I Need Help on Mondays, It's Not My Day. The Other Days, I'm OK'.—Perspectives of Disabled Children on Inclusive Education

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This article examines the experience of inclusive education from the perspective of disabled children. We worked with the observations of, and interviews with, 15 children, aged 5–17 who go to a mainstream school. The study is set in the context of a 3-year research project exploring the practice of inclusive education in Flanders. Here, we report on the key findings from the children’s accounts, focusing on what they had to say about themselves, what they think about school, friends, support and their future prospects. © 2008 The Author(s). Journal compilation © 2008 National Children’s Bureau.

Introduction

This article is the result of a research project subsidised by the Flemish government (Department of Equal Opportunities) between 2002 and 2005. The goal of the project was to identify critical factors underlying ‘good practices’ of inclusion. We explored the daily experiences of how inclusive education can work for a child in the classroom from the perspective of several stakeholders. This study, called ‘Inclusive education in the Flemish Community’, involved 30 children between the ages of 3 and 18. The research was conducted in a qualitative way with observations, interviews and information analysis inside the children’s school, home and leisure environments. A full account of the study in Flemish can be found in Van Hove and others (2005).

We held in-depth interviews with 15 of the children. The purpose of this study was to find out the experiences of the disabled students themselves. In order to take the position of each person involved in the process of inclusive education seriously, we wanted to pay special attention to the view of the disabled child. Background literature revealed: ‘The views of ill and disabled pupils themselves constitute a particular gap in existing knowledge. Despite a growing awareness of the importance of engaging directly with children in research rather than using adult ‘proxies’, disabled children remain a neglected group’ (Lightfoot and others, 1999, p. 268). This is also confirmed by Allan (1999), Davis and others (2000), Mitchell and Sloper (2001), Barker and Weller (2003), Norwich and Kelly (2004), Curtin and Clarke (2005) and Broer and others (2005). Through this research project, we intended to put in concrete terms and describe the perspectives of children on inclusive education. We did not want to make any judgements on what was positive/negative or true/not true in their situation.
Literature review

We went through literature that focuses on children’s perspectives. Some of the key themes will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

When young people are looking at their disability, it is only one aspect of life. They put a lot of different meanings on it:

Being disabled meant that they encountered disabling barriers in the social world (mainly access and attitudes). For other children, being ‘disabled’ meant having a visible physical, sensory or cognitive impairment. This definition of disability meant that some children with a hidden impairment could exclude themselves from the category. Some children gave a very specific and practical explanations of disability in terms of the way impairment impinged on their lives. (Watson and others, 2000, p. 19)

In the research of Connors and Stalker (2007), children talk about impairment in using the word ‘disability’. They are able to put in concrete terms the consequences on their daily life:

The children did tell us about what Thomas (1999) called ‘impairment effects’ (restrictions of activity which result from living with impairment, as opposed to restrictions caused by social or material barriers). At the same time, most seemed to have learned to manage, or at least put up with, these things. Most children appeared to have a practical, pragmatic attitude to their impairment. (Connors and Stalker, 2007, p. 24)

Parents play an important role as mediators towards the school, by giving information and resolving problems when teachers/pupils do not understand their child’s needs (Lightfoot and others, 1999).

The attitude of staff at mainstream schools is crucial in the experiences of the pupils. Lightfoot and others (1999) see that children know the teachers who are aware of their difficulties. They appreciate teachers who try to understand them. When adults slow down the pace or are flexible in learning arrangements, pupils are very grateful. These findings are shared by Lovitt and others (1999) and Curtin and Clarke (2005).

Teachers and staff at school are important actors in the positive ethos of the school towards disabled children. Davis and Watson (2001, p. 680) refer to those adults as reflexive practitioners: ‘Their comments reinforce the belief that children, whatever the level of their impairment, should be treated as competent social actors who can be included in the everyday processes of schools if the necessary structural, cultural and individual issues are addressed’.

Allan (1999, p. 116) assigns teachers a significant role in helping to build the identity of their pupils: ‘Teachers might help pupils to explore their sense of self – expressed as desires rather than needs – and to analyse the constraining and enabling factors, but should avoid passing judgements on them’.

