



Communication and Deafblindness, Special Needs Education, and New Perspectives on Deafblindness

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The link to the Valedictory Lecture will be published here in the very near future

Abstract

Introduction: In this valedictory lecture, the author presented new perspectives on deafblindness, by looking back at the studies performed in the field of Communication and Deafblindness from an educational perspective at the University of Groningen since her appointment as professor in 2008, preceded by her personal life story. **Background Ph.D. Studies:** In these studies, based on Single-Case-Research methodology, the aim was improving communication between individuals with congenital deafblindness and their educators (teachers, caregivers and parents) and evaluate the effects of the interventions in a mainly quantitative way. Building up evidence-based-practice was the central theme. In total, interventions were performed with 75 people with congenital deafblindness and their 175 educators. These communication interventions were based on attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 1974) and Trevarthen's intersubjectivity theory (Bråten & Trevarthen, 2007). The interventions were performed by well-trained communication coaches who conducted a cyclic diagnostic intervention approach, tailor-made for each individual case, in which video analysis and video feedback were crucial tools. **Results Ph.D. Studies:** Presented were the developed Models and Educational Instruments by the different Ph.D. researchers, and some crucial communication aspects from each model. Martens developed the *Intervention Model of Affective Involvement*,

Bloeming-Wolbrink the *Change Project*, and Huiskens the *Intervention Model for Tactile Communication*. Interventions based on these models proved to be effective on the first and second layers of intersubjective communication and were focused on aspects such as attention, initiatives, positive emotions, affective involvement, meaning-making, and bodily emotional impressions. Damen developed the *High Quality in Communication Intervention*, Boers the *Interaction Communication Analysis List*, and Wolthuis the *Layered Communication Model*. Interventions based on these instruments proved to be effective on three layers of intersubjectivity, on aspects such as attunement, meaning-making, symbolic communication, declarative communication, and perspective-taking. Based on the Self-Determination theory of Deci and Ryan (2000) Haakma, developed the *Need-Supportive Behavior Intervention*, to enhance motivation in learning for both students with acquired and congenital deafblindness. It was concluded that the ‘autonomy-supportive behavior’ of educators in particular should be more strongly encouraged. **Results Master Studies:** In the years between 2006 and 2020, when the author coordinated the Master Pedagogical Sciences Communication and Deafblindness, a number of 85 international master theses and 35 Dutch theses were written, of which several were published in this Journal. The international theses were based on theoretical frameworks of Dialogicality, Developmental Psychology, Semiotics, and Cognitive Linguistics integrated into a Special Needs Education perspective, lectured and reviewed by members of the former DbI Communication Network, now known as Groningen Study Group on Diversity in Communication. **New Perspectives and Conclusion:** As main new perspectives for the future were referred to in the presentations of the Symposium Deafblindness (June 21, 2022), namely: a) the voices of Persons with Deafblindness are heard; b) listen to parents; c) unite the three fields of deafblindness (Congenital, Acquired and Age-related); d) overview of educational knowledge in Academic Volumes for Oxford University Press; e) dialogical Reflections on Video-analysis of Communication related to different theoretical perspectives; f) continuation of Research and Education on new topics in Groningen; and g) international collaboration. The main conclusion of the author was that *a solid foundation* has been laid in which science and practice go hand in hand and that it is up to the young people with deafblindness, family members, practitioners, and researchers, to build a ‘sustainable house’ on this foundation.

Keywords

communication, deafblindness, special needs education, evidence-based, new perspectives

Introduction

This valedictory lecture was meant to give background and overview of studies, in particular, the Ph.D. studies, performed on Communication and Deafblindness from an Educational perspective, at the Department of Inclusive and Special Needs Education connected to the University in Groningen in the Netherlands during the years, since the appointment of the author as a professor in 2008 (Janssen, 2009). With the future in mind, new perspectives on deafblindness were presented, preceded by the author's personal life story.

In this paper historical references are included, in particular for young students to have an idea of how this research is grounded in knowledge of predecessors and colleague researchers of the author in this unique field of deafblind education. In the near future, we hope to make this literature also accessible online on the website of the UG Institute for Deafblindness: <https://www.rug.nl/gmw/pedagogical-and-educational-sciences/research/ugidb/?lang=en>.

