



## CONFERENCE REPORT

Symposium Deafblindness: New Perspectives on Deafblindness

Groningen, the Netherlands. June, 21, 2022

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On June 21 st, 2022, the UG Institute for Deafblindness in collaboration with the Department of Inclusive and Special Needs Education organized an (inter) national symposium at the University of Groningen to mark the farewell of Marleen Janssen as professor and the start of her work as Professor Emeritus. This Symposium is recorded and is available on the website of the UG Institute for Deafblindness.

### **Here comes the link with presentations of the Symposium Deafblindness and the Valedictory Lecture soon**

It was an interesting program aimed at New Perspectives in the field of Deafblindness, besides the topic of Communication and Deafblindness, which was and is the research topic from an educational perspective of Marleen Janssen and colleagues for almost 20 years at the University of Groningen. Many Master-students and Ph. D.-students graduated on this topic. In this symposium, it was celebrated what is achieved with a focus on the future.

The Chairman of the day was Prof. Alexander Minnaert. He welcomed the guests who came to the Akerk, a historical and beautiful church in the city of Groningen, as the many (inter) national online participants of the Symposium. He emphasized that what the author has achieved was unique and devoted very beautiful words to her. He introduced each presentation in a very enthusiastic manner in which he showed that he immersed himself in each presenter and each topic.

The first presenter was Dr. Jolanda Dwarswaard, Director of the Kentalis Academy of Royal Dutch Kentalis in the Netherlands. The place where the author started her career was at the deafblind school, now Kentalis Rafael. Jolanda had, besides a very beautiful

speech for the author, an important announcement to make, namely that a newly Endowed Professor will be appointed, not only with an assignment on Deafblindness but with an extension to people with multiple disabilities. This appointment will be within a collaboration between Royal Dutch Kentalis and the University of Groningen.

By now, December 2022, the name is known. Prof. Saskia Damen is appointed on September 1<sup>st</sup> 2022, as Endowed Professor of “Developmental and Learning of people with multiple disabilities and complex communication needs and people with congenital and early acquired deafblindness”. Here, I congratulate Saskia on her appointment, which is well deserved. She worked very hard for it, and I am very happy that our collaboration of over 15 years led to a new professorship. This means that the work and many beautiful projects will go on at the University in Groningen.

After this important announcement, a film was presented of Lisa van der Mark, a person living with deafblindness because of the Usher Syndrome. Lisa is a Ph.D. student at the University of Leiden. She introduced the audience in Protactile Communication. She told us that Protactile is a tactile-centric communication that goes beyond the tactile reception of sign language as it is more than communication through the hands. “Protactile” makes use of contact space, the touchable surface on the listener’s body, so that the listener can experience and embody what is being said. Protactile started out in the US and has been spreading beyond its country borders, to also set foot in Europe. You can view the film online as well as find another interesting clip on Youtube about Protactile Communication of John Lee Clark and Jelica Nuccio and the research of Terra Edwards.

“Listen to the voices of parents of persons with Congenital Deafblindness” was an important take-home message of Dr. Rosemarie van den Breemer and Liliast Liston (Msc Communication and Deafblindness). They represented family members of persons with congenital deafblindness and demonstrated clearly that parents are very successful to be included in research projects, or moreover should have the lead in research projects. Rosemarie works on different research projects in Norway and Liliast in the UK. They will be presenting also at the DbI World conference in Ottawa in July 2023.

Prof. Timothy Hartshorne from Michigan University and Prof. Walter Wittich from the University of Montreal presented the content of two academic volumes on Deafblindness for Oxford University Press. The three of us are the editorial team in this exciting book project. One Volume is entitled *Communication with people who are deafblind: Assessment and intervention*. In this volume the following sections will be included: Identification, Assessment, Social Interaction and behavior, Communication

development and intervention, Dialogical Approaches to communication, Tactile Communication, Tactile Sign Language and interpretation. A second volume is entitled *Learning, Education and Support of deafblind children and adults*, and existing of the following sections: Identification, Specific Learning approaches, Learning, Self-determination and education, Participation, work and recreation, Family perspective, Professionalization and interdisciplinary support and Research, technology and innovation. Over 150 authors around the globe are working on these volumes. And a third volume led by Deafblind authors is in the making.

An exciting book project of the Groningen Study group on Diversity in Communication is in progress as well. Presentations related to this project were held at this Symposium in Groningen. Prof. Ivana Markova from Stirling University Scotland spoke about Dialogical Single Case Studies. Dr. Paul Hart from Sense Scotland held an interesting presentation about the case study of Fiona, in which different theoretical concepts were explained. Dr. Marlene Daelman, from Brugge Belgium (live), with Anne Nafstad, Psych. Cand. from Statped Norway (online), prepared a presentation about the Dialogical concept of the Second Perspective and illustrated that with an interesting video. Jacques Souriau, psychologist from France, reflected on different epistemological issues. This book will be written in the coming two years in collaboration with the UG Institute for Deafblindness in Groningen.

The last presentation in English of this Symposium was of Saskia Damen, Associate Professor at the University of Groningen. She presented several new research topics with a Focus on the Future and started with four Ph.D. projects illustrated with interesting videoclips. The first Ph.D. was that of Marianne Rorije, a study about the effects of interventions on tactile communicative agency and sign language and an investigation on the role of the communication coach in these interventions. The second study presented was that of Kim Tosolini, entitled *Thinking in Dialogue*, and this one aimed at improving partner strategies focused on the zone of proximal development regarding the cognitive abilities of students with congenital deafblindness. The third study of Mijkje Worm is focused on Multiparty Communication with children and adults and the fourth study of Rita Gerkema-Nijhof is aimed at Storytelling. Saskia told about all relevant variables, research designs, and aims of the different studies. As other goals for the future, she was looking forward to implementation studies of interventions; including parents in research; the benefits of peer interaction; tactile sign language; dynamic assessment, and including technology and innovations.

After the break, Prof. Wied Ruijssenaars introduced my valedictory lecture. He did that in Dutch with slides in English in a very humorous way. My valedictory lecture was especially meant to thank all my colleagues with whom I collaborated, during the 47 years of my working career. Many of them were there live or online. In this issue of the Journal of Deafblind Studies on Communication, you find the complete lecture with all the references (see Janssen, 2022). For me, it was an unforgettable day, and I want to say here thank you all for the wonderful contacts in the past, and I am looking forward to meeting you again in the future and seeing the interesting work in deafblind education go on, now as Professor Emeritus.

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