On the other hand, Watson and others (2000) state the risk of surveillance coming from adults. Disabled children in schools are under closer surveillance than non-disabled children. The extra support coming from adults sometimes has the effect of control and makes children feel excluded from their peer group.
In almost all of the research, friendship is a topic that young people talk about. It is clear that disabled and non-disabled children can form friendships (Curtin and Clarke, 2005; Lightfoot and others, 1999; Norwich and Kelly, 2004).

Yet, there are some considerations that go together with this. Such friendships do not automatically follow from a mainstream school environment.

Attending a mainstream school does not automatically lead to young people with and without disabilities mixing. Some people with disabilities may be more comfortable mixing with pupils with whom they feel they have more in common, appreciating the peer support and sense of belonging that Mulderij (1997) and Widdows (1997) consider essential for developing social skills and a healthy self-esteem'. (Curtin and Clarke, 2005, p. 210)

Support is always part of the friendships that do arise. However, it can sometimes dominate the relationship and then we can question the meaningfulness. When relations are dominated by the assumption of need and care, the peers behave not as equals, but more as guides or helpers. (Watson and others, 2000). This is also an important issue for students in secondary school, according to Lovitt and others (1999).

**Contextual framework for our study**

In Flanders, there are very few possibilities in the mainstream education system for disabled children. There is a growing number of children receiving special education (5%) (Mardulier, 2005). We have a system of integrated education that allows disabled children to go to a regular school, on condition that they live up to the existing educational standards. The schools receive support from special education teachers who mainly work on an individual basis with children. However, this is not possible for children with moderate or severe intellectual disabilities. Currently, the only way for them to receive support is through a special government project that aims at including 50 children with moderate or severe intellectual disabilities in general education, with the support of teachers from special education.

This does not mean that children, parents and schools are awaiting new laws and legislation. There is a very active movement of parents who make different choices for their disabled children than the integration or segregation opportunities they get. The query about inclusive education comes from families who want their child to go to a mainstream school in the neighbourhood, along with their sibling(s) (Van Hove and others, 2005).

Our research project was carried out in this context. It was the first time that the practice of inclusive education in Flanders was investigated. The data were gathered through intensive co-operation with children and their families.

**Method**

For the inclusive education in the Flemish Community project, we selected a group of 30 disabled children. We gathered them by using our own practice in coaching educational teams and supplying Master students (in special education) as support workers in the classroom. We also worked together with the parents’ organisation *Parents for Inclusion* and with...
professional organisations working with parents of disabled children. This provided us with a group of 30 children with a wide range of characteristics with regard to age, gender, disability, support needs, location and type of school. All these children had the chance to participate. We sent their parents a letter asking for their permission to work with their child. Lewis (2002) refers to parents as gatekeepers, either providing or withholding access to the children to be interviewed. Children and young people themselves were asked whether or not they wanted to be involved and whether the interview could be recorded. Their right to withdraw at any moment was explained in clear terms to them and their parents (Davis, 1998). From the 30 young people, 15 wanted to co-operate. We received a lot of different reasons why the children did not respond: the children did not want to participate, parents did not give their permission, it was not convenient at the time, the child was in hospital, parents thought their child’s means of communication was too complex or that their child was too young.

We worked with five interviewers, all of whom were professionally involved in the area of inclusive education. We matched the interviewer with situations she already knew. This way of working enabled an informal style to be developed and a wide-ranging exploration of ideas. The interviewers made observations in the classroom and at home and monitored the child’s engagement during the interviews.

Semi-structured interviews and observations, lasting between 1 and 1½ hours maximum, were carried out with each disabled child at school and in their own homes. A common interview framework was drawn up among the different interviewers to cover various aspects of the children’s perspectives. Specific questions were tailored to the particular circumstances or characteristics of each child.

- How do the children and young people regard themselves?
- Who are the important people in their lives?
- What do the children and young people do at school? How do they feel about school?
- What are their future prospects?

In most cases, the children were visited twice at school and once at home. There was also a conversation with the parents to discuss the data resulting from communication with the child at a younger age (<7). In some cases, communication was not so intensive because of practical circumstances: the child was sick, the car broke down, there was too much going on at school, etc.

