Deaf-Blind Perspectives

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Breaking Through the Barriers with Leadership Training

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In June 2006 at its national conference in Towson, Maryland, the American Association of the Deaf-Blind (AADB) offered a unique opportunity to twelve young adults between the ages of 16 and 20 who are deaf-blind. In the past, AADB has welcomed youth at its national conferences, but the number of attendees under the age of 20 has been low and the general focus of the workshops and social activities has been on an older generation. A small group of individuals who work closely with the state deaf-blind projects and various programs for deaf-blind youth recognized the interest young adults have in becoming involved with AADB. They met to brainstorm ways that these younger members could be included in the conference and obtain valuable skills that might lead to personal insight and growth as future leaders in their home communities and schools. The result was that Suzanne Ressa, Sister Bernie Wynne, and Susan Lascek (Helen Keller National Center); Emily Taylor-Snell (Florida Deaf-Blind Outreach Project); Mike Fagbemi (National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness); Debbie Parkman (Georgia Sensory Assistance Project); and Paul Malloy (New York Deaf-Blind Project) met in early 2006 to lay the foundation for what would become the first workshop to focus on leadership training for youth who are deaf-blind.

Planning

Comprised of the aforementioned individuals, AADB's newest committee, the AADB Young Adult Leadership Challenge (YALC), began planning for this exciting training by meeting regularly to discuss the program's vision and mission. Leadership training opportunities for youth with disabilities have long been limited, and leadership workshops for youth who are deaf-blind were nonexistent. The committee's first challenge was to develop a leadership training model that was instructional, engaging, and fun, but at the same time relevant and appropriate for young adults who are deaf-blind. To do this, the committee needed input from various sources, most importantly, from young adults. Fortunately, a wonderful opportunity presented itself at a teen retreat for blind and deaf-blind youth in Georgia in February 2006. The committee members attended the retreat to assist with the program and to discuss the future AADB leadership training.

This retreat proved to be an ideal setting to assess the key elements of a successful youth program. Many noteworthy insights were gleaned from the committee's participation in this retreat, including the following: young people will open up more when the number of adults present is limited (particularly when parents are not involved); they enjoy action or movement activities that get them out of their seats; they are not afraid to discuss the challenges they face (in fact, they seem to welcome opportunities to share this information); and lastly, the right combination of interpreting and support service provider (SSP) assistance, utilizing individuals who understand the unique communication needs of the participants, is paramount to the success of the program.

In This Issue

At the conclusion of the teen retreat, the committee had formulated a vision for the AADB Young Adult Leadership Challenge. The mission of the week-long training would be to empower young adults to become confident and effective leaders using a small group forum with fun, interactive discussions and activities. The committee planned to keep in touch with the young participants after the training to learn whether or not it resulted in their becoming more effective leaders in their schools and communities.

Participants

Application forms for YALC were sent to state deaf-blind project coordinators and HKNC regional offices throughout the country with a request for help to identify potential candidates. The application outlined requirements for participation and sought the following information from applicants: (a) examples of leadership skills and experiences; (b) clubs and service organizations in which they have been involved; (c) awards, honors, or special recognitions they have received; and (d) ways in which applicants have promoted deaf-blind awareness within their schools or communities. Finally, the applicants were asked to submit two letters of recommendation. Completed applications were reviewed by a group of volunteer professionals from the field of deaf-blindness and individuals who are deaf-blind. Applicants who demonstrated a strong interest in leadership received the strongest consideration.

The twelve young adults who were accepted came from eight states in five regions of the country. Their ages ranged from 16 to 20 years; nine were female and three male. They all demonstrated previous experience as leaders. A young man from Wisconsin was valedictorian of his class; a young woman from Florida had presented at a Rehabilitation Services Administration national conference in Washington, DC; another student from Georgia was elected treasurer of the

local chapter of the Junior National Association of the Deaf; and a student from New York had participated in Mock Trial at his high school. In addition, the young adults had a strong desire to improve their leadership skills, as noted in their application statements. One young man from California wrote, “At my school I’m the only deaf-blind student and there are no others like me. I want to show the students and staff that deaf-blind people can do things like them.” Another young woman from Georgia wrote, “By attending the Young Adult Challenge, I hope to increase my leadership skills so I can impact the quality of life for children and adults with deaf-blindness.” A third student wrote, “I recently found out that I have Usher Syndrome. Only a few of my friends know about it. I want to show them

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a positive attitude and tell them about Usher Syndrome."

Prior to the conference, the young adults were invited to participate in an on-line chat via e-mail to get to know each other and to provide information that might help the curriculum committee develop a meaningful training module. The first group e-mail went out, and the recipients were asked to send a "hello" message to the others telling a little about themselves. The return messages started flying through cyberspace. For some, this group e-mail was the first encounter with other people who are deaf-blind, and their excitement over meeting each other was evident in the messages. As one youth commented, "I haven't met a deaf-blind person. It would be a great experience for me to meet someone who has the same condition and they would finally understand what I am going through." Another young adult shared that she is excited about learning sign language, "I have retinitis pigmentosa and have a hearing impairment. I am learning sign language and hopefully I'll learn more when I hang out with all of you!" The messages continued to flow back and forth, and it soon became evident that this forum would provide useful information for the development of a successful leadership program.

