Walking the Talk of Presuming Competence

Tracy Thresher
Pascal Cheng

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“What I have come to understand, is that a presumption of competence is much more than a set of beliefs, it is a way of interacting with another human being who is seen as a true equal and as having the same basic human rights as I have.”

Ariane Zurcher, 2013, Emma’s Hopebook
https://emmashopebook.com/2013/03/07/presume-competence-what-does-that-mean-exactly/
“Presume competence means – assume your child is aware and able to understand even though they may not show this to you in a way that you are able to recognize or understand.

Presume competence means talk to your child or the other person as you would a same age non-Autistic child or person.”

Ariane Zurcher, 2013, Emma’s Hopebook
https://emmashopebook.com/2013/03/07/presume-competence-what-does-that-mean-exactly/
Presume Competence is a “practice”. Much like anything I want to get good at, I must practice this. It is very much an action.

https://emmashopebook.com/2013/05/22/taking-action-presuming-competence/
A groundbreaking point-of-view documentary exploring a non-fluent speaker's world. 14-year-old Emma challenges societal judgment surrounding autism... one keystroke at a time.

This is Emma's debut as co-director.

https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/unspoken-documentary
Changing attitudes and assumptions towards the practice of the presumption of competence
“Fastening labels on people is like leasing cars with the destinations determined beforehand.”
“Its attitudes more that limit opportunities rather than the disability itself. Larry likes people to see him first as primarily an artist instead of autistic man and Tracy wants you to see him as leading man who gets the girl like George Clooney.”
“Labeling creates exclusion so asserting the talents of people over their label promotes their inclusion.”
“You can be a poet, painter, athlete or reality TV addict but whatever your passion is that should define you.”
Redefining how intelligence is seen
Perception drives expectation.
Expectation drives opportunity.
Opportunity drives achievement.
Achievement drives perception.

http://praacticalaac.org/practical/perception-and-presuming-competence/
“If you want to see competence, it helps if you look for it.”

Doug Biklen
Least dangerous assumption

“Unless someone makes a jump by going outside the handicapped person’s previous stage of communication, there is no way the speechless person can do so. Failure is no crime. Failure to give someone the benefit of the doubt is.”

Anne McDonald, *Annie’s Coming Out*, 1980
Expanding how we think about communication
“All People Want Communication”
“Populate my day with opportunities for communication.”

Larry Bissonnette
“The power of communication is rooted in relationships... I want social contact, relationship, and conversation...I want to be in the mix...ask me enticing questions.”
“With time and patience I can have some really thoughtful conversations. What works for me is communicating with thinking, patient people who understand my autism and work through the problems of anxiety and impulsive movement to focus on thoughtful communication."
Creating a culture of “presuming competence”
Spot yourself as person of potential first. Look openly out for opportunities to pursue your talents. Please plan on making yourself like Clark Kent and change in phone booth of communication into Superman of intelligent words.
Public education
University of Vermont Medical Center 2018 Communication Expo
Going out to schools
Film screenings and presentations
For further reading:

Kathie Snow “Eliminating the Presumed Incompetence Paradigm” (www.disabilityisnatural.com)

- Providers and consumers
- Service provider is the “answer”
- Create, operate, fund segregated system of services, programs, activities
- Minimal focus on inclusion