What about sign language? A longitudinal study of the early interaction between hearing mothers and deaf infants with a cochlear implant.

Public defense to obtain the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY**

of

**Ms. Liesbeth Matthijs**

which will take place on

**Friday, November 30th, 6h30 PM**

Promotion Hall D2.01

**Brussels Humanities, Sciences & Engineering Campus**

(Etterbeek)

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How to reach the VUB: http://www.vub.ac.be/campus/brussels-humanities-sciences-engineering-campus

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**Jury:**

**EXTERNAL:**

Prof. dr. Nathalie Pattyn (VUB, Psychology and Educational Sciences)

Prof. dr. Luk Van Langenhove (VUB, Social Sciences and Solvay Business School)

Prof. dr. Gerrit Loots (VUB, Social Sciences and Solvay Business School)

Prof. dr. Mieke Van Herreweghe (University of Ghent, Sign Language Research)

Prof. dr. Greg Leigh (Macquarie University, Faculty of Human Sciences, Australia)

**Promotors:**

Prof. dr. Alys Young (University of Manchester, Social work, education and research)

dr. Maartje De Meulder (University of Namur, Research group on Multilingualism)
Summary

The role of sign language in hearing mother-deaf infant interaction continues to be a contentious issue, and one that is mainly researched from the perspective of language acquisition and development through dialogic interactions. By contrast, the goal of this dissertation was to investigate intersubjective development between mothers and their deaf infants. In an era where early cochlear implantation is almost standard practice, the focus of this research was to answer the question “What about sign language?” in the context of intersubjective development. We mapped the development of intersubjectivity by measuring the extent to which the mother-infant dyad interactions reached the shared involvement level based on reciprocal exchanges. Investigating the mediating role of the use of visual-tactile communication strategies (VCS) led to the conclusion that the use of VCS enhances the development of intersubjectivity. However, we noticed irregularities surrounding the advice and guidance to parents via-à-vis the use of VCS or sign language. To seek to understand those irregularities, we further developed the concept of intersubjectivity to include relational activity and interaction that is embedded in social contexts, in so far as they impacted on mothers’ approaches to communication with their deaf child. These analyses pointed to the fact that, for hearing mothers, choosing to raise their deaf infant with a sign language-inclusive approach was not a real option. Moreover, we provided evidence to suggest that failing to support a mother’s aspirations and access to sign language created contextual and discursive situations that had detrimental effects on the development of intersubjectivity between those mothers and their children. Through examining intersubjectivity both as an issue of mother-infant interaction and as means to examine parent/professional interactions this work has yielded fresh suggestions about how to ensure that the principles and intentions embedded within international guidelines in early intervention service provision are effectively carried through into practice.

Curriculum Vitae

Liesbeth Matthijs graduated as a master in Special Education in 2002 (VUB).
In 2003 she accomplished a postgraduate in Social and Cultural Antropology (KUL) and in 2004 the Secondary and Tertiary Teacher Training at the Faculty of Psychology and Education (VUB).
After a short period in the educational-pedagogical domain, she returned to the VUB for a doctorate preparing research about the role of sign language in the contemporary context of early identification and early implantation of deaf children.
Awaiting grants for a doctoral study, she worked two school years as a teacher and project worker in Kasterlinden, a school for the deaf with a bilingual project.
In the summer of 2009 she started her PhD. Between 2013 and the beginning of 2017, she worked at Doof Vlaanderen (Deaf Flaners) as a lobbyist for families with deaf children, and she coordinated for ‘t Signaal (The Signal) a participatory project for families with deaf children.
Now she works at the Gezinsbond (Family Union) preparing the Family Conference of 2019.
Apart from this, she works as a self-employed Systemic Therapist. She was licenced as a Family and Relation Therapist in 2011, and as a Narrative Therapist in 2018.