With regard to master studies, reference was made to an earlier conference, a Special Issue of this Journal of Deafblind Studies on Communication (2017; Volume, 3), <https://jdbsc.rug.nl/issue/view/3868> and several publications of master students in this Journal.

In my life, there have been several crucial moments or crossroads that led me to do this work. This means that deafblindness has always been the central theme in my life. The first took place when I was eleven. As an 'eager to learn' vegetable farmer's daughter, I can still imagine how I was sitting on an auction box. I would see the workers labor in the fields and think: this is not me. I want to work in education, see the world, and at least do something exceptional! I started as a teacher at a school for children with visual and intellectual disabilities. I followed the Special Needs Education program. There, Professor Jan van Dijk, who became my supervisor, later on, gave an exciting guest lecture on communication with children who are deafblind (Van Dijk, 1965; 1967), and I was very impressed. That turned out to be the second crossroads in my life. I applied for a job at Rafael, the only school for students with deafblindness in the Netherlands at the time, associated with the Institute for the Deaf, now Royal Dutch Kentalis, in Sint-Michielsgestel. I learned a lot from my first student, a girl who was profoundly deaf and blind from birth. When I started with her, she didn't know the difference between night and day, at 7 years old. Over the next five years, she learned a lexicon of some 900 concepts, and two-to three-word sentences through natural gestures, referential objects, and fingerspelling in the hand. These methods have long been familiar, thanks to Helen Keller, a famous American woman who became deafblind

at 19 months and was taught well throughout her life, among others by Ann Sullivan (Keller, 2003; Lenderink, 1907). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ch_H8pt9M8.

In Sint-Michielsgestel, I learned how to apply and teach those methods by first building a good relationship with the deafblind child. To make a long story short: it opened up a whole new world for me. I studied Van Uden's Conversation Method (Van Uden, 1968; 1981), the Van Dijk curricular approach (Van Dijk, 1965; 1968; 1982, 1986; MacFarland, 1993) and other relevant methods underlying the need for support of children with deafblindness (Brazelton, 1974; Day, 1978a; 1978b; Dumont, 1984; 1979; Enerstvedt, (1996); Erikson, 1967; Fraiberg, 1977; Freeman, 1971; Hyvärinen, 1983; Lenderink, 1907; Jürgens, 1977; Janssen, 1984a; 1984b; Kok, 1976; Meshcheryakov, (1979); Mönks & Heymans, 1978; Piaget & Inhelder, 1978; Schaerlakens, 1977; Schaffer, 1978; Siegel-Causey & Downing, 1987; Riksen-Walraven, 1977; 1981; 1983; Stillman, 1984; Totaalplan Rafaël, 1985; Van IJzendoorn et al., 1982; Visser, 1977; 1988; Welsh & Blash, 1980; Walsh & Holzberg, 1981; Werner & Kaplan, 1963). And so, after four years in Sint-Michielsgestel, I had already achieved my childhood dream. I did something exceptional, learned a lot, and saw the world.

In 1984 at the World Conference of Deafblind International in New York, which was quite the experience for my colleagues and me, I gave a plenary speech for 300 people on the use of Objects of Reference (Janssen, 1984b). At Kentalis, I got to expand my expertise, and I seized all the opportunities. For example, I wrote a chapter about the education of deafblind children for the book *Meervoudig Gehandicapten [Multiple Disabilities]* with Jan van Dijk as part of the Ortho series edited by Han Nakken, at the time Professor of Special Needs Education at the University of Groningen (Van Dijk & Janssen, 1993). So even back in the '90s, there was a link between Sint-Michielsgestel and Groningen.

I combined my PhD research with a practical job. Gradually, I found out that the practice was already at a high standard but that there was hardly any scientific evidence in the field of deafblindness. In my opinion, the practice had to be much more science-based.

In 2000, my other supervisor Professor Marianne Riksen-Walraven, an authority in the field of early childhood development (Riksen-Walraven, 1978; Riksen-Walraven & Van Aken, 1997), held her inaugural lecture (2000). That was the third crossroads for me. Then it occurred to me I have to build up a specific research group or 'chair' focused on Communication with people who are deafblind. Because people with deafblindness were not seen or heard enough at that time. Perhaps they were medically speaking, but certainly not in Special Needs Education. By then, I had gathered some 30 years of practical and research experience. So, it became my mission to ensure that the

knowledge about communication with people who are deafblind would be lifted to a scientific level. Today, I would like to thank all who have helped achieve this.

