

Ensuring Access to Highly Qualified Interveners and Teachers: Establishing Intervener and Teacher Specialized Professional Associations in Council for Exceptional Children

Alana M. Zambone and Linda Alsop

The need for highly qualified educators and interveners to serve students with deafblindness is indisputable (Alsop, Killoran, Robinson, Durkel, & Prouty, 2004; Zambone & Engleman, 2007). This brief article describes the process and current status of establishing national competencies and a national credential for deafblind interveners and teachers serving children and youth with deafblindness.

Since the 1970s, efforts have been underway in various states to establish the role of interveners (Alsop, Blaha & Kloos, 2000). In 2002, the National Intervener Task Force held its first meeting. By 2004, they had developed and validated the National Intervener Competencies. These competencies have been used to develop training programs and are the core of the competencies for interveners approved by CEC.

Similar efforts have been made on behalf of teachers. University programs, typically with support from the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education, have been preparing teachers to serve children and youth with deafblindness for nearly 50 years. Teacher competencies were first published in 1997 (Bruce, 2007; McLetchie & Riggio, 1997) and have continued to be developed and refined by Zambone, Bove, Davidson and others providing teacher training in this area. Still there are few states that offer teacher licensure in deafblindness (Note 1).

Standards and credentials enable accountability and provide a basis for ensuring excellence (Easterbrook & Putney, 2008). To this end, the National Intervener Task Force and the National Personnel Preparation Consortium in Deaf-Blindness worked with the International Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) to present intervener and teacher competencies for adoption as national standards. CEC provides the standards and guidance that are at the heart of teacher education program accreditation and state teacher licensure. Specifically, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) adopts CEC's standards for the knowledge and skills needed by special education teachers and paraprofessionals. At the same time, the Interstate New Teacher

Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) and CEC formed a partnership. INTASC members establish state teacher licensing standards, program approval, and professional development programs.

The relationship between CEC, INTASC, and NCATE has led to CEC providing the framework for teacher preparation, teacher competency and licensing standards, and personnel preparation program accreditation standards for special education. Thus, inclusion of standards for interveners and teachers establishes a strong foundation for accountability in the provision of highly qualified personnel to serve children and youth with deafblindness (see Note 2). Furthermore, it is necessary in order to develop a national credentialing process.

The process for adoption of standards by CEC consists of several steps. A professional organization such as the National Intervener Task Force or the National Personnel Preparation Consortium in Deaf-Blindness presents its competencies to CEC's Professional Standards and Practices Committee (PSPC). Based on the competencies and rationale presented, PSPC agrees to establish a Specialized Professional Association (SPA) within CEC. The committee reviews the standards with representatives from the submitting body to identify redundancies and reword the standards to fit the language and organization of CEC. This editing process, called "smoothing" is the first level of scrutiny. The competencies for interveners were the first to go through this process in April, 2008 and the teacher competencies were "smoothed" the following October.

The second stage involves validation of the smoothed competencies. This process begins with submission to PSPC of the literature/theory, research or practice-based evidence to support each "smoothed" competency. CEC initiates a national validation survey of relevant stakeholders who will determine whether each of the standards is essential, desirable or unnecessary for interveners or teachers. For the two sets of deafblind competencies, the validation surveys were sent to parent and professional organizations and list-serves in deafblindness, visual impairment, hearing impairment, and severe and multiple disabilities. Those standards determined to be essential by 80% or more of the respondents were retained, while those which fewer than 30% of the respondents indicated were essential were eliminated. The PSPC committee discusses the remaining standards individually,

determining whether they are to be retained or eliminated based on the evidence and rationale provided by the presenting organizations. The intervener competencies have been through this final validation step. The survey has been completed on the teacher competencies and the results will be reviewed in April 2009.

Once the competencies are finalized by the PSPC, as the interveners' have been, they are presented to the CEC Board for formal adoption. It is anticipated that both sets of competencies will be adopted this April at CEC's national conference. Once this process is complete, the competencies are added to CEC's standard publication (see Note 2) and will be posted on the National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness website as well.

As mentioned in the beginning of this piece, adoption of intervener and teacher competencies in deafblindness by CEC is a necessary first step toward establishing a credential for interveners and certification for teachers that will be recognized by schools and other service agencies. Validation of the intervener and teacher competencies enabled the National Intervener Task Force and the National Personnel Preparation Consortium in Deaf-Blindness to begin work with the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP). Currently, a credentialing process is being developed for interveners with ACVREP, and a proposal for a certification process for teachers has been submitted for their consideration.

The development of CEC SPAs for interveners and teachers of students with deafblindness represents the continued efforts of professionals in the field of deafblindness, particularly the National Intervener Task Force and the National Personnel Preparation Consortium in Deaf-Blindness to effect systems change. Joining with CEC and ACVREP in this effort will provide additional tools for ensuring that each child or youth with deafblindness will have access to highly qualified interveners and teachers.

References

- Alsop, L., Blaha, R., Kloos, E. (2000). *The Intervener in Early Intervention and Educational Settings for Children and Youth With Deafblindness*. Monmouth: The National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind.
- Alsop, L., Killoran, J., Robinson, C., Durkel, J., & Prouty, S. (2004). *Recommendations on the training of interveners for students who are deafblind*. [On-line]. Accessed November 12, 2006, at <http://www.dblink.org/pdf/intervener-train.pdf>.
- Bruce, S. (2007). Teacher preparation for the education of students who are deafblind: A retrospective and prospective view. *Deaf-Blind Perspectives*, 14(2). [On-line]. Accessed February 10, 2009, at <http://www.tr.wou.edu/tr/dbp/apr2007.htm#prep>
- Easterbrook, S. & Putney, L. (2008). Development of initial and advanced standards of knowledge and skills for teachers of children who are deaf or hard of hearing. *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, 30(1), 5-11.
- McLetchie, B. A. B, & MacFarland, S. Z. C. (1995). The need for qualified teachers of students who are deaf-blind. *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, 89(3), 244–248.
- McLetchie, B.A.B., & Riggio, M. (1997). *Competencies for teachers of learners who are deafblind*. Watertown, MA: Perkins School for the Blind.
- Zambone, A. & Engleman, M. (2007). *Teaching a contact profession on line: Development of training modules for serving students with deaf-blindness*. Select Proceedings of E-Learn 2007--World Conference on E-Learning in Corporate, Government, Healthcare, and Higher Education, Quebec City, Canada October 15-19th. 19869.

NOTES

- 1: A more complete history of efforts to professionalize the role of deafblind interveners and establish a mechanism for ensuring that teachers are highly qualified to serve students with deafblindness are available in the Selected Topics Section of the NCDB website (<http://www.nationaldb.org/>).
2. For a timeline and description of the key steps in CEC's evolution as the primary standards and licensing resource for special education teachers and paraprofessionals please see Appendix C of their publication *What every special educator must know: Ethics, standards and guidelines for special educators*. (5th ed.) Available online <http://www.cec.sped.org/Content/NavigationMenu/ProfessionalDevelopment/ProfessionalStandards/?from=tlcInterior>