With this in mind, a later e-mail posed another question to the group: "When you think of strong leaders, who do you think of?" Surprisingly, the traditional names one would expect to hear, such as Martin Luther King and those of United States presidents, were not mentioned. Instead, the group offered the names of leaders with whom they could personally identify. Among those mentioned were Thomas Gallaudet, Helen Keller, and Ray Charles. Also revealed in the e-mail messages was the fact that the young adults had very little knowledge about the leadership of AADB. This information resulted in the YALC committee's suggestion that AADB board members be invited to meet the young adults during the week-long training. With the help of this on-line chat forum, the curriculum committee had a lot of information and insight to work with and a training module was finalized. The next step was the AADB national conference in Towson, Maryland!

At the Conference

Shaking pom-poms and spraying silly string in the air, the twelve young adults shouted their excitement at being recognized by the conference attendees during the opening ceremonies. This vibrant display of youthful enthusiasm clearly indicated that AADB's younger members are eager to be involved in the deaf-blind community. Throughout the week, the young adults made their presence known to the larger (and older) membership by participating in some of the traditional events that AADB offers. One such event, the "Meet the Board" session, tied in nicely with the theme of leadership and offered the young adults a wonderful opportunity to hear how AADB's leaders became involved and what their goals are for the organization. The young adults also joined a workshop on communication and learned about the importance of using interpreting support to become effective communicators and presenters. But the highlight of their AADB experience, by all accounts, was the daily workshops where they met together as a small group and shared their feelings and thoughts on various topics related to leadership.

Workshop Sessions

With enjoyment as the underlying criteria for every teachable moment, the YALC committee kept the young adults busy. The leadership training sessions included engaging group activities followed by time for discussion and reflection. The first day began with a bumper sticker activity. Names of famous leaders were printed and Brailled on large stickers and adhered to the back of each young adult. As they mingled and interacted with each other, they tried to determine whose name was on their back. The rules were that they could only ask questions that resulted in "yes" or "no" answers. Following this activity, the young adults discussed the characteristics of strong leaders, revealing those qualities they would personally like to embrace. Another session focused on public speaking skills. After learning

fundamental presentation skills, the participants were asked to tell a funny story in front of the group. Not surprisingly, many of them were nervous and hesitant to do this, but with encouragement each one presented their story to the delight of the others. Fun activities like these were instrumental in teaching leadership skills; however, the group discussions were equally powerful. The young adults shared some of their negative experiences with public speaking. One young woman told how she was teased by a group of girls in high school for having a vision and hearing loss. In a misguided attempt to stop the teasing, the principal forced her to stand in front of the entire school and explain her disability. Another student revealed that he has difficulty presenting in front of people because he is blind and doesn't know how to position his eyes so he will be "looking" at the audience. As the students shared their experiences, they sometimes learned that others in the group faced similar challenges. The realization that one is not alone can be instrumental in breaking through feelings of isolation. One young adult captured this best when she wrote "AADB changed my life because I now realize that there are people just like me out there and they share some of the same experiences as me."

In addition to the workshop sessions, the participants enjoyed many team-building activities and social events, including an afternoon of rock climbing. The highlight of the week was when they met Cody Colchado. Cody is a 15-time World Champion Power Lifter for the Blind. He talked about his struggle with anger and depression over having a vision and hearing loss and how power-lifting helped him overcome these challenges. At the conclusion of his talk, Cody asked the students to write down their fears, frustrations, and challenges on a block of wood. One student wrote, "I am afraid to go blind;" another wrote, "My teachers don't believe in me;" and another one wrote, "I hate being teased for being deaf-blind." Cody then karate-chopped through each block of wood, demonstrating that barriers can be broken with a positive attitude and strong determination.

Closing Thoughts

As the week came to an end, the young adults were asked to reflect on what they had learned and what they think their communities could do to help them become leaders. They developed a list of supports that would contribute to their success. The following suggestions were made:

- Schools should offer public-speaking classes to students who are deaf-blind.
- Support service provider (SSP) programs should assist young adults who wish to join school clubs and community organizations.
- Deaf-blind sensitivity training should be offered in the school setting to all students and school personnel.
- Individualized education plans (IEPs) should include leadership objectives and goals for students who are deaf-blind.
- Students who are deaf-blind should serve as the team leader at their IEP meetings.
- The presence of note-takers would facilitate deaf-blind students' involvement in school, club, and community organization meetings.
- Mentorship programs should be offered.
- Internship opportunities should be made available.
- Schools and vocational rehabilitation agencies should support the purchase of essential adaptive technology.
- Leadership training should be offered in the school setting.
- AADB should offer young adults opportunities to become involved with the organization.
- AADB should offer young adult workshops at every national conference.

