

Dialogicality and Language in CDB

Response from the **perspective of congenital deafblindness**
to the plenary of prof. Per Linell on Dialogicality and Language

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Starting Question

Which aspects of dialogicality do we meet in our encounters with persons with CDB?

What are challenges and opportunities? What are pitfalls ?

Listening to Per Linell's plenary it struck us how many of the themes from typical development that he has dealt with, also occur in sustained interactions between CdB children/youngsters and their partners. The video that we will present today is in our opinion a clear illustration of several of these themes, but also of the pitfalls, challenges and opportunities that are characteristic for fragile encounters .

The following aspects that were developed by P. Linell, are also illustrated in the video.

- Interaction with others and with objects in the world
- Interaction within the Self – thinking
- Emergence of meaning made by the minded body
- importance of shared biographies
- idiosyncratic aspects
- It is a conventional idea that words have a stable meaning
- Culture makes a difference

- It is important that you can make concepts
- Negation is an innate capacity
- Narrative elements in stories
- Primary, secondary and tertiary intersubjectivity
- Recyclings
- Scaffolding and supporting attitude of the adult

Video-illustration

dialogue between a CdB girl (11;10 years) and her well known teacher

Alana together with her well known teacher Caroline, but also in the company of a second adult are ready for a motor circuit. The second partner Stefanie is Alana's communication therapist. Her help is necessary because of Alana's motor problems. Alana was born blind (without light perception) and hard of hearing (bilateral loss of 50 to 60 dB). Alana has hearing aids.

Over the years several games have been added to the circuit. The first game ever was sliding down from a soft slide. Together with Caroline and the second person at that time, Alana developed a gesture for naming the sliding activity. And this is also the gesture that Alana uses for speaking about the whole context that they are in now. The origin of the gesture is well documented in another video from two years ago {"glijden" (1;50 – 2;50) and "nog glijden" (00;00 – 1;58)}. another child (the noise of stamping feet) is also in the room.

who is who on the mat?

Alana: reaches out for Stefanie

Stefanie: responds by her personal name-gesture = stroking her nose

Caro asks verbally: who else is here ? And Alana makes both adults point to herself: "yes, you are also here"

Then Alana reaches out for Caro too, as if she thinks: "the three of us together".

What shall we do ?

Stefanie makes Alana aware of the context by letting her feel the structure of the mat.

Alana responds by reaching out for Caro 's hands too and communicates the already negotiated SLIDING-sign.

Caro looks for Alana's hands and responds: "YOU are already THINKING of the SLIDE", but FIRST we do the 'WHIRL-and-SWING-and-POUF'-game (zwier en zwaai en poef spel).

Alana first regulates herself emotionally and then confirms the message, by bringing Caro's hands in the starting position for the game. Caro confirms on her turn by doing as if, that means, without lifting Alana from the floor. Alana is expecting fun. Both adults organize the three of them for the game. They perform it in a narrative way, with a short introduction, a well articulated middle and a bit of tension at the peak of the game.

The last round and then a new game

Alana has asked for another round of the game, and Caro tells her (orally) that it is the last one. She points with Alana's left arm in the direction where they will climb on the stairs for the "TRIP- TRAP-on-the-STEP-" game. But Alana asks firmly for the first game again and so they repeat it once more, now with a slightly different tempo and a more articulated end.

now on the stairs and sliding

Alana is now *coactively* with Stefanie *touching* the steps. Then she *pulls away her hand, regulating herself* a bit. She *looks for Caro's hands, and refers to the previous game, once more.* Caro confirms by repeating the GAME-gesture on Alana's body, and Alana is smiling. But Caro is challenging Alana's secondary intersubjectivity, by telling her that it is FINISHED, and by bringing Alana's hand to the steps, on which she rhythmically taps. She waits a bit, repeats the tapping and gives the turn to Alana who still sticks to the previous game and puts Caro's hands in the right position for it. Caro confirms Alana's message by repeating the WHIRL-SWING-POUF'-gesture ...but tells her that this is really finished now. That she should go upstairs. Now Alana is agreeing and responds with the SLIDE-sing. Caro confirms: yes, first TRIP-TRAP on the STEP and then SLIDING. Alana is willing to be picked up now.

When sitting on the stairs, Alana repeats her gesture of sliding. And Caro responds: "first trip-trap- on-the-step". Together they lift Alana now on top of the staircase. And Alana thinks it's super.

When Alana is told that she can slide now, she is trying to find the right position on her belly and then she slides independently.

Once more ? Yes, of course !

The game is repeated several times, either on demand of Alana, either suggested by the adults, with much emotional response from Alana.

Alana tries out another position now, on her bottom.

Alana's sliding SIGN is rather schematized here. But she is told to be less nonchalant.

And then they lift her back on top for another round.

now she goes down on her bottom.

And then she takes some time for reflection, by touching the slope of the slide. And so on...

push-push-push. A new game is introduced

the next activity is introduced

mutual misunderstanding

After a while, Alana is tired and looks for a more comfortable position. She also makes a gesture that is interpreted by Caro as 'apple-juice', something totally out of the context.

"For apple juice you have to wait a bit", Caro says. Or was it maybe one of your jokes ? Alana responds on this interpretation by repeating the joke-sign and vocalizing rather sadly.

ongoing negotiation

Alana is vocalizing rather sadly. Then she performs another gesture that is interpreted by Caro as TOOTH-BRUSHING, and as probably another joke. Alana joins in with the laughing.

no no no, that is not what I meant...

Now Alana repeats her sign and then shakes her head firmly. The adult accepts that she did not mean 'tooth-brushing' and Alana joins in with the laughter. Immediately after she performs a new gesture, that is not clear to Caro, because she asks "what?" What is that?" Alana shakes again her head in "no" and then she is awaiting a response from Caro. Not getting that response she adds another gesture, the third one already, no recognized by Caro. She understands that Alana is asking for a song. But that song is only coming at the end of the circuit and therefore Caro says: Singing ROMMEKEBOM has to wait a bit.

The adult's voice

And after that you will first TELL US a bit and then it is FINISHED // And only AFTER THAT I will sing ROMMEKEBOM.

The Child's answer

But Alana's body-language is very clearly showing now that she is not able to go on any more. She is comforted by Stefanie and Caro offers her a deal, imitating Alana's plaintive tone: "PUSH-PUSH-PUSH is finished. I will HELP you a bit". Alana is immediately smiling again. And she enjoys being helped.

recycling

"Will you now tell a bit about our activity to Stefanie?" Stefanie takes over Alana's hands and she asks "WHAT will you tell me?" Alana responds, vocalizing "oewoewo". Stefanie immediately imitates this and connects it to the shoving on the wooden bench.

Stefanie is holding Alana's hands and asks "What else will you tell me?". Alana is starting a gesture, but then withdraws her hands and goes in the direction of Caroline. And after a little push she goes back to Stefanie and makes the SLIDING sign. Stefanie responds: yes, you have been SLIDING 3 times. Once on your (BELLY), then on your (BACK) and then once more on your (BACK). And here we can see something like the celebration of this communication in Alana's facial expression.

Again Alana is asking for support from Caroline, before taking Stefanie's hands. Because she also wants to tell her about the 'WHIRL-SWING--POUF'-game. She brings Stefanie's hands on her own body, as to start the song. Stefanie imitates the beginning of the song several times in a row and Alana confirms with laughter, again and again. Stefanie adds: it was on the ribbed mat.

time for my reward and for goodbye

Alana now installs herself on Caro's lap. And she asks for the song. Caroline confirms: "yes I promised you to sing for you. You were so good! Alana enjoys the song and participates in it.

Then Caro suggests to say goodbye to Stefanie. And Stefanie says to Alana: Stefanie will now GO AWAY. BYEBYE. Caroline makes Alana imitate the goodbye wave. Alana is now listening carefully to Caroline,

hand on her cheek. Caroline adds "it was nice, so nice". And Alana asks for her song again. Caroline agrees: ONCE more the SINGING and than we are FINISHED.

Conclusion and discussion:

After having watched this video we would also like to refer to the features of rhythmical interactions (by Ellen Dissanayake) that Paul Hart yesterday brought under our attention in his response to Colwyn Trevarthen:

- mutuality
- belonging
- meaning making
- developing competence
- elaborating

And we are pleased that we can start the discussion with some reflections from Colwyn Trevarthen, with these characteristics in mind.