No Teacher Left Behind: Training Teachers to Meet the Challenge of Accessing the General Curriculum for Deafblind Students

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The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have changed educational practice for students with disabilities. All students are now expected to study the general education curriculum—fundamental academic subjects such as English/language arts, math, science, and social studies—and to demonstrate knowledge of the curriculum through extensive testing.

This change for special education students also signifies a transformation for their special education teachers. In order for students with disabilities to participate effectively in the new system, their teachers must learn about the general curriculum content and redesign their educational practices. Traditionally, special education teachers focused primarily on goals and objectives related to skills such as orientation and mobility, Braille reading, use of technology, and activities of daily living. Now, all special education teachers responsible for instruction in a general curriculum core subject area must be highly qualified in that area and be able to demonstrate knowledge and skills beyond specialized learning strategies and therapy.

This article describes how a training program developed by the University of Massachusetts Boston helped teachers of deafblind students at Perkins School for the Blind to learn how to align the curriculum they already use with the Massachusetts general curriculum in order to ensure meaningful participation for their students. It is a program that can be adapted for use in other states to educate teachers who work with students who are deafblind.

Education Reform in Massachusetts

NCLB mandates that all students be measured on their knowledge of the general curriculum, but states can design their own curricula and assessments. In Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 (MERA) requires that all students participate in a standards-based academic curriculum focused on English/language arts, math, social sciences, and science and technology. It also requires that all students pass a rigorous test based on these curriculum frameworks in order to receive a high school diploma. About 40 percent of states have similar student-based accountability measures. Other states hold schools and districts (rather than students) accountable.

In This Issue

No Teacher Left Behind: Training Teachers to Meet the Challenge of Accessing the General Curriculum for Deafblind Students .................. 1
Communication Portfolio: A Tool to Increase the Competence of Communication Partners of Learners Who Are Deafblind .................. 5
Ready for Partnership: Collaboration Between NFADB and State Deaf-Blind Projects .................. 8
Personal Retrospective: Roberta Reid ................. 9
DVD Review: Sensory Perspectives .................. 11
Research Update .................. 12
Communication During Physical Activity: A Review of Strategies .................. 13
For Your Library .................. 14
Conferences and Events .................. 14
In Massachusetts, as in other states, students with substantial disabilities were previously exempted from large-scale assessment programs. With the passage of MERA, Massachusetts created one set of curriculum expectations for all children. Children with disabilities are now held to the same academic curriculum standards and expectations as their typical peers.

Meeting the Challenge

To provide an opportunity for special education teachers to learn about the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, the Center for Social Development and Education (CSDE) at the University of Massachusetts Boston designed a 12-credit graduate certificate professional development program called Charting the Course: Adapting the Curriculum Frameworks for All Learners. CSDE is a research and training institute dedicated to promoting quality education and social development for students at risk for academic and social failure. The certificate program was created by CSDE associates, all of whom are practicing special-education administrators, under the leadership of Gary Siperstein, CSDE Executive Director. It contains six 2-credit modules that address the following topics:

Module 1: Education Reform
Reviews state and federal laws that have led to recent changes in educational practices in the United States. MERA itself is assigned reading material.

Module 2: Special Education Reform
Reviews the history of special education practices, ranging from institutionalization to the right to a free, appropriate education to the right to participate in the general education classroom and curriculum. The book Educating One and All (McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morison, 1997) was a key source for the development of this module.

Modules 3 and 4: Curriculum Frameworks and Adaptations for Students with Disabilities
Describe how to connect curricula currently being used by special education programs with the state curriculum frameworks in English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Module 5: Assessment
Teaches the skills teachers need to determine the types of accommodations that students with disabilities must have in order to participate in the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). It also describes how to use a portfolio assessment format for students who will participate in MCAS through MCAS-Alt, the state alternate assessment model for students who cannot show what they know and can do through standard administration, even with accommodations.

Module 6: Philosophical Steps to Implementation
Pulls together all of the elements teachers need to formulate a personal and professional view of education for students with disabilities in a changing educational environment.
The program was designed to be highly interactive. It focuses on clearly describing current practice and actively planning the best ways to match students’ needs with state curriculum requirements.

Training Teachers at Perkins School for the Blind

Teachers at Perkins School for the Blind were the first group of educators to participate in the training course. Perkins, the oldest private school for the blind in the United States, has been in operation for 175 years. The school provides educational services to students, including day and residential educational programs at the Perkins campus in Watertown, Massachusetts, as well as a variety of state, national, and international outreach programs. The Perkins School for the Blind Deafblind Program serves a wide range of students with varying needs. Many students have other disabilities in addition to deafblindness. The program is internationally known as a leader in the education of deafblind children. Perkins’ goal is to offer the best education possible for each learner, and the school prides itself on the quality of its programs and the professional integrity of its faculty.

Twenty-six teachers and other staff members from Perkins participated. They represented the full range of Perkins programs: Deafblind (serving students ages 3–22), Lower School (ages 5–14), Secondary Services (ages 14–22), and Outreach (to individuals of all ages who are served within the community). Six staff members from the Deafblind Program participated—two administrators and four teachers.

Training sessions were based on the course modules from Charting the Course: Adapting the Curriculum Frameworks for All Learners and were offered over the course of one school year. Each began with a full-day Saturday session and were followed by a series of after-school meetings. This schedule provided a concentrated introduction to each topic and ample time between sessions to apply new information.