A common concern shared by all the participants was the lack of role models and mentors in their schools and communities. At AADB they met many adults who are successfully attending college, working, raising families, and more importantly, serving as leaders in various ways within the deaf-blind community and the community at-large. The impact of these connections is significant. Currently there are very few mentoring programs available to youth who are deaf-blind, and the need continues to grow. In addition, there are very few opportunities for deaf-blind youth to serve as mentors to others in their peer group. With these thoughts in mind, several of the YALC participants made a pledge to get more involved as mentors and mentees in the deaf-blind community.

Nearly one year later, the young adults remain committed to their pledge. Three of them have expressed interest in becoming mentors at the next AADB conference or at a deaf-blind retreat for

youth. All of them have expressed interest in assisting with the next Young Adult Leadership Challenge. The YALC planning committee has remained in contact with the young adults through e-mail and is pleased to report that many of them are already serving as leaders in their schools and communities. One young adult is president of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Club at his high school. Another reports that she is a member of the Deaf-Blind Advisory Council in her state and is working on a youth mentoring program for teenagers who are deaf-blind. One of the young men writes that he is involved in several leadership roles at his college. He is a residence hall associate, he has helped to train some of the resident assistants, and he is a member of the Student Access Society.

For the twelve young adults, the AADB Youth Leadership Challenge was a life-changing experience. They have shared comments such as:

- "The friendships that I developed over the short week changed my life;"
- "Being involved with AADB made me realize that there are a lot of great opportunities out there for people like me;"
- "YALC was the best experience I've ever had in my life other than the joy of passing a 4th grade reading level!"

These vibrant individuals have been empowered with the skills to accomplish many goals. It is now our responsibility to provide the resources and supports they need to fulfill them.

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Usher Family Weekend at Camp Berachah

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On September 15-17, 2006, nine families with eleven children and young adults with Usher Syndrome converged on Camp Berachah, near Seattle, from the states of Washington, Oregon, and Arizona for a weekend learning experience. Several of these families had attended previous family weekend events and the kids could not wait to reconnect with old friends.

The event was unique in that a group of adults with Usher Syndrome (Types I, II, and III), led by Jelica Nuccio, director of the Deaf-Blind Service Center in Seattle, played a key role in planning and leading the entire weekend. This group of six talented people—Bruce Visser (Seattle), his sister, Debra Kahn (Yakima), Aniko Samu Kuschatka (Walla Walla), Robert Taylor (Bremerton), and aj Granda (Seattle)—helped to ensure that the agenda and activities were more "deaf-blind friendly" than ever.

Their goal was to function as mentors and provide emotional support to the children and young adults with Usher Syndrome, as well as to just have fun. They planned an icebreaker for Friday night and Saturday night activities—with emphasis on *active*—that required very little shared language. Regardless of whether a person was Deaf or hard of hearing and used sign language or not, everyone was able to become acquainted and enjoy each other's company. A fantastic corps of 15 Seattle-area interpreters, coordinated by Ellie Savidge and Jeff Wildenstein, ensured communication access for everyone; an awesome feat to observe.

Usher family weekend participants

Dorothy Walt, regional representative for the Helen Keller National Center, gave a brief overview of HKNC services, chatted with families, and answered their questions throughout the day on Saturday. Dr. Gerald Chader ("just Jerry, please") of the Doheny Retina Institute at the University of Southern California Keck Medical School, gave a warm, accessible presentation of up-to-date research and treatments for retinitis pigmentosa. Jerry spent the weekend answering our individual questions, not to mention giving a memorable Saturday evening performance as owner of the "Crabby Shoe Store" in an improvisational skit led by aj Granda and Bruce Visser.

A highlight for the parents and grandparents who attended was the opportunity to gain support from other parents. Facilitated by our family consultant, Tracy Jess, a group of experienced parents shared their stories and lessons learned. Pat Clothier of Mt. Vernon, Luko Bruer (Jelica Nuccio's father) from Georgia, and Don and Vicki Taylor of Bremerton, deserve a huge "thank you" for their openness and grace.

What did the children, teens, and twenties enjoy most about the weekend? The answer to that question varied with age. Marissa, age 8, fell in love with the horses, her child-care team, and leaders Jelica, Bruce, and aj—not necessarily in that order. Jonathan, age 11, informed us that he wanted to come to camp "365 days of the year" and planned to spend a good deal of that time in the swimming pool. Teenager Tim spent hours at the go-kart track, and most of the teens braved the climb up a tree to experience the thrill of a 250-foot zip-line ride, starting from a platform 30 feet up in the air.

Marisa and friend

The kids, the adults with Usher Syndrome, parents, and staff all wrote evaluations of the weekend. Common comments were, "Wish it could have been longer," and "When's the next one?" One suggestion offered was a follow-up "Play Day" for people who attended the Camp Berachah weekend, as well as for other interested families and community members. Even the families from Oregon and Arizona said they would make every effort to come.

This kind of support, education, and networking is critical for families of children with Usher Syndrome to help them locate resources and figure out what services their kids need to prepare for the future. By the end of our September weekend, all of the children and young folks had connected in special ways with their adult mentors; parents and grandparents connected with and learