

# Assuming Competence

## The Least Dangerous Assumption

The least dangerous assumption approach helps people with disability achieve much more than we think they can.

This approach assumes that when there is no strong evidence, decisions about the person's life (e.g. educational plan), should be based on the assumption that he/she is competent and/or is able to learn.

These assumptions, even if they are incorrect, have the least dangerous effects on people's life outcomes.

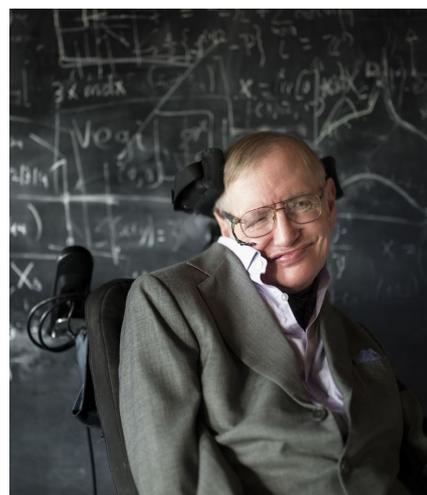
When we assume competence:

1. People are seen as capable of learning.
2. We assume that poor performance is due to poor teaching strategies rather than the person's deficits.
3. We use age respectful vocabulary, topics, and intonation when addressing others.
4. We do not discuss people's lack of skills in front of them, unless they are part of the conversation.
5. We give feedback highlighting success rather than failure and disabilities.
6. We provide people with greater learning and life opportunities such as developing literacy, social skills, social network and joining the workforce.

Intelligence is a multi-dimensional concept. It is difficult, if not impossible to measure intelligence accurately, particularly for people with communication, sensory and/or motor difficulties.

These are people who have not been able to develop and/or have not been taught the skills required to participate in tests which aim to measure intelligence (e.g. IQ tests).

Often test results lead us to make incorrect conclusions about the person's capacity to learn.



When competence and ability to learn is not assumed, people with disability are provided with fewer choices and opportunities. They are given a narrowed vision for the future. They may also not be supported to participate in social and educational activities with same-age peers, assuming that those are too advanced for them.



All people have different talents and skills. People learn best when we hold high expectations for them and when we support them and provide them with good instruction and appropriate communication assistive technology.



**Reference:**

Jorgensen, C. (2005). The Least Dangerous Assumptions: A Challenge To Create A New Paradigm. Disability Solutions, 6(3).

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