Deafblindness

Deafblindness is a combination of severe auditory and visual disabilities that seriously impact various life domains, such as social life, communication, access to information, and orientation and mobility. Obviously, the sense of touch becomes extremely important to compensate for the disabilities. There are many variations. <https://wfdb.eu/what-is-deafblindness>

It makes a big difference whether the deafblindness occurred before language development (congenital deafblindness), after someone has already learned to speak or sign (acquired deafblindness), or if someone becomes deafblind after fifty due to aging. Also, in addition to deafblindness, a person may have additional disabilities, such as an intellectual disability or multiple disabilities (Larsen & Damen, 2014; World Federation of the Deafblind, 2018).

If you can see and hear, it's difficult to imagine what it means to be deafblind. It is different for each person. We can learn from experts living with deafblindness such as Nicole Kort, who has been an essential ambassador in our field in The Netherlands. And Femke Krijger, who recently wrote a remarkable book entitled *De Evenwichtskunstenaar* [2022, The Balancing Act], on how to find your balance in life and learn to perceive in a different way when you lose your sight and hearing, with many examples from her daily life.

Deafblindness and Special Needs Education

What can Special Needs Education (SNE) do for people with deafblindness? SNE is *a treatment-based science* that focuses on the educator-child relationship or the relationship between an educator (parent, teacher, caregiver or other professional) and a person with disabilities. We focus on analyzing educational problems to recognize, treat, solve, or prevent them (Nakken, 2001; Janssen, 2009)

Evidence-Based Practice

In our SNE research, the emphasis is on intervention studies. Interventions are essential to improve the practice, and to do that based on evidence, with theoretically well-

founded methods, tested on their effects, and soundly implemented (Bartman et al., 2001; Vlaskamp et al., 2005) There are many different definitions of Evidence-Based Practice, but we used the definition of Baartman.

Our research methodology is Single-Case-Research (Barlow et al., 2009; Morgan & Morgan, 2009; Parker & Vannest, 2009). This means that each person is a study in itself. This form of research is increasingly considered appropriate to demonstrate 'best practices' and build evidence in SNE (Horner et al., 2005).

The single case designs applied in our PhD-program research are mainly experimental and quantitative (see interventions Janssen, Damen, Martens, Boers, Huiskens, Haakma, Bloeming-Wolbrink and Wolthuis).

This contrasts the dialogical single case studies presented by Ivana Markova (2016; 2017; 2022) which are qualitative. Many more qualitative examples can be found in the theses of our international *Master-program Pedagogical Sciences, Communication and Deafblindness* (2016) and in the international series of booklets on *Communication and Congenital Deafblindness* (Rødbroe & Janssen, 2006; Janssen & Rødbroe, 2007; Souriau et al., 2008; Souriau et al., 2009).

Harmonious interaction as a basis for High-Quality Communication

Where did we start?

At the time, the hypothesis in the author's Ph.D.-research was that harmonious interaction is indispensable for developing high-quality communication (Janssen, et al. 2003a; 2003b; Janssen, 2014). 'Interaction' was considered the basis for further communication development. 'Interaction' was defined as a process in which individuals influence each other in terms of behavior and emotions (Janssen et al., 2003a). 'Communication' was described as a form of interaction in which meaning is transmitted by the use of utterances that are perceived, interpreted, and responded to by the communication partner, so that the person with deafblindness feels understood (Janssen et al., 2003a; Bjerkan, 1996). Two instruments were developed known, as the *Diagnostic Intervention Model* (DIM) for harmonious interactions (Janssen et al., 2003a) and The *Contact Intervention program* (CONTACT) (Janssen et al., 2002; Janssen, et al., 2003b; Janssen, 2014). Based on the DIM, interventions were performed with 13 children with congenital deafblindness and 44 educators (teachers, caregivers, and parents) in different settings such as schools, residential facilities, and at home. Effects were demonstrated for *initiatives, answers, turns, regulation of intensity, and affective involvement*. Later many more interventions were performed based on the CONTACT program on aspects such as