All respondents were told that their replies were anonymous, and that their names would be changed. This seemed to be particularly important for the older pupils.

The design of our research required the use of more creative methods of communication for children who do not communicate verbally (Morris, 2003). Researchers were engaged to do this because they had already known the children for a longer period. They worked by interpreting the children’s body language, as well as using tools for augmentative communication. The mother of the child, the support worker and/or a speech therapist helped interpret responses that were not clear.

The following table provides background information about the 15 participants in this study. All of them follow education in a mainstream school setting. There are no special units in
the regular school. Three of the 15 children (marked with *) have previous experiences in special education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Communication support</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Girl</td>
<td>Intellectual disability</td>
<td>Primary school (5th)</td>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
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<td>Girl</td>
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<td>Secondary school (1st)</td>
<td>Special educator + volunteers</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathalie*</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Intellectual disability</td>
<td>Secondary school (4th)</td>
<td>Direct budget + volunteers</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeffry</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Intellectual disability + ADHD</td>
<td>Kindergarten (2nd)</td>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma*</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Cerebral palsy</td>
<td>Primary school (4th)</td>
<td>Direct budget</td>
<td>Speech therapist, Augmentative communication device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arash</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Syndrome of Noonan</td>
<td>Kindergarten (3rd)</td>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara*</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Cerebral palsy</td>
<td>Primary school (4th)</td>
<td>Direct budget + special educator</td>
<td>Speech therapist, Augmentative communication device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Down syndrome</td>
<td>Primary school (3rd)</td>
<td>Special educator + volunteers</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Girl</td>
<td>Cerebral palsy</td>
<td>Secondary school (2nd)</td>
<td>Direct budget</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yasmine</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Intellectual disability</td>
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<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Cerebral palsy</td>
<td>Primary school (2nd)</td>
<td>Special educator + volunteers</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Motor problems</td>
<td>Kindergarten (3rd)</td>
<td>Volunteers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
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<td>Girl</td>
<td>Motor problems</td>
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<td>Direct budget</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Down syndrome</td>
<td>Secondary school (2nd)</td>
<td>Special educator + volunteers</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ADHD, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

Analysis

With the permission of the children and parents, observations and interviews were transcribed in full. All material was shown to the children and their families, so that they could decide whether it could be used or not. Each manuscript was carefully read through several times and was subjected to a content analysis. For this analysis we followed the inductive and conceptual mapping procedures suggested by Clarke (2005) and Charmaz (2006). Reoccurring themes, common patterns and key points were identified by the first author after coding the interviews (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998; Patton, 1990). The themes were examined for consistent patterns and exceptions. Within the group of interviewers the inter-relationship between the most important variables was discussed. Searches for a possible causality between variables of a higher and lower level of abstraction were made within the group of authors.

We are fully aware that the participants in this study are not representative of all young people in inclusive education with a disability. Nevertheless, this research project gives us some
valuable insights into how children/young people are involved in their own education process.

Findings

We have included a lot of quotes from children in this article as a way of giving them a voice.

Just another kid

I like to play with Play-mobil. I collect bears and books. I like to draw. I can tell you everything about Spy Kids, Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter. I have my own mail address. During holidays I don’t want to get up early, I like to be lazy then. (Yentl, 11)

Disabled children are just regular persons with everyday interests, desires, activities, worries, choices... Ordinary things determine their lives, not just the difficulties or disabilities they have. Their worlds and ways of living show a lot of similarities with their peers. They are very active children with a lot of activities.

Once a week, I go dancing in my wheelchair. My friend Ann from school joins me. I also ride horses. I wouldn't be able to live without it. (Liz, 13)

The children give us a lot of material about their hobbies outside school, as they invest a lot of time and energy in this. They spend a lot of time in mixed groups of disabled and non-disabled children.

Capacities and abilities

I am good at cooking. This morning I have baked pancakes, but some of them went wrong. I can do the washing up and the drying. At school I am good at physical education. I like to co-operate in the classroom. (Nathalie, 17)

Children spend a lot of time talking about things which they think they are good at. This is not always related to their intellectual abilities. Their interests and talents can become points of contact in their learning process and can help to make choices, add content to subjects at school, give direction to their field of study and leisure time.