Each module followed a consistent pattern. At the beginning, participants discussed their knowledge about the topic of the module for that session, created a list of questions about things that perplexed them, and expressed their frustration and concern about the changes they and their students faced. Each module concluded with a project that teachers could use right away to help them begin to transform their current practices to match the content and focus of education reform.

In Modules 1 and 2, participants examined the critical foundation elements of education reform—MERA, IDEA, and the history of recent changes in special education—and explored the impact of each element on current educational practices.

When working on Modules 3 and 4, they examined the curricula already used by each Perkins program and compared them with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. The philosophy of the Deafblind Program is to offer an individualized curriculum based on the needs of each child. Instructional content is developed through the use of several different types of curricula. Most students begin with a unit-based curriculum organized around themes such as readiness skills for reading and math (matching, sorting, sequencing); social skills, gross and fine motor skills, and community experience; early science concepts; and music, art, and multisensory concepts. Students move from this to a functional academic, academic, or vocational curriculum. The process of aligning existing curricula with the state curriculum frameworks was possible once the outcomes of each of these curricula were described. Using a model developed by Heidi Hayes Jacobs (1997), the participants mapped their current curricula onto the state frameworks. As a result, they were able to review the standards and make connections to the curriculum they used everyday in their classroom. They were happy to find that they were already teaching many of the curriculum framework standards.

During Module 5, participants linked the state’s assessment program to the individualized education program (IEP) format and to the way student performance data was already being collected at Perkins. The assessment model of McTighe and Wiggins (1999) and the guidance of Thurlow, Elliott, and Yssledyke (1998) about the participation of students with disabilities were essential resources for this section.

Outcomes

Although the curriculum program officially lasted only one year, it resulted in far-reaching and unanticipated outcomes that have transformed the Perkins community.

Curriculum and Assessment

The program provided structured, extended time to explore and become familiar with the state curriculum frameworks. The practical nature of the modules inspired teachers to begin a number of new projects. For example, one teacher selected poems
for early literacy learning from the state’s English/language arts curriculum framework and adapted several short poems to meet the language-level needs of her students.

Faculty members who participated in the program also created tools to help them manage the work of aligning their curricula with the state standards for English/language arts, math, science, and history. These included checklists used to identify standards from the state curriculum that were directly related to outcomes in curricula already used at Perkins. They also created a database of the state standards to make it easier to locate specific standards in the curriculum frameworks. This is much more efficient than reading through the curriculum frameworks each time a teacher needs to make decisions about instructional content for a specific student.

Increased knowledge of the general curriculum helped teachers move beyond apprehension about the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) to analyze the way participation in the standard MCAS was affected by a student’s disability. They identified test items that require visual or auditory experiences that deafblind students cannot access. They devised ways in which test items could be adapted or interpreted without changing the intent of the test.

As they became comfortable with MCAS-Alt, the state alternate assessment model, they realized that the portfolio alternate assessment format could use data already routinely gathered for progress reports. They felt more in control of the teaching-assessment process and more confident that they—and their students—could participate meaningfully.

Initially seen as distinct elements, curriculum and assessment are now viewed as connected components of an instructional cycle in which student learning is continually assessed. The student is at the center of this cycle, and the goal is to always help them access grade-level curriculum at their individual instructional level. The curriculum frameworks, the IEP, and the school curriculum provide important information that guides the shape of each student’s program. The information gathered through MCAS and classroom assessment documents student progress and refines the focus and direction of each student’s educational program. What began as a cumbersome process has become second nature. As a result, higher-level academic content is being offered for all students. Also, the efforts and accomplishments of the Perkins community were acknowledged by the Massachusetts Department of Education in commendations for the match between their instructional program and the curriculum frameworks.

Professional Relationships and Development

Once teachers felt confident of their abilities to master the elements of education reform, they began to feel more comfortable sharing what they knew. A number of teachers became experts on the curriculum frameworks and the assessment process and now provide assistance and support to Perkins faculty members who did not attend the training and to colleagues at other schools. At least two participants went on to become instructors for the certificate course. Professional connections that formed between staff members during the program have had a significant impact on the Perkins community. Deafblind Program teachers feel more connected with each other, and teachers and administrators more easily turn to one another for help to solve problems or discuss program changes.

Participation in the program also changed the way professional development activities are planned and implemented at Perkins. Previous activities were typically designed to meet the needs of individual program groups by focusing on their instructional strategies and specific curricular issues. Faculty members from different programs rarely interacted, and there was very little discussion of a general curriculum. This was the first time that administrators and faculty from all programs participated in one shared activity. It was so successful that a process for continuing to provide cross-program professional development opportunities was established.

Outreach

The expertise of Perkins faculty in applying elements of education reform to students with significant disabilities has been acknowledged by other schools and programs as demonstrated by the following:

- Requests to assist other special education schools in Massachusetts with their use of the curriculum frameworks;
- Requests to assist other schools along the East Coast to meet the goal of access to the general curriculum for all students;
- Invitations to present at statewide conferences.

