



Child-Guided Assessment Strategies

By Dr. Jan van Dijk

The information below was taken from Dr. Jan van Dijk's website:

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What is assessment?

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (USA), 2003 describes this process as follows:

"Assessment involves the multiple steps of collecting data on a child's development and learning, determining its significance in light of the program goals and objectives, incorporating the information into planning for individuals and programs, and communicating the findings to family and other involved people."

I have developed over the years such an approach for children with multiple impairments, including for children with deafblindness. During my long career I must have assessed over 4.000 children. Except in a few cases it was always possible to find an area of strength in the child, which could be used as a starting point for effective intervention.

For a long time colleagues were convinced that our approach was a "Van Dijk thing" which could not be applied by others. Dr. Catherine Nelson et.al have published data that the "Approach" can be learned in a rather short period of time, in a reliable way if appropriate instruction methods are used.

Typical children are often assessed using standardized tests or checklists. In some cases, instruments like these also exist for atypical populations, such as the *Perkins-Binet Test of Intelligence for the Blind*, *Intelligence Test for Visually Impaired Children (ITVIC)*, or the *Snijders-Oomen Non-Verbal Intelligence Test for deaf children (SON)*.

These tests are standardized on a representative group of children. The children carry out tasks according to a strict procedure.

The testing instruments designed for hearing impaired children primarily use visual materials and the testing materials for visually impaired children can be touched. For deafblind children, *standardized instruments like these are not available* (though a group of experts on deafblindness is trying to develop such an instrument).

Nevertheless, parents and educators want to foster a deafblind child's development, determine the child's best school placement and have a better understanding of their child's/student's future.

Last, but not least, they want to know if their child will remain highly dependent on others throughout life or develop sufficient social and economic skills to live in relative independence.

How do I respond when confronted with these questions? When asked to conduct an assessment, the first thing I do is *clarify the questions*:

- Formulation of the question(s) to be pursued in the assessment?
- What information is already available?
- Determining the most favourable situation.

After we have the answers on these questions, the Actual Assessment can take place.

Additional Resources:

Dr. Jan van Dijk's website: www.drjanvandijk.org

National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness

<http://nationaldb.org/ISSelectedTopics.php?topicCatID=7>

Nelson, C., Janssen, M., Oster T. & Jayaraman G. (2010) "*Reliability and Fidelity of the van Dijk assessment for Children with Deafblindness.*"

Nelson, C., van Dijk, J., Oster, T., McDonnell, A. *Child-guided Strategies: The van Dijk Approach to Assessment*, American Printing House for the Blind, Inc. 2009.