Jeffry (5) has a long list of all the things he likes to do: paint, stamp, draw with crayons, cut with his scissors and work with clay. The teacher says that Jeffry ‘likes to paint in his way but he cannot work on paper and colour something in. He can cut if you take his hand. If you don’t watch him, he cuts the head or a leg off. His fine motor abilities are not good’.

Being active and doing the things you like to do is more important than being able to master things. In a lot of interviews and observations, the children give us information about what they like and do not like to do. They talk more in these terms than about the things they are able to do or not. Grown-ups in their environment can think differently about this.
Impairments and difficulties

I react differently, sometimes. I am slower. I need help sometimes. I don’t understand everything. Everybody has brains. Me too, but they work a little bit slower. (Nathalie, 17)

The respondents make it clear to us that they are aware of being different. Their difficulties are part of who they are. Some children are very explicit about this. They talk about their motor problems. Older children describe better what is difficult for them.

Yentl (11) talks about her difficulties with mathematics. I have to use my cards to know my multiplication tables.

When pupils talk about their disabilities, they talk a lot about the way in which they handle their difficulties. Some young people relate this to bad performances in some school subjects.

The teacher asks everyone what his/her favourite colour is. The assistant takes the communication book. She searches for the right page with all the colours. It takes a while before Emma can make her choice clear. She has to pick a colour and a number to discover the right position in the block. In the meantime, the teacher continues: ‘We will give Emma some more time, give a sign if you are ready’. (observation, Emma, 11)

There are moments when children are confronted more explicitly with their difficulties. These problems have to do with communication, pace, the teacher being very busy, the child having a difficult day, the kind of activity, etc. The children themselves recognise that they are different but, as they make clear, this difference only becomes relevant at certain times and in particular contexts.

Belonging

Belonging is a basic need for each person (Kunc, 2002). Membership refers to a child’s right to have access to the same opportunities and experiences as non-disabled peers. Disabled children start from what they have in common with peers and show in lots of different ways that they can and want to belong. They want to contribute and be part of the class and school context. Students’ sense of belonging, self-esteem and engagement are all affected by participating in the regular activities of the classroom alongside their peers (Williams and Downing, 1998).

Nathalie signs her letters and drawings with: Nathalie Spriet, 2BKVV. [name of her class] (observation, Nathalie, 17)

Children and young people are looking for linkages with their peers. This becomes clear in our conversations and observations.

The exercises you don’t finish in class, you have to take home. Because I don’t write very well, I have more homework. That is not fun! When I was in primary school I didn’t have homework when I had to go to therapy. In secondary school, they cannot take this into account. If I work more during the weekends, I can handle this. (Liz, 13)
Young people with a disability sometimes have to prove themselves when they want to take part in the educational process. Pupils can and have to work very hard. They show that they have a lot of abilities but nevertheless it requires a lot of energy.

About school

On Monday we can paint, Tuesday, we ride our bicycles, on Wednesday, it is only half a day, on Thursday I work with Anne (speech therapist) and on Friday we make bread. (Arash, 5)

Children like to go to school. They tell a lot about their subjects, class and school.

Sara (11) showed pictures of Celine, Aurelie and Nathalie during her interview, she calls them ‘friends’. She knows the name of her teacher ‘Marleen’ and her physical therapist ‘Inge’.

The children talk a lot about who they meet in school, about classmates and teachers.

Jeffry (5) likes school outings, school treats, birthdays and Santa Claus.

Most of the time, the stories about school are about non-academic activities. Children put a lot of emphasis on the community aspect. They talk about field trips, school treats, what happens at the playground, etc.

I cannot put my shoes on my table. The teacher doesn’t like it. (Thomas, 10)

Children learn what is necessary to maintain their position in class. They have specific goals in this area where, for non-disabled children, this is often expected without questioning. Disabled children experience the way things work in a mainstream environment; they learn the rules and habits of the teacher and the classroom. They give us a lot of information about this in their interviews.

The teachers know and accept how I am and how I work. I wouldn’t like to start all over again. She talks about her class teacher in a negative way. I would never tell him anything personal. We saw that with Nele. She talked about some problems and he called her parents. (Nizreen, 14)

In general, children are positive towards their teachers. This is certainly true for children in kindergarten and primary school. In secondary education, the attitude towards the teacher has a lot to do with who the teacher is and how he/she relates to the pupils. A strong theme in pupils’ accounts is the value of teachers who ‘understand’ them.

At Christmas, I had 83% and now at Easter, I had 87%. So I am becoming better and better! (Liz, 13)

Children of all ages talk about being evaluated and the feedback they experience. They think it is very important to be appreciated for what they do.

Social relationships with other children and young people

They are being pushed by two bigger children who are running in the playground. The girl cries. Yasmine weeps. When I come closer, she says: ‘Friend’. (observation of Yasmine, 6)
In all the stories, we see that disabled children have friends in and outside the classroom. Besides support from their friends, playing together is very important to them. Children look forward to seeing each other. Friends are an important motivation behind going to school (Whittaker and others, 1998). Disabled pupils have their own preferences. Reciprocity is an important factor in recognising friendship.

I was punished because I threw sand in Hanne’s eyes. (Arash, 5)

Pupils acquire (out of necessity) the ability to defend themselves. Their regular environment demands that they deal with expectations of, and questions from, others. Friendships matter to children, their parents and teachers because they provide children with the opportunity to develop important skills and attitudes and, perhaps most importantly, they enhance the quality of life for children and their families (Meyer and others, 1998).

Nina walks around the whole time. She comes to Flo and takes her by the neck. Fortunately, the teacher has seen it. Then Nina says something bad to me too: ‘Stupid scissors!’, she says, ‘If you don’t say what you want to say, I will cut your ears!’ Then she comes with her scissors, the teacher stops her before my ear is gone. (Martha, 8)

The children also talk about their negative experiences. There are stories of loneliness of being an outsider or a curiosity. At certain moments children do not feel at ease with their peers.

Help and support in the class and at school

Who gives support?

The way the support is provided differs a lot depending on each child’s situation.

I can count on the help of other students. Some more than others. I think that everybody does it, not always and some are more motivated than others. The pupil who sits next to me always takes my books. My friends also help a lot. Ann doesn’t mind. Nobody really minds, but there are students who don’t like to do it. (Liz, 13)

A lot of help comes from classmates. This either happens very spontaneously or when the pupil with special needs asks for help. Sometimes the class uses a structured system to give support as a buddy (Snell and Janney, 2000). Children can have an influence on the help they get.

Sometimes there are support people in the classroom to help. The type and frequency of support depends on several factors. Some children need very little extra support except from the teacher and the classmates. Others have full-time support. Some receive individual support, in or outside the classroom. There are several systems in which children can get extra people to help: special educators, personal assistants through direct payment, volunteers, etc. This does not matter for the children: they are all seen as people who help them.

Marjolein comes to help me in class. She also works with other children. She gives me some extra explanation if I need it. (Yentl, 11)

In some cases, the support is not exclusively for the disabled child. Every pupil in class can ask questions or receive help. Some of the support workers also go home with the children.
How do children experience this extra support?

It is good that Miss Isabelle comes to help, otherwise Miss Kathleen [the teacher] would cry! (William, 5)

Most of the children think very positively about this. The support is related to positive consequences that go along with the help. They can do more work. Their classmates have to do less for them. It is easier for children to participate in the activities with their peers.

I need help on Mondays, it’s not my day. The other days, I’m ok. I can do a lot myself. (Kathy, 10)

Some children are very explicit about doing things on their own. They want to do things independently as much as possible. Disabled children spend a large amount of their time in the company of adults and in social spaces where adults are actively present.

If my special educator comes in lessons I like a lot, it’s no fun to go out. When she comes during art class, I don’t like to go with her. (Martha, 8)

If the help of the support person implies they have to miss things that are fun, children do not like help either.

With every new adaptation, I am a little bit scared. I know I have to work like that, otherwise it’s not possible for me. I have to explain that lots of times to other classmates and teachers. My assistant helps me do that, she tells them I can’t participate if I can’t do it my way. I will never be able to type fast and blind. I’m scared to be the exception. (Nizreen, 14)

Negative reactions of classmates can influence the way children experience extra support or adaptations. If peers are jealous, it is difficult for them. They do not want to be an exception. This becomes even more important when they grow older.

Therapy

I don’t like physical therapy. I’m sick of it. It takes a lot of effort. I know it is necessary for my muscles. I like occupational therapy. She helps me to write and count. I like that. (William, 5)

Most of the participants receive therapy such as physical, speech and occupational therapy. The therapists come to school or the children go to them after school hours. If we look at some combinations of school and therapy we see that the weekly programme for children can become very demanding.

Looking to the future

I don’t know what it will be like in secondary school. It will all be new. I hope the teachers will understand me there. (Yentl, 11)

When I go to primary school, I will get a big satchel and homework! (Arash, 5)
Disabled children have a lot of ideas of what is going to happen to them in school, especially when they are in a transition period. They appear to be looking forward to certain subjects but we could feel some tensions, too.

Liz (13) will do something with her computer. She likes to work with it and is good on it, too.

William (5) will become a father and a waiter.

Most of the children have ideas about what they want to do when they become adults. They are inspired by their talents. They fall back on the subjects they are good at or on their personal interests. Young people, in particular, have a pretty good idea about this (Burchardt, 2004).

Conclusions and discussion

Through the research material, we learn a lot from the perspective of disabled children. We would like to bring more depth in relation to two emergent themes. They give us valuable insights into how children think and experience their position in mainstream education.

First, this material shows that it is important to meet children and find out their views about education. It is a different perspective from that of parents, teachers, professionals, etc. (Lincoln, 1995). The respondents touch upon a lot of things that adults worry about in the context of inclusive education – for example self-esteem, support, etc. (Van Hove and others, 2005). It is essential to take into account the information received from children, regardless of their age and/or disability.

Most of the children have a (long) personal history of persisting and surviving from the day they are born, sometimes going through several schools and education systems. They are able to communicate their feelings and experiences about their lives at school. Given that young people are active managers of their situation, parents and schools should consult them about their educational programme and the kinds of support they need. Such an approach is consistent with the rights of children to have a say in decisions which affect them (United Nations, 1992).

The second conclusion refers to the way children are talking about themselves and their (dis)abilities. The children are blurring boundaries that are set for them through the school system and their label(s). They are doing this without destroying bridges with the concept of support. The children are in a constant stream of playing within certain social expectations and they live in between the ‘regular-school-world’ and the ‘world as made for them with their label’. We recognise what Julie Allan (1999, p. 48) describes:

Transgression allows individuals to peer over the edge of their limits, but also the impossibility of removing them. (…) They need not to reject their gendered or disabled identities, but can choose to vary the way in which they repeat their performances, cultivating an identity which is always in process.

The data indicate that children focus on their strengths and capabilities. Working with children in a positive way on what they can and want to do can be an important tool. This is in
contrast to the policy of approaching, orienting and classifying children on the basis of their labels. At the moment, there is no opportunity in Flanders to talk about the capabilities of disabled children, either in education or in welfare.

This reinforces essentialist medical model perspectives, which concentrate on the deficits of children. (...) Detailed arguments about test scores, relative costs and diagnostic labels carry far more weight than the right of a child to belong or be accepted. (Whitakker and Kenworthy, 2000, p. 228)

The disabled children want to give correct and useful information about how to handle their labels. They do not only work with disability-related information. Parents, teachers, peers, support staff, therapists, etc. should take an overall view of the child’s life in various contexts. This gives varied information about the personality and characteristics of the child.

References


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Geert Van Hove is an Associate Professor at the University of Ghent and Brussels. His field of research is ‘Disability Studies and Inclusive Education’. Most of his research projects are linked with parent movements and the self-advocacy movement in the Flemish speaking part of Belgium.

Kathleen Mortier is an assistant at the University of Ghent. She is working with children, parents and teachers in inclusion projects. Her research focuses on inclusive education and professional and natural supports that enhance participation of children in general education classes.

Gerrit Loots is an Associate Professor at the University of Brussels and Ghent. He has a broad field of research with Deaf Studies, early child–parent interactions, the impact of mental health diagnosis on the construction of the self as possible examples.