Through the support of the Hilton/Perkins International Program, the model of curriculum access used at Perkins has also been shared with and successfully used by schools in other countries, including Russia, Argentina, Brazil, England, and Africa.
Long-Lasting Benefits

Participation in the certificate program has transformed the Deafblind Program at Perkins School for the Blind from a program with a very good specialized curriculum to one that has embraced the general curriculum in a way that is competitive with strong local school districts. It led to the establishment of important connections, both within Perkins and with other institutions. The bond forged between Perkins and the University of Massachusetts Boston, which developed the training program, continues. We are all richer for these connections and continue to work with each other to refine best practices for all students at Perkins and at other schools.

Best of all, special education teachers at Perkins discovered productive relationships between standards-based curricula and specially designed instructional methods for students with substantial disabilities. Teachers and students gained access to the general curriculum and are now able to demonstrate what they know and can do. The school is stronger for meeting the challenge.

The authors gave a presentation about this program at the National Staff Development Council 34th Annual Conference, Boston, MA, December 7–11, 2002. The conference paper is available through ERIC (Byrnes & Majors, 2002) or may be obtained by contacting DB-LINK: 800-438-9376, 800-854-7013 TTY, dblink@tr.wou.edu.

References


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Communication Portfolio: A Tool to Increase the Competence of Communication Partners of Learners Who Are Deafblind

Every person who interacts with a person who is deafblind is a communication partner. Competent communication partners are essential for the development of a deafblind person’s ability to communicate and build meaningful relationships (Miles & Riggio, 1999; Nafstad & Rodbroe, 1999). Communication portfolios that give in-depth information about a deafblind individual’s abilities, needs, and most effective methods of communication can greatly support this partnership.

Between 1999 and 2003, communication portfolios were used as part of a project in Massachusetts designed to provide inexperienced educational teams with the knowledge and skills needed to develop communication strategies with deafblind students. The project combined the resources and expertise of the New England Center Deafblind Project and the Massachusetts Department of Education. Together they collaborated with educational teams at six school districts to develop communication portfolios for seven learners who are deafblind. The learners ranged in age from 4 to 19 and were being educated in a variety of programs—four were in inclusive settings, two were in programs for students with severe/multiple disabilities, and one was at a school for the deaf. Family members were actively involved on each team and were the primary sources of information about their children.

The project used communication portfolios and the process of portfolio development to teach families, teachers, and other educational personnel effective communication and educational strategies for deafblind students and to inspire them to view each learner as an individual with unique needs and abil-
Portfolios

A communication portfolio consists of a combination of photographs, videos, and text designed to share information among a learner’s educational team members, which includes his or her family and other communication partners. The portfolio gives a holistic view of a learner—communication abilities, learning style, family, culture, cognitive style, and vision and hearing abilities—while providing a visual display of the learner’s abilities across all environments (school, home, and community). It illustrates his or her interests, effective interactive strategies to enhance communication, and techniques for accessing and commenting on people, events, and things in the environment as topics of conversation. Portfolios help a learner tell all about him- or herself in a user-friendly way. For example, a portfolio cover might have a picture of the learner and the words, “Hi, I’m Michael! I love to be with people. Touch my hand so that I know you are there. Let’s read this book to learn about me. Tell me who you are.” Portfolios also include family members’ pictures and their perceptions of their children’s abilities.

The portfolio is written in the words a learner might use if he or she were speaking to the reader. For example, in one of the portfolios there is a photograph of a student standing at his object calendar with his teacher. The teacher is showing him an object that represents his next activity while demonstrating the sign for the activity at the same time. The caption says, “Please use objects and let me feel your signs. I will put my hands on top of yours to feel the signs.”

Portfolios should be tools that evolve and are continually updated with new photographs, videos, and text. It is important to include dates with the photographs and videos because they help to document a learner’s progress. Families are primarily responsible for ensuring that the portfolios are updated and shared with new communication partners and teams. To create portfolios for each of the seven learners involved in this project, photographs and videos were taken in a variety of environments—home, school, and the community. Each portfolio included a 15 to 20 minute video.

Hi, my name is Austin. I am seven years old and I live with my family in Massachusetts. I like people and being with my friends. This picture book is about me and how I learn. Let’s get going there is a lot to tell.

This picture is of Arthur and me. Can you tell by my face that I am excited to see him? We have a special way of saying hello. Arthur makes me laugh. He knows how to play with me and make learning fun.

This is my mom. She is helping me too. I hope you like my book and getting to know about me. I want to know about you.
Project Outcomes

The project greatly benefited families, improved socialization for the children, and increased knowledge about deafblindness for the educators.

Family Benefits

Establishing trust between the professional team members and the families of the children was the heart and soul of this project. It proved to be the key to developing relationships and communication with learners who are deafblind and with their family members. Because one of the staff members worked on the project full-time, there was the luxury of frequent contact with the families in their homes and at their children’s schools at least once a month, as well as weekly contact by phone, e-mail, or fax.

We found that the process of developing the portfolios positively affected families in a number of ways. Parents’ expectations of what their children were able to achieve increased, as did their expectations for better educational programs. They gained confidence to advocate for quality personnel and programs. Collaborative meetings with school personnel occurred more often and IEPs improved as a result of parent advocacy. At the end of the project, parents expressed more competence and confidence in working with school personnel. In some cases, extended family members gained a better understanding of the learner. For example, one learner shared his portfolio with his grandmother after it was translated into Spanish.