affective involvement (Martens et al., 2014; 2014a; 2014b), sustained interaction (Janssen et al, 2014) also for other target groups, such as persons with visual and auditory disabilities and intellectual disabilities (Damen et al, 2011) and persons with deafblindness and intellectual disabilities (Bloeming-Wolbrink et al., 2015; Bloeming-Wolbrink, 2020; Martens et al., 2016). Several of the underlying studies of the author's Ph.D study are referenced in the extended reference list, included as a separate file in this issue (Janssen, 2022b; Chen & Haney, 1995; Hart, 2001; 2006; Nafstad & Rødbroe, 1996; 1999; Daelman, 1995; Daelman, et al., 1996; 1999; Dekker et al., 1994; Van den Tillaart, 2000; 2001; Van Dijk & Nelson, 2001; Van Strien, 1986; De Bruyn et al., 1995; Rowland & Schweigert, 1997).

At the time, in the first decade of 2000, there was hardly any scientific evidence for 'meaning transfer' and 'higher forms of communication' in people with congenital deafblindness.

Questions from practice

Our research was based on questions coming from clinical practice. Educators associated with the large institutions in the Netherlands for people with deafblindness indicated a serious need for guidelines to improve their communication skills and competencies. These questions were focused in particular on interaction and attunement; reducing negative emotions and problem behavior; meaning transfer; tactile strategies; assessment of communicative and cognitive capabilities; and stimulating advanced forms of communication.

Scientific evidence demonstrated as far as

We have completed seven PhD-studies so far, published more than 40 articles, and – not insignificant – performed interventions and investigated their effects for 75 people with deafblindness and their 175 educators (see publications by Martens, Damen, Boers, Bloeming-Wolbrink, Huiskens, Wolthuis, and from a different theoretical framework those of Haakma).

Four PhD studies are still ongoing, under supervision of my successor Professor Saskia Damen, Alexander Minnaert and me (Damen, 2022; see references for Rorije, Tosolini, Worm, and Gerkema-Nijhof).

Communication interventions

The communication interventions are mainly based on attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 1974) and intersubjectivity theory (Bråten & Trevarthen, 2007;

Trevarthen & Aitken, 2001). Trevarthen's theory describes intersubjective communication development in three layers. Communication is the ability to share meanings from an innate I–other awareness. From that awareness, the individual develops the ability to share their intentions, thoughts, and feelings with the other person. This development takes place from birth until the age of six. The first layer is characterized by harmonious interactions and affective involvement; the second layer by shared attention and meaning transfer; and the third layer by symbolic communication and perspective-taking. In practice, these layers complement each other and are interchangeable (Bråten & Trevarthen, 2007).

Coaching of communication partners

The interventions aimed to improve communication through the coaching of educators, i.e., the communication partners. The coaching was performed by trained coaches who conducted a cyclic approach of assessment and intervention, tailor-made for each case. Following such a fixed step-by-step plan guaranteed the integrity of the intervention. Each intervention consisted of several phases, starting with the phase of 'interaction or attunement' and then one or more phases aimed at 'improving communication'. Video analysis and video feedback were essential coaching forms, but also other forms were used such as modeling, coaching on the job, individual coaching and team coaching (Janssen & Damen, 2018; Damen et al, 2019).

Here the different intervention models or instruments developed in each study are presented, besides some communication aspects per study. For more information about the content and the effects of the studies see the publications of the different researchers.

Effective on first and second layers of intersubjectivity

Marga Martens has developed the *Intervention Model for Affective Involvement* and she performed interventions with 9 persons with congenital deafblindness and 34 educators. She has shown, among other aspects, that it is possible to *share emotions* in a perceivable way for a person with deafblindness, so-called *affective involvement*. This model has also proved suitable for reducing problem behavior and negative emotions (Martens et al., 2014; 2014a; 2014b; 2016)

Kitty Bloeming-Wolbrink has performed *the Change project* with 7 people who are not only deafblind from birth but also intellectually disabled and their 25 educators. She investigated aspects such as attention, confirmation, affective involvement, Bodily Emotional Impressions and stress levels. Highlighted is *attention: attention by the caregiver and attention by the client*. This aspect could also be improved in this challenging target group. An important conclusion was that the quality of interaction

could be improved even more by coaching on a more permanent basis (Bloeming-Wolbrink, 2015; 2020)

Hermelinde Huiskens has performed the *Intervention Model for Tactile Communication* in interventions with 9 persons with congenital deafblindness and 10 educators. She investigated aspects such as tactile initiatives, tactile gestures and/or tactile signs, and bodily tactile strategies and demonstrated in a scientifically quantitative way that *bodily tactile strategies* could be improved (Huiskens, 2015).

Effective on three layers of intersubjectivity

Erika Boers developed an observation list that enables a professional to identify interaction and communication possibilities with 6 persons who are congenital deafblind and their 12 educators, the *Interaction Communication Analysis List*. Further, she developed a dynamic assessment procedure that allows the improvement of aspects such as attention, regulation of intensity, confirmation, affective involvement, negotiation of meaning, intentional communication, and *symbolic and declarative communication*. Declarative communication is: getting the attention of the other and sharing intentions and thoughts as an exchange of information (Boers, 2015; Boers, submitted).

Saskia Damen developed the *High Quality in Communication intervention* and performed interventions with 6 persons who are congenital deafblind and their 25 educators. She investigated aspects such as dyadic interaction, sharing of emotions, referential communication, negotiation of meaning, declarative communication, and past experience. For 9 dyads she investigated the sequential analyses in turns between the person with deafblindness and the educator involved. She has shown that it is possible to improve communication in the three layers. An important conclusion was that the *scaffolding mechanism* is essential; advanced forms of communication, such as talking about past events, were only observed after they were first demonstrated or initiated by the educator. (Damen et al., 2014; 2015a; 2015b; 2017). Damen worked out with her colleague-researchers a practical handbook for professionals “Kwaliteit in Communicatie” [Quality in Communication] (Damen, Worm et al., 2021).

In the *Layered Communication Model*, Kirsten Wolthuis strictly adhered to the theory of Bråten & Trevarthen (2007). She performed interventions with 12 teacher-student dyads and 3 caregiver-client dyads. She investigated aspects such as mutual attention, turn-taking, imitation, affective involvement, joint attention, naming objects, symbolic communication and perspective-taking. She has shown that it is also possible to achieve the highest form of intersubjective communication with children with congenital deafblindness, namely *perspective-taking*, or the ability to put oneself in someone else’s mind. She has also demonstrated that the first layer, interaction or attunement, is indeed the basis for the other two higher levels of communication development and that this

model not only can be used to describe the development but also to monitor and improve this development (Wolthuis, et al., 2019-2021). Wolthuis and Loertz (2019) produced with colleagues from practice, the observation list *Kwaliteit van Interactie en Communicatie* [Manual for the use of the observation list Quality of Interaction and Communication].

Illustration of communication aspects in a video

The video of Emil and his mother where they have a conversation about the Playground is used to demonstrate some communication aspects (this video is from Project Communication and Congenital Deafblindness, Part 3 Meaning Making, Souriau, Rødbroe & Janssen, 2008; available on You Tube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Drhj-lkF8uY>).

Emil is four and a half. He is socially blind but can still observe some light and movement. He is also deaf and received a cochlear implant six months ago. Earlier that day, he visited the playground with his mother, and now they talk about it. This means that this conversation is already at a symbolic level (third layer) because it discusses a topic from the past.

Among many others, the following communication aspects are observable: *mutual attention*, and *sharing emotions*. Emil is trying to express certain intentions about climbing on the slide and succeeds in doing so. The mother supports Emil with *tactile hand-under-hand contact*. She initiates the conversation about the girl they encountered in the playground. This clearly shows the *scaffolding mechanism*. In this way, the mother stimulates Emil to think of the girl and even put himself in her shoes, *perspective-taking*, the highest level of communication within this theory.

