



DBI Communication Network News Report

We have expanded our organization team of the Communication Network with Meredith Prain from Australia and Helle Buelund from Denmark. We will work on a members list and a website page which will be linked to the page of DbI and we keep you informed about our past, current and future activities. In this report you find mainly an overview of what we have done the last period and some announcements of our current activities.

Current activities

DbI Review Book on Communication: overview of 40 years

Making a book of all interesting articles about Communication published in the DbI Review over the last forty years.

Newsletter

Meredith will set up a newsletter with relevant information for the members of the communication network which will be connected to the webpage

Post Releases

Pre-conference report Communication Network Reviewed by Rachel Kavanagh, *Deafblind Intervenor and Consultant, Canada*

Preconference Communication Network

17th Deafblind International World Conference "Sharing the knowledge to ACT. Accessibility, Communication Technology. Now is your time to ACT".

Gold Coast, Australia. August 12th, 2019.

Reviewed by Rachel Kavanagh, Deafblind Intervenor and Consultant, Canada

Ahead of the 17th Deafblind International World Conference in the Gold Coast, Australia, the Communication Network hosted a pre-conference on August 12th, 2019. Presenters from five countries were organized by Marleen Janssen to share about video analysis and communication.

The day started with presentations from the Japanese delegation featuring fascinating videos of co-created communication between children with congenital deafblindness and the presenters themselves, which included Hiroyuki Sugai (Miyagi University of Education), Yasukazu Nakamura (Gunma University), Shinichi Okazawa (Utsunomiya University), and Yoshimi Tsuchiya (Joetsu University of Education). One memorable video of a child exploring inside his communication partner's mouth was a reminder that following the initiatives of an individual with deafblindness can result in unconventional but meaningful interactions. Next, three presenters from the Dutch delegation shared their PhD studies from the University of Groningen. Kirsten Wolthuis, Marianne Rorije, and Mijkje Worm educated us on a range of theoretical frameworks and processes they used in analyzing communication and language; it was affirming to see the role of videos in each of their studies. The third delegation included presenters from Sweden, starting with Maria Creutz who shared about the Nordic Welfare Centre. Ingrid Axelhed, Caroline Lindstrom, and Kristina Strom then presented on language in the tactile modality. For anyone in the role of a communication partner or intervenor, it was inspiring to see how flexible the partners were to the deafblind person's positioning in activities like wood working. Finally, there were two presentations from the Alumni delegation of the Master's in Communication and Deafblindness from the University of Groningen. Kirsten Costain from Norway showed a video of an initial interaction with young child, and the usefulness of video in assessment and consultation. Lastly, Rachel Kavanagh shared her thesis study, which explored the concept of voice for a child with congenital deafblindness using video analysis.

The DbI Communication Network pre-conference provided an opportunity to discuss various approaches which support communication and language development within the context of video analysis. Every presentation was an opportunity to engage in robust discussion between the presenters and attendees, highlighting the variety of perspectives and experience in the room. The heterogeneity of the deafblind population can create challenges for discussion, however using videos as a focal point allowed for a depth of interaction that can otherwise be difficult to achieve. Additionally, the frameworks provided by the various theories bridged differences in the observations and subsequent discussions. Regardless of people's experience with this kind of group analysis, the analytical lenses, knowledge, and reflections shared throughout the day were truly informative and inspiring.

*Rachel Kavanagh, MSc, Deafblind Intervenor and Consultant,
Rachel Kavanagh Consulting, Canada; email:
<rachelkavanagh@gmail.com>*

Reports of Smaller Networkgroups

Alumni network and Master Deafblindness by Saskia Damen, assistant professor University of Groningen

Alumni seminar “Tactile language acquisition “ in Groningen

On September 25 2019, the international Masterprogram Deafblindness at the University of Groningen in The Netherlands held its annual alumni seminar. The topic of the seminar was “Tactile language acquisition”. The first speaker was prof. Arnfinn Muruvik Vonen, who is a linguist and professor at the department of international studies and interpreting at the Oslo Metropolitan University. His presentation, titled “Language must be sensorily accessible”, focused on how language can be made accessible for children with congenital deafblindness. Prof. Vonen emphasized that tactile signing has a different status for deafblind children than visual signing for deaf children. While visual sign languages are cultural languages, tactile sign languages are adaptations of visual cultural languages. Nevertheless, tactile signing seems to be the most accessible language for deafblind children. According to Prof. Vonen children with deafblindness need access to competent and aware tactile signers in order to develop tactile sign language. The second presentation was given by Gøran Forsgren, who works as a senior advisor for Statped in Norway and is an alumnus of the Master deafblindness. His talk concerned the use of tactile language by people with congenital deafblindness. Mr. Forsgren explained that their linguistic expressions are often based on their embodied tactile impressions of the world, a phenomenon he refers to as ‘tactile iconicity’. To understand expressions of people with congenital deafblindness one can look at how they explore objects and how they construct signs. After the coffee break, participants followed a workshop in which they practiced with recognizing tactile iconicity in a video clip of a young child with congenital deafblindness.

One year Masterprogram in Deafblindness

In September 2020, the University of Groningen in the Netherlands again offers a one year international Masterprogram in Deafblindness. The program is taught in English and is open for people from all over the world who are interested in acquiring in-depth knowledge about deafblindness and professional skills in assessment, intervention and scientific research for this target group. The program consists of a combination of contact and distance education, enabling the participation of students from all continents and those who want or need to combine study and work. The program starts with one-month of fulltime interactive lectures and practical assignments at the university of Groningen. After this month, students work on practical assignments and a research project in their own countries. Lecturers of the Master are international experts in the field of Deafblindness and Sign Language. For more information on this master and admission requirements (deadline for admission is May 1th 2020), visit

<https://www.rug.nl/masters/deafblindness/> or contact the curriculum coordinator Saskia Damen at s.damen@rug.nl.