Increased Opportunities for Socialization

All families want their children to have friends, and communication is the key to developing social relationships. During this project, friendships developed through increased interactions when portfolios were shared with classmates. They helped classmates learn strategies to communicate and be “in touch” with their deafblind peers in an interactive way. Classmates learned about:

- the importance of interacting in ways that are meaningful to a deafblind person, such as using hand-under-hand positioning when communicating or exploring materials;
- the importance of anticipation, of letting a deafblind person know in advance what will happen next (for example, letting a student who is in a wheelchair know when his wheelchair is going to be moved);
- the use of devices or systems that enhance interactive communication, such as FM systems, voice output devices, and object communication.

One child’s mother helped her son share stories about his home and community experiences with his classmates using a switch-activated voice output device. A classmate brought in a homework assignment that she had adapted on her own for her classmate who was deafblind to touch and feel so that he could understand the assignment better. A future teacher in the making!

Educating Teachers and Other Team Members

Although all of the students’ teachers and other team members worked hard and were highly committed professionals, we discovered that commonly accepted educational practices and strategies in the field of deafblindness were not being used. The project provided many opportunities for team members to learn about educational practices for learners who are deafblind and to help them come to a mutual understanding of their students. Throughout the course of the project, they gained knowledge about strategies such as natural learning, how to have conversations, effective interactive strategies, and environmental adaptations.

Natural learning. Teams members developed an appreciation of how children who are deafblind are deprived of natural or incidental learning experiences, and they learned the importance of involving the children in the entire process of simple activities such as having a snack—preparing the food, setting the table, eating, and cleaning up. This type of process learning using real life experiences is critical for communication and concept development. If a child is not involved throughout the entire process of an activity, the world seems unpredictable, confusing, and the child may develop inaccurate concepts.

Conversations. Portfolios use a learner’s own pictures and words to promote conversations. Through the use of portfolios, team members learned how to have conversations with learners who are deafblind either with or without words. They learned about the importance of turn-taking when communicating with learners who are deafblind, how to give them opportunities to initiate conversations, and how to respond meaningfully to their communication efforts.

Effective interaction strategies. Strategies that promote interactive communication are essential. Team members learned about staying close to the learner in order to maintain touch and visual contact and the importance of positioning their hands under rather than over a learner’s hands for communication and exploration of the environment.
Environmental adaptations. Teams learned about simple environmental adaptations that promote communication, such as good lighting, use of a white board and black marker, and large print. They also gained knowledge of specific communication tools used by their students such as slant boards, calendar systems, and sequence boards (pictures or objects representing how an activity is organized).

Because portfolios are visual documents, they can be referred to often. Team members didn’t have to rely on their memories of what they learned in a training session. They always had the portfolio to remind them of a student’s unique needs and the educational and communication strategies to meet them.

Other Benefits

We also found that the use of portfolios reduced the amount of time it took a new team or new communication partner to get to know a deafblind learner. During spring break, two of the students transitioned to new programs. By using the students’ portfolios, new team members were able to feel comfortable and competent interacting with the students and were able to implement their educational programs within two weeks.

Unexpectedly, the portfolios were also used as assessment tools detailing the accomplishments and abilities of the learners. All of the teams used the portfolios to assist them in meeting the requirements of state mandated alternate assessments. The portfolios served as visual support during the creation of new IEP goals and objectives. For example, one of the learner’s portfolios included a video segment that showed him learning how to identify school landmarks and travel from one classroom to another by trailing a locker wall while in his wheelchair. This visual representation had a strong impact on his IEP team. It brought the team to a mutual understanding of his abilities and how he learns and made it possible for them to quickly agree upon goals related to orientation and mobility.

Conclusion

Technical assistance providers often discover that their recommendations are forgotten, misunderstood, or not implemented consistently. With reminders in the communication portfolios via pictures, videos, and words, team members implemented new practices and became more effective communication partners. Portfolios helped families, other team members, and peers share a common view of each deafblind learner’s abilities.

The project described in this article was funded by a Matchmaker Grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, awarded to the New England Center Deafblind Project and to the Massachusetts Department of Education. Products developed as a result of the project include a 30-minute compilation videotape, which has already been completed, and a manual that will be available this spring. For more information: http://www.necedbp.org.

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Ready for Partnership: Collaboration Between NFADB and State Deaf-Blind Projects

Reported by Peggy Malloy

Last October at the annual project director’s meeting for people who work on Department of Education-funded projects for children and young adults who are deaf-blind, five representatives from the National Family Association for Deaf-Blind (NFADB) participated in a plenary session panel discussion about ways that NFADB and the state deaf-blind projects can work together. The discussion was moderated by John Reiman, Director of DB-LINK, and included brief presentations by each of the NFADB representatives and questions from the audience. The panelists spoke enthusiastically about establishing strong connections between NFADB and the state projects in order achieve a common goal—to help families of children who are deaf-blind. They described NFADB’s structure and services and proposed suggestions for increased collaboration.

The purpose of NFADB is to bring families together to give them an opportunity to share ideas and expe-
riences, to work together on common goals, and to promote communication and interaction between parents and other family members of individuals who are deaf-blind. One of the principal ways this is achieved is through the organization’s system of regional directors. There are regional directors (RDs) in 10 regions throughout the United States, with each region consisting of four to six states. The RDs serve as liaisons between parents in their areas and organizations and agencies involved in deaf-blindness. Each of the panelists stressed that one of the best ways that state projects can begin to increase collaboration with NFADB is to connect with the regional director for their state. The RDs can assist the state projects in their work with parents by

- giving input about the needs of parents and families;
- sharing information about project activities with parents in their regions;
- helping to plan social and training events for parents;
- providing support for family specialists;
- participating in activities to raise awareness of deaf-blindness.

The NFADB leaders also expressed a willingness to assist state projects in letting others know the value of the work they do and in helping to document the impact of that work from the perspective of families. In return, state projects can assist NFADB with outreach efforts by letting parents in their states know about NFADB. In addition to its system of regional directors, NFADB also has a central office housed at Helen Keller National Center, a Web site, a LISTSERV®, and a newsletter (News from Advocates for Deaf-Blind). All members of the NFADB board and the regional directors are parents of deaf-blind children themselves as well as parent leaders and advocates.

NFADB President Sheri Stanger recommended that the projects include their state’s regional director on their advisory boards. She said that it is important to have a parent’s voice on advisory boards and that participation also provides an opportunity for the regional directors to stay aware of state project plans and activities. They can then share that knowledge with parents in their regions. Sheri concluded the presentation by encouraging projects that have not previously worked with NFADB to consider doing so now. She said, “When we know what your project’s needs are and you know what our needs are, we can both provide better services for families.”

The NFADB panelists were Sheri Stanger (President), Linda Syler (Treasurer), Corry Hill (Region 8 Director), Cynthia Jackson-Glenn (Region 5 Director), Elisa Sanchez Wilkinson (Region 6 Director).

Historically in Australia, as in the USA, many children who had combined vision and hearing loss were assumed to be profoundly intellectually disabled. They were said to be ineducable and were thought to have the bleakest of futures. Little or no assistance was available to their parents, and the children were often institutionalized. Considerable heartbreak and anguish were the result. In Australia, Roberta Reid was instrumental in changing public and professional perspectives on the potential of deafblind children.

Her Early Life and Times

Roberta Sinclair Reid was born in 1884 at the tiny settlement of Eskbank in the State of New South Wales. Her father, Robert Reid, was manager of a local sawmill. It has been suggested that she was named Roberta after her father in “a burst of Scottish caution lest he failed to produce a son” (Thompson, 1990, p. 15). Robert Reid, by the standards of his day, was an educated man, and he recognized early the consequences of an absence of schooling in Eskbank for his growing family. At some time in the late 1880s, he moved with his wife and family to Sydney, where he found a position with the Sydney Evening News as a typesetter. Roberta, or “Berta” as she became known, attended the tiny local school and completed the primary curriculum in three years (less than half the normal time). She then attended Sydney Girl’s High School, located in downtown Sydney. In 1900 (a year in which bubonic plague broke out in Sydney) she passed her Senior Level and won a scholarship to attend the University of Sydney.

Berta graduated with a B.A. in 1904 and sought a teaching position at the New South Wales Institution for the Deaf, Dumb, and Blind, located on the edge of the University of Sydney campus. At the age of 20, without having had specific training in the education of blind children, she found herself in charge of the “Blind School,” as it was then known, and its 13 pupils. She worked hard and learned quickly.
A Girl Called Alice

Beginning in February 1908, Berta began teaching a seven-year-old deafblind girl named Alice Betteridge. Alice was the subject of an article appearing in the Spring 2001 issue of Deaf-Blind Perspectives. No other child like Alice had ever been educated in Australia when the Institute agreed to try and break through her “impenetrable walls of darkness and silence” (Thompson, 1990, p. 56).

There were signs that Alice could recognize differences in her environment, small indications that she was intelligent. She would often, for example, fall to her knees and scrabble in the grass or sand in the play area, seeming obviously perplexed, trying to extract meaning from the tactile differences. To capitalize on this and teach Alice to communicate, Berta had to make her understand that objects had names. She experimented with one object after another. She would place an object in Alice’s hands and then fingerspell the word to her. She hoped that one of the objects would generate a spark of recognition, interest, or comprehension. Week after week nothing was successful. Typically, Alice would be given an object like a doll. She would grasp it, finger it, and then drop it. This happened repeatedly.

Readers familiar with the Helen Keller story will recall that the major breakthrough in her education occurred when her teacher ran water over Helen’s hands. With Berta and Alice, the first breakthrough occurred when Alice was given a shoe that had been presented to her many times before. Repetition had linked the fingerspelled letter pattern and the object. This time, Alice tapped the fingerspelled letters onto her own hand, then reached to touch the shoe. The all-important connection between a fingerspelled word and an object had been made. In overcoming the first and greatest hurdle, Berta had opened a slight crack of light in the dense curtain enclosing the child. Fortunately, Alice’s natural intelligence, together with her longing to discover and make sense of the world that surrounded her, immediately began to shape her education and her life. Touching the shoe and making the connection was perhaps the most important moment in Alice’s life, and possibly in Berta’s too. They had broken through. Alice had discovered an incredibly important aspect of language—things have names.

Until that time no one had any proof that Alice might be intelligent, but it soon became evident that she was very bright. Her access to a language system released many years of pent-up curiosity. In a few short months she knew 200 nouns and several verbs, including “run,” “jump,” and “laugh,” and could use them in sentences. Next Berta introduced Alice to Braille so that she could begin to read. Alice speedily mastered the skill and began to read her way through the school library.