Master's Program Pedagogical Sciences, Communication and Deafblindness

Much of the 'practice-based evidence' is gathered in unique studies within the framework of the Master's program in Pedagogical Sciences, Communication and Deafblindness. The author was the curriculum coordinator for this program from 2006 until 2020. She collaborated with a team of international experts. A team of dedicated researchers who worked as a Working group on Communication connected to Deafblind International for over 30 years, and now known in the deafblind field under the name Groningen Studygroup on Diversity in Communication (see for references CNUS-Communication Network Update Series texts, NWC 2012). Because this team of lecturers and developers was vital for the development of the content of this master's program all

the names were explicitly mentioned: Anne Nafstad, Inger Rødbrøe, Marlene Daelman, Jacques Souriau, Ton Visser, Flemming Ask Larsen, Paul Hart, and including the author Marleen Janssen. Several of these experts published earlier interesting articles in this *Journal of Deafblind Studies on Communication* (Souriau, 2015; Nafstad, 2015; Rødbrøe, 2016; Nafstad & Daelman, 2017). Without this team of experts, this master's program at the University of Groningen would not have been possible, as well as this *Journal of Deafblind Studies on Communication*. During the years several international researchers were invited, among others Hubert Hermans (2012; 2013), Ivana Markova (2017), Shaun Gallagher (2017), Linell (2017), Stephen von Tetzchner, to discuss and reflect on theoretical themes together with master students and alumni. The content of the program was focused on the theoretical frameworks of Dialogicality, Developmental Psychology, Semiotics, and Cognitive Linguistics and integrated into a Special Needs Education perspective. These topics varied on themes such as Social Interaction, (f.e. Imitation, Laughter, Rhythm, Touch, Musicality); Communication (f.e. Meaning-making, Partner and Intervenor strategies, Tactile gestures, Agency, Joint Attention, Tactile communication, Tactile Signing, Languaging, Improvisation, Linguistic elements, Multi-Party conversation) and many other topics such as Exploration, Theory of Mind, Aesthetic Space, and Tactile Working Memory.

85 international master studies were performed and described in master theses. Several students published their research in this journal (Hanning-Zwanenburg et al., 2015; Selling et al., 2015; Brede & Souriau, 2016; Lembcke et al., 2016; Forsgren et al., 2018; Smith, 2018; Costain et al., 2019; Reid, 2019; Lindström, 2019; Tosolini, 2020; Byaryhanga et al., 2021; Lie & Nafstad, 2021; Da Silva, 2022; Shakele, 2022). We are working on it to make an accessible overview of all master studies on deafblindness on the website of the UG Institute for Deafblindness in the near future. Besides the international master studies, also 35 Dutch master theses were published. Most master studies were focused on people with Congenital Deafblindness. In recent years, we have also deliberately focused on more diversity in the target groups with complex communication needs such as persons with Acquired Deafblindness (Van de Molengraft, 2011; Cahiero, 2016; Hug, 2017), Persons with selective mutism (Van Geel, 2014), persons with multi-sensory disabilities (Canossa Dias, 2015). Also for these target groups the theoretical frameworks and qualitative case study methodology used for people with congenital deafblindness proved to be successful, such as dialogical exemplary case studies (Markova, 2017). Eight master's students were so motivated by their research that they have gone on to a Ph.D. track, with four having already obtained their Ph.D. (Damen, 2015; Martens, 2014; Bloeming-Wolbrink, 2019; Wolthuis, 2021) and the other four former master students will follow soon. They have already presented and/or published their master study or parts of their Ph.D study (Rorije, Tosolini, Worm, Gerkema-Nijhof).

New Perspectives on Deafblindness

Learning and future studies

In ongoing and future studies more emphasis is placed, besides analysis of communication, on learning, cognition, and language (Damen, 2022). These new perspectives are becoming visible on the website of the UG Institute for Deafblindness (UGIDB) in Groningen.

A first PhD-study in the field of learning has been carried out by Ineke Haakma (2015). On the basis of Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2000), she investigated the motivation in learning in four students with congenital deafblindness and three students with acquired deafblindness. She developed the *Need-Supportive Behavior Intervention*. Motivation is strongly influenced by the need-supporting behavior of the teachers. It has been concluded that for both target groups in particular 'autonomy-supportive-behavior' could be improved. Further research on autonomy behavior in tactile communication is being carried out by Marianne Rorije.

Voices of persons with Deafblindness and parents

Other important themes which can be considered as new perspectives on deafblindness were presented during the Symposium Deafblindness in Groningen (2022) of which the content is reported more extensively in a conference report in this issue (Janssen, 2022): Protactile communication by Lisa van der Mark, and Research by parents of persons with congenital deafblindness by Rosemarie van den Breemer and Liliast Liston.

Three subgroups

Several of these themes will be written in two academic textbooks, which will be published in the near future. These book proposals have been recently accepted by Oxford University Press (OUP) for the Perspectives on Deafness Series. One volume is entitled: "*Communication with People who are Deafblind: Assessment and Intervention*", and the other is "*Learning, Education, and Support of Deafblind Children and Adults: An Interdisciplinary Lifespan Approach*". These books combine the three subgroups of deafblindness and are supervised by Marleen Janssen, Timothy Hartshorne and Walter Wittich, the same editorial team which edited also the Special Issue of *Frontiers in Educational Psychology: Development, Wellbeing, and Lifelong Learning in Individuals with a dual Sensory Loss* (2021). <https://www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/11454/development-wellbeing-and-lifelong-learning-in-individuals-with-a-dual-sensory-loss>.

A third book will be written for the *Professional Perspectives on Deafness* series of OUP, about deafblind voices and diversity in education and support. All in all, over hundred fifty authors from all over the world, are working on these volumes.

Video analysis of Communication from a Dialogical Perspective

The Groningen Study Group on Diversity in Communication is working on a new book project “*Video-analysis of Communication. Reflections on case studies and examples from dialogical and other interdisciplinary perspectives*” in which the dialogical theory will be connected with other theoretical perspectives and illustrated with practical cases.

International collaboration

The UG Institute for Deafblindness collaborates closely with the Deafblind International Communication Network, from which the author is the network leader. With our organization team existing of Helle Buelund from Denmark, Meredith Prain from Australia, Steve Rose from the UK and Saskia Damen from the Netherlands. We are focusing on the fact that the voices of people with deafblindness and family members will be heard more in the future. Two times a year, webinars on Video-analysis of Communication are organized for family members worldwide. <http://communication.deafblindinternational.org/>

This network will also contribute to the world conference in Canada “Global Connections” from July 22 to 28, 2023, with a program not just for researchers but also for people with deafblindness, their families, and professionals <https://www.deafblindnetworkontario.com/18th-deafblind-international-world-conference-2023/>. Besides that, the Communication Network will be active in Deafblind International’s Education Campaign (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7BiLl pn7iJpBXJNhheHuoA>)

Continuation

From within the University of Groningen, we will continue this Journal of Deafblind Studies on Communication, the new Master’s degree program in Deafblindness, Ph.D.studies, the training of research-practitioners, and the research lab for longitudinal case studies. This will be in collaboration with the new professor, Saskia Damen, who is appointed at September 1st 2022, as Endowed Professor of “Development and Learning of people with multiple disabilities and complex communication needs and people with congenital and early acquired deafblindness”, within a collaboration between Royal Dutch Kentalis and the University of Groningen.

Conclusion: A foundation has been laid

A solid foundation has been laid. As a research group, we have been implementing the current research strategy of the Dutch Research Council (2019-2022), linking science and practice, for over 20 years. Let us be an example to others, but above all, let us continue and ensure that a 'sustainable house' is built on this foundation.

A dream for the future is: That all people with deafblindness are heard and seen. That they get the chance to continue learning throughout their life. Research and practice will continue to go hand in hand. In addition to good research and good practice, there is an urgent need for proactive policies and sufficient funding to realize the plans that will truly benefit people with deafblindness. The national approach is essential but should be extended at a European and global level. Interdisciplinary collaboration and research are essential. Training and coaching professionals and family members at a high-quality level is an important point of attention for organizations and policymakers.

To conclude: The foundation is there, as is the will. Keeping the dream alive and realizing it is a task for people with deafblindness themselves, their families, professional educators, and researchers. We wish them a great deal of wisdom, success, and pleasure in this fascinating field and research and education will go on at the University of Groningen.

References

References connected to the Valedictory Lecture of Marleen Janssen on June 21st, 2022 at the University of Groningen, are published in a [separate file](#) in this issue of the Journal of Deafblind Studies on Communication.

As well as references connected to the Oral History Interview of Marleen Janssen as Professor Emeritus, by Vittorio Busato on December 9th, 2022 for the ADNG project <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Ejl8Czb-wc>.

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