Graduation day Master Communication and Deafblindness by Marleen Janssen

On September 26th 2019 five students of the Master Communication and Deafblindness graduated at the University in Groningen, Department Inclusive and Special Needs Education. Here an overview of the graduated master students and their topics. If you are interested in a thesis you can contact me or you can contact the authors yourself. We try to support the authors to publish their thesis in the form of an article in the Journal of Deafblind Studies on Communication. Kim Tosolini has published her thesis in the latest issue.

- Kim Tosolini (the Netherlands): “Improving competences of newly qualified professionals”
- Hellen Shakele (Zambia): “How an intervention on the Tactile Bodily Modality can improve communication. A case study of a girl with congenital deafblindness in Zambia”.
- Douglas Gawani (Zambia): “From communicative disability to communicative ability. An exploration into the implementation of knowledge about the communicative resources of a child with cdb by the use of focus groups”.
- Cosmas Goliati (Malawi): “The impact of differences in cultural context on the interpretation of gestures”
- Rachel Kavanagh (Canada): “Exploring the voice of a child with congenital deafblindness in a multimodal interaction. A case study”.

It was announced that the master program in the academic year 2019-2020 has a different content and different criteria than the preceding years. The program will be more attuned to the regular master programs in special needs education in Groningen and will have a new name: “ Master in Pedagogical Sciences “Deafblindness” and is coordinated by Saskia Damen as new curriculum coordinator.

Opening of the University of Groningen Institute for Deafblindness by Marleen Janssen

On September 27th 2019 a new research institute opened its doors at the University of Groningen. It is an interdisciplinary institute for research and education in the area of persons with congenital and acquired deafblindness. In the morning several speakers explained why this institute is important. Several speakers Kees Aarts of the University, Ramses Vulperhorst of Royal Dutch Kentalis and Angelique Koelewijn en Desirée Nobels of Deafblind Connect emphasized the development of expertise for people with deafblindness: congenital and acquired and age-related deafblindness. Marleen Janssen stressed the importance of collaboration at a national and international level in these times where in many countries the uniqueness of the disability of deafblindness

is not recognized and still unknown while at the same time support in education and care goes through significant changes. She explained that the time is ripe for such an institute to connect what already is achieved: 80 graduated master students all over Europe and other continents, an alumni network, a Dutch PhD program, the Journal of Deafblind Studies on Communication, and connections of smaller networks in the DbI Communication Network. It is time to lift up the existing knowledge to another level, spread it more, document it and investigate it further.

She explained that the new institute is focusing on research and education activities: **Research activities**- performing *longitudinal research* in the domain of communication, language, cognition and lifelong learning and other topics regarding special needs support and rehabilitation in *natural situations* and in a *research lab*; - collaboration in *international research consortia* where researchers and practitioners can work in different research networks around special issues of journals and a new handbook about deafblindness about themes such as: recent research in education and rehabilitation, tactile (sign) language, cognitive development, communication and language, identity and identification; - identification of deafblindness: performing research but also spreading scientific information; providing manuscripts for journals and books with regular organisation of national and international seminars or symposia. **Education activities:** - organising and further development of the international master Deafblindness; - Organising alumni seminars with interesting speakers and activities; - developing an international PhD Program on Deafblindness; - organising professionalization courses on topics such as interventions, assessment procedures and instruments in collaboration with other universities and care facilities. Other speakers were Anne Nafstad, Jacques Souriau and Marlene Daelman (representatives of the Groningen Study group on Diversity in Communication) who gave a presentation on theory based analyses of communication illustrated with interesting video-fragments on the communication of a Belgian youngster with congenital deafblindness.

After that Timothy Hartshorne (Professor of Psychology Central Michigan University) and Christa de Geus (Coordinator of the CHARGE expertise center University Medical Center Groningen) gave an interdisciplinary presentation about CHARGE, the Behavior Triangle. Finally another interdisciplinary presentation was given by Ronald Pennings (ENT consultant and surgeon at Radboud University Medical Center), and Nicole Lo-A-Njoe-Kort (Medical doctor and patient expert) about USHER Syndrome and building bridges between patients, doctors and rehabilitation. The morning was closed by two very interesting video-analytic demonstrations by Saskia Damen and Lisette de Jonge-Hoekstra (PhD student Developmental Psychology UG, Psychologist Kentalis).

As a surprise Marleen Janssen was appointed with a high royal award Knight of the Order of the Netherlands Lion, which was a special moment not only for the one decorated.

After lunch the new research lab was opened, which is integrated in the University Ambulatorium of Groningen. Several young researchers gave parallel demonstrations and workshops in their method of video analyses of interaction and communication: Kirsten Wolthuis (PhD student), Kim Tosolini (master student), and Lisette de Jonge-Hoekstra.

In a next issue of DbI Review other smaller networks will report about their activities, such as the Groningen study group on diversity in Communication.

For more information or if you have questions about this network contact Marleen Janssen, on behalf of the DbI Communication Network team: h.j.m.janssen@rug.nl.

Marleen J. Janssen, Prof. Dr. Professor, Chair DBI Communication Network, Department of Special Needs Education and Youth Care, University of Groningen; e-mail: [<h.j.m.janssen@rug.nl>](mailto:h.j.m.janssen@rug.nl)