life: they enjoyed going to school and spending time with their classmates, all students were happy to have DHH role models.

2 differences:

- Students in the school for special education felt *comfortable in the school*, whereas students in the co-enrollment setting felt *comfortable in their own classroom* and with their own classmates, but less comfortable in the school. This was explained as:
 - “other students don’t know us” and “they are not used to us”.
- Students in the school for special education could *communicate directly* with teachers whereas students in the co-enrollment setting often *communicated indirectly* with their teachers (via interpreters).

Results – Identity 1

One of the very last questions: what do you call yourself: deaf, hard-of-hearing or hearing? Happy with this choice?

Students considered this a difficult question (age-appropriate). Answers were related to audiological status and language choice, not to identity and belonging.

Result:

- 3 students say that they are deaf.
- 3 students say that they are hard-of-hearing.
- 4 students give mixed answers: *"hearing and deaf"/ "hearing and HoH"/ deaf and HoH"*. Mixed answers were explained as: *"I am hearing because I can talk, and I am deaf because I have CI's"*.

Results – Identity 2

Students at both schools considered NGT very important and people should sign to them.

But: most of them say that they do not sign themselves.

This was explained as: *“don’t need it”/ “too difficult”/ “do not know enough signs”*.

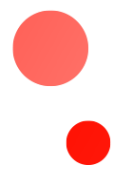
Number of utterances in Dutch: 818.

Number of utterances in NGT: 219 (mostly of 1 student).

Three small circles in pink, green, and red are arranged vertically on the left side of the slide.

Discussion

Conclusion: identity is an abstract concept for students aged 11-12 years but students at both schools are satisfied about their education and feel well.

Three circles in red, light red, and red are arranged vertically on the left side of the slide.

Discussion: most students at both schools consider NGT important and want others to sign to them but say that they do not sign themselves. Why?

However: *identity* development is a *dynamic* process and identity is *fluid*, with different choices at different times in a life.

Thus, education should offer all options, to guarantee an *open future for each DHH student*.

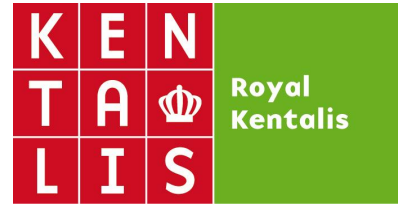
References & contact

References :

- De Klerk, Annet, Daan Hermans, Loes Wauters, Lilian de Laat, Francien Kroon, & Harry Knoors (2019), *The Best of Both Worlds: A Co-Enrollment Program for DHH Children in the Netherlands*. In Marc Marschark, Shirin Antia, and Harry Knoors (Eds). Co-Enrollment in Deaf Education. New York, Oxford University Press.
- Hualand, H. (2007), *Sound and Belonging: What is a Community?*. In: Bauman, H-Dirksen L. (Ed). Open Your Eyes: Deaf Studies Talking. Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis Press.

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Thank you
for your attention