

## PREFACE

Working with children with functional impairments means learning a lot about the development of “normal” children and about the situation of children in general. Pursuing research on deaf children deepens this experience and involves studying universal human problems and problems of general psychology.

The issues of general psychology touched upon in various connections in this thesis include the question, how a child’s development is influenced by the lack or impairment of a sensory function. The relation between language and cognition is of special interest when you work with persons who cannot spontaneously learn the language spoken around them. Other central topics are the basic social needs of children and the meaning of the term “communication”.

The universal aspects are not so obvious, but they are included in my personal experiences and emotional involvement in this work.

As a psychologist at Östervångsskolan, the School for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, in Lund between 1975 and 1992, I was able to study the great changes taking place in the situation of deaf children’s growing-up and education. The work of the psychologist gradually came to be affected by sign communication, which became common in education and was recommended at parental guidance meetings in the early 1970s.

Among children born in Sweden, I no longer met beginners who in their first seven years of life had had no opportunity to develop an effective communication – in speech or signs. It was increasingly unusual for parents to have found no way of communicating with their children, previously this had been a common reason for relational problems leading to contacts with a psychologist. Experiencing such massive communication problems had affected me deeply.

Thirst for psychological knowledge and emotional involvement were not reason enough for me to begin working on a dissertation. The necessary impetus came from Associate Professor Kerstin Nordén. She persuaded me to start working with deaf children, she lured me into partic-

ipating in research work and directed me on the long and sometimes tortuous path leading to a thesis.

Sharing her wide knowledge, her solid experience and strong engagement has been a great privilege. Thank you, Kerstin!

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#### *Foreword to the translated version*

Soon after the dissertation, it became clear that the findings reported in my thesis would be of interest to an international audience. The original summary in English was distributed to researchers, teachers, administrators and parents in different parts of the world, but did not provide sufficient information. Translation of the entire thesis was made possible by grants from the Swedish Association for the Deaf (SDR) and the Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSFR). I wish to record my gratitude to both these funding agencies, as well as thanking Mrs Gunilla Layer and Mr Roger Tanner for doing the translation work and Mr Tomas Vollhaber for putting the finishing touches to the manuscript.