Berta, Alice, and Others

During the period of Alice’s formal education, Berta also developed in professional competence. Her family hoped that she would eventually marry, but she suffered a “great disappointment” when a close male friend, who had enlisted in the military forces, was killed in the Boer War. Her work at the Institute left her with little time for a social life.

It is not possible to know what motivated Berta. Possibly it was love of a challenge. It is likely, however, that no other teacher of a deafblind child working under such conditions has ever equaled Roberta’s achievements with Alice Betteridge. Her achievement lies not only in having engineered the breakthrough to Alice, but also in persevering with Alice’s education to the point where Alice was considered the best-educated girl in the school. This together with the responsibilities of being headmistress of the school suggests a most remarkable mind and character.

In 1951, Berta received the highly prestigious Medal of the British Empire for her contributions to the education of children with sensory impairments. An annual award of the Roberta Reid Prize at the “Blind School” also commemorated her contribution to this remarkable story of 44 years of service. The Royal Institute named one of its major educational programs the Roberta Reid Centre, and in 1990 the Institute named its special school for children with multisensory disabilities the Alice Betteridge School. Fitting tributes to remarkable people.

Reid’s Educational Philosophy and Contributions

Reid’s educational philosophy for educating blind or deafblind children cannot be traced to her formal training as a teacher. At that time, no programs existed that taught teachers how to work with blind students (Thompson, 1990). Valerie Thompson’s biography of Alice Betteridge provides insight into Berta’s teaching philosophy and methods. For example, few period educators would have placed such great philosophical emphasis on the needs of the children and their parents, while also delivering the vision of the earliest French schools for the blind as places where all were welcome and should receive the same education, love, and attention as other children.
Having no specialized teacher training meant devising her own methods, her own ideas, and inventing her own aids. Both the real world and functional pragmatism were Berta’s focus. She recognized that her “first task [with Alice] was to win her trust and affection” (Geason, 1999, p. 100). Her style was simple and direct—the child’s remaining senses of touch and smell were seen as important. Berta intuitively quested for a “key” to make a link in Alice’s mind between an object recognized by touch and a fingerspelled alphabet pattern. When the right key was tried in the right lock, the door blocking opportunity opened.

**Roberta Reid’s Legacy**

The Royal Institute currently has 55 children with deafblindness enrolled in its several programs. The Alice Betteridge School (ABS) is, in 2004, a leading special school for children (aged 3–18) who have a sensory disability, as well as in some instances an intellectual or a physical disability. The school is recognized nationally and internationally for the excellence of its cross-disciplinary curriculum and for the caliber of its staff. At the very core of today’s educational programs for students with deafblindness are embedded the fundamental principles developed and practiced by Roberta Reid in the early years of the last century. These have to do with the establishment of an enduring emotional relationship between the student, the family, and the teacher, involving frequent reciprocal interactions around activities that are challenging to the child. The effect of the interactions is to strengthen bonds, enhance motivation, increase the frequency of responses, produce mutual adaptations in behavior, and thereby improve teacher and family effectiveness.

Those who visit the Alice Betteridge School at North Rocks near Sydney are invariably impressed with what they see and hear. Its excellence is a fitting tribute to the memory of a truly remarkable Australian and her equally remarkable teacher.

**References**


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**DVD Review: Sensory Perspectives**

Teresa Coonts, Coordinator  
Nebraska Deaf-Blind Project

**P**opcorn and a DVD!!!! It is sometimes difficult to find the time to preview educational DVDs, but it can be an enjoyable and rewarding experience (especially when linked to popcorn). I recently purchased the *Sensory Perspectives* DVD set developed by the SKI-HI Institute at Utah State University in 2003, and I was amazed by the quality of this wonderful tool. It provides comprehensive, current information regarding vision, hearing, and deaf-blindness.

Disk 1 focuses on vision and hearing loss. The vision section includes an introduction to vision and information about acuity loss, field loss, and conditions that may cause combined field and acuity loss, contrast sensitivity, processing problems, and oculomotor problems. It also includes vision loss simulations and a vision quiz. The hearing section consists of an introduction to hearing, hearing loss information, hearing loss simulations, environmental issues, and a hearing quiz. Disk 2 addresses combined vision and hearing loss, including an introduction to deafblindness and to deafblindness and learning, communication, and social and emotional development. Also included are simulated examples that allow the user to combine specific types of vision and hearing losses and a quiz.

I have found the DVD set very easy to use with my laptop when providing on-site technical assistance to local school teams. It is also easy to use when conducting a presentation or workshop for larger groups of educators. In order to play the DVDs on a computer, you need a DVD-ROM drive and DVD software such as Windows Media. The DVD menus are easy to navigate using a mouse or arrow keys to move from one selection to another. It is fast and easy to pull various sections together. You do not have to watch the entire DVD; just select the sections and topics that you need. Written instructions are provided on the inside cover. One word of caution: if you are presenting to a large group and using this DVD program, you will need to have good computer speakers or a connection to the local sound field system. If using it with a small group, make sure that your computer sound output is turned to the highest volume.

There is an option to view the DVD with Spanish and with closed captioning (with a captioning decoder box or a television with a closed captioning
The cost is only $65, and it can be purchased through HOPE, Inc. It is very cost effective for the amount of information provided.

Educators and service providers with whom I have worked in Nebraska have been thrilled with the quality of the DVD. Family members have also reacted positively. It allows them to view the experience of normal vision and hearing in a variety of environments (e.g., classroom, playground) and then compare that to a simulated experience of combined vision and hearing loss in the same environments.

So, after reviewing this DVD (and eating some popcorn), I encourage you to get this exciting resource for your library or for use with local educational teams and when providing technical assistance to families.

For additional information, contact:
HOPE Publishing, Inc.
1856 North 1200 East
North Logan, Utah 84321
Phone: 435-245-2888
E-mail: hope@hopepubl.com
Web: www.hopepubl.com

Research Update
Peggy Malloy

This issue highlights two agencies involved in research activities and several new publications.

Agencies
National Center on Low-Incidence Disabilities
The National Center on Low-Incidence Disabilities (NCLID) held their second annual research conference in Denver, CO, on October 2-4, 2003. The conference focused on improving education for all learners, with presentations on research, universal design, and the implications of distance technologies. NCLID is developing a database of ongoing research in low-incidence disabilities and working to identify gaps in current knowledge in order to sponsor research in those areas.
Web: http://www.NCLID.unco.edu
Phone: 800-395-2693 (voice/TTY)

Sense
Sense, an organization for deaf-blind people in the United Kingdom, has information on its Web site about Sense research projects. The agency’s research and development department co-ordinates a wide range of research projects within Sense and also works in partnership on research activities with other organizations. The Web site provides: information about current research projects at regional, national, and international levels; an extensive list of completed research projects; and the full text of a selection of papers delivered at national and international conferences by Sense staff.
Web: http://www.sense.org.uk/research/index.cfm

Publications

Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 28(3), Fall 2003.

This issue is devoted to a special series, “Perspectives on Defining Scientifically Based Research.” Featured articles include:

- “Scientifically Based Research in Education and Students with Low Incidence Disabilities” by Fred Spooner and Diane M. Browder
- “Scientifically Based Research and Evidence-Based Education: A Federal Policy Context” by Anne Smith
- “‘Scientifically Based Research’ and Qualitative Inquiry” by Michael F. Giangreco and Steven Taylor
- “‘A Perspective on Single/Within Subject Research Methods and ‘Scientifically Based Research’” by John McDonnell and Rob O’Neill
- “Applying Research to Practice: The More Pervasive Problem?” by Martha E. Snell
- “The Relationship of Inquiry to Public Policy” by Wayne Sailor and Matthew Stowe

Available on the Web:


This study sought to replicate the results of a previous study that examined the effects of a training program designed to improve the quality of in-
interactions between deaf-blind children and their educators. The program trained educators to respond more adequately to deaf-blind children’s interactive behaviors. This present study was expanded to train educators to improve their responses to deaf-blind children’s independent behaviors as well as interactive behaviors and it included a follow-up phase.

If you have information about a research topic that you would like to include in this column, contact:

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Communication During Physical Activity: A Review of Strategies
Dr. Lauren Lieberman
SUNY Brockport Department of Physical Education
Katrina Arndt
Syracuse University

Over two summers we observed and interviewed youth who are deafblind at a one-week developmental sports camp. The youth used a variety of communication methods including tactile sign, tracking, and signing at close proximity. We discovered that when considering how to best communicate during sports activities, it is important to consider whether an activity is discrete or continuous. This is a new way of categorizing activities.

Discrete activities are those that include natural breaks that provide opportunities for communication. Examples include canoeing, bowling, long jump, and gymnastics. Communication—corrective feedback about a particular movement or skill sequence, questions, comments, or praise—takes place naturally during these activities.

Continuous activities, on the other hand, are more challenging for communication. Swimming, rock-climbing, tandem biking, and running all require deliberate attention to when and how communication will occur before engaging in the activity.

Our research has taught us that planning breaks provides a way to structure time for communication during these activities and that not explicitly planning breaks can result in frustrating scenarios in which little communication is possible.

We believe this emerging distinction between discrete and continuous activity has potentially far-reaching implications. For example, it is possible that activities of daily living could be similarly categorized, helping people who are deafblind and their communication partners to effectively plan communication breaks for activities identified as continuous.

For more information or to share your thoughts about using these methods of categorizing activities, contact Dr. Lieberman at llieberm@brockport.edu.
Communication Matrix: Especially for Parents

A parent friendly version of the Communication Matrix, a communication skill assessment tool for individuals operating at the earliest stages of communication, is now available in print and online. Using the online version (http://www.communicationmatrix.org), the user is able to enter data on a child and print out a profile and a list of communicative behaviors and intents. This is a free service designed especially for parents but available to anyone. A print version is also available. The Communication Matrix was first published in 1990 and was revised in 1996. It was designed primarily for speech-language pathologists and educators to use to document the communication skills of children who have severe or multiple disabilities, including children with sensory, motor, and cognitive impairments. It is appropriate for individuals of all ages, including adults, who are at the earliest stages of communication. It is not suitable for individuals who already use some form of language meaningfully and fluently. The parent and professional versions are available for purchase from Design To Learn. Web: http://www.designtolearn.com. Phone: 888-909-4030. E-mail: design@ohsu.edu.

HomeTalk: A Family Assessment of Children who are Deafblind
Bringing It All Back Home Project, 2003.


Using Tactile Strategies With Students Who Are Blind and Have Severe Disabilities

This article describes specific tactile strategies to support the instruction of students who have severe and multiple disabilities and who do not learn visually. It describes tactile modeling, tactile mutual attention, characteristics of tactile learning, how to use tactile information to represent specific concepts, the importance of considering a student's degree of sensitivity to touch, and the need for a team approach to teaching. More information on this topic is available at the Project SALUTE Web site: http://www.projectsalute.net.

Communicating Research to Practice and Practice to Research: From Theoretical Contributions to Therapeutic Interventions

This is the text of a plenary session from the 2003 Deafblind International World Conference. Dr. Jude Nicholas from the Resource Center for the Deafblind in Norway, discussed ways to approach research in the field of deafblindness and how to link clinical research and practice. His talk focused primarily on what current cognitive neuroscience can tell us about how sensory deprivation influences brain function, particularly as it relates to the concept of neuroplasticity. For a copy of this paper contact DB-LINK. Phone: 800-438-9376. TTY: 800-854-7013. E-mail: dblink@tr.wou.edu.

Conferences and Events

The following is a list of some upcoming conferences and other events for the fall and summer of 2004. For more extensive listings see Conferences/Trainings on the DB-LINK Web site (http://www.dblink.org) or call DB-LINK. Phone: 800-438-9376. TTY: 800-854-7013.

Tangible Symbol Systems Online Learning Opportunity
Summer 2004

Tangible symbols are an alternative means of communicating, using concrete rather than abstract symbols, for individuals who do not speak. Many individuals who are unable to understand abstract symbols are able to use tangible symbols to communicate. This graduate credit course provides instruction on all aspects of teaching an individual to use
tangible symbols and addresses the theoretical basis and research related to this approach. Contact: Carolyn Mills. Phone: 888-909-4030. E-mail: tangible@ohsu.edu. Web: http://www.designtolearn.com/pages/tsonline.html.

✓ Helen Keller National Center National Training Team (NTT) Fall and Summer Seminars

June 14-18 Employment: The Ultimate Goal
September 13-17 Enhancing Services for Older Adults with Vision and Hearing Loss
October 18-22 Imagine the Possibilities: Person Centered Approach to Habilitation
November 15-19 Expanding the Arena: The Magic of Technology


✓ Arkansas Project for Children with Deafblindness Summer Workshop on Severe Disabilities, Including Deafblindness

June 23-25, 2004, Little Rock, AR
This workshop will provide participants with basic knowledge to effectively work with children who have combined hearing and vision loss. Topics include creating reactive environments, concept development, communication, orientation and mobility, parents’ rights under IDEA, behavior, and early intervention. Contact: Lou Kirkpatrick. Phone: 501-682-4222. E-mail: lkirkpatrick@arkedu.k12.ar.us.

✓ Boston College Summer Institute on Deafblindness

June 27-July 1, 2004, Boston, MA
This program is designed to provide participants with the practical knowledge and skills needed to effectively work with students who are deafblind. Coursework will focus on evidence-based practices to plan and implement effective educational programs. Contact: Kristen Layton. Phone 617-552-6245. E-mail: Kristen.Layton@bc.edu.

✓ Creating A Future: Meeting the Secondary Transition Needs of Learners with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss (2004 Summer Institute)

June 28-30, 2004, Breckenridge, CO
This program will address transition to adult life planning for all ages, but specifically for children and youth who are in middle and high school. It is designed for parents and educational service providers who work with children who are deaf-blind and is sponsored by the Colorado Services to Children with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss and the Colorado Chapter of AER. The featured speaker is Dave Wiley, a secondary transition expert from the Texas School for the Blind. Contact: Tanni Anthony. Phone: 303-866-6681. E-mail: anthony_t@cde.state.co.us.

✓ Washington State Combined Summer Institute on Special Education

July 12-16, 2004, Yakima, WA
The purpose of this institute is to provide educators, paraeducators, interpreters, related service providers, administrators, and families of children with autism, hearing impairments/deafness, visual impairments and blindness, or significant disabilities from ages birth through 21 years with updated information on education strategies, assessment and intervention, support, research, and networking. The content includes a strand on students with significant disabilities, including deaf-blindness. Contact: April Wright. Phone: 360-480-6637. E-mail: aprilwright70@earthlink.net. Web: http://www.ncesd.org/csi.

✓ Nebraska Deaf-Blind Summer Institute

July 19-23, 2004, Lincoln, NE
This summer institute for parents, educators, and others who work with deaf-blind children includes the following sessions: Assistive Tech World; Functional Hearing-Assessment and Instruction; and Communication, Literacy, and the Language of the Hands. Contact: Teresa Coonts. Phone: 402-595-1810. E-mail: tcoonts@esu3.org.

✓ Nebraska Family Workshop: Communication and the Language of the Hands for Children with Dual Sensory Impairments or Deaf-Blindness

July 24, 2004, Lincoln, NE
This ½-day workshop for families in Nebraska will be presented by Barbara Miles and is designed to introduce parents to strategies to help their children develop communication. Contact: Teresa Coonts. Phone: 402-595-1810. E-mail: tcoonts@esu3.org.
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