



Gent, February 10th 2015,

Dear Mme. / Sir / Professor,

Let me introduce myself briefly: My name is Peter Vermeulen, an educationalist from Belgium with a MSc and a PhD in educational and psychological sciences. I work for the Belgian centre, called Autisme Centraal, a centre for expertise and training in autism spectrum disorders. I have been working in the field of autism for more than 25 years now.

A couple of years ago, I developed, under the supervision of Prof. Uta Frith, a revision of her Weak Central Coherence model of autism, stressing the element of “context” in that hypothesis. My hypothesis is that the common pathway in the prevailing cognitive deficits in autism (Weak Central Coherence, and problems with Theory of Mind and Executive Functions) is Context Blindness. I wrote several articles and a book on the topic. In English:

Vermeulen, P. (2014). Context Blindness in Autism Spectrum Disorder: Not Using the Forest to See the Trees as Trees. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, Published online before print April 11, 2014, doi: 10.1177/1088357614528799.

Vermeulen, P. (2012). *Autism as context blindness*. Overland Park, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

The hypothesis has been received well in the autism field. It has been presented on many conferences all over the world and it has been picked up by the scientific community as well, see for instance:

Baez, S., & Ibanez, A. (2014). The effects of context processing on social cognition impairments in adults with Asperger's syndrome. *Frontiers in neuroscience*, 8.

The concept of “a lack of contextual sensitivity” is a rather new concept, but it has a lot of practical implications. To name only one: the world wide known tool of Social Stories, developed by Carol Gray to help people with autism understand the complexities of the (social) world has been revised by Carol Gray because of the hypothesis of context blindness and the new Social Stories 10.2 are now explicitly “contextualized”.

Although the hypothesis of context blindness has shown to be useful, the application of it in clinical and educational practice is limited because until now there have been no practical tools to assess the cognitive ability of contextual sensitivity outside of scientific labs.

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Mr. János Farkas, after reading my book on context blindness and after meeting me and discussing the concept of context blindness, has developed a tool to assess context sensitivity in people with or without an autism spectrum disorder. The tool has items covering different aspects of context sensitivity in areas such as (visual, auditory, etc.) perception, social cognition, perspective taking, Theory of Mind, communication (both verbal and nonverbal), flexibility, and conceptual development (knowledge).

The items that Mr. János Farkas developed are still in a draft version, but according to me they have the potential of being a valid and reliable assessment tool for a concept that is not only relevant to the autism field (contextual sensitivity also plays a pivotal role in schizophrenia). Of course, the whole assessment tool needs to be evaluated and validated by scientific research. Therefore it would be good, both for scientific purposes (the falsification of the concept of context blindness) and for clinical purposes (there's a lack of useful assessment tools for 'autism specific' cognitive deficits) to do some research on the Context Sensitivity Assessment Tool.

I sincerely hope you will grant Mr. Farkas' request for a scientific support of this tool, because the assessment tool can become a useful aid in our quest for a better understanding of autism and a better quality of life for all those affected by autism.

If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Peter Vermeulen', written in a cursive style.

Peter Vermeulen, PhD  
Senior autism lecturer and consultant

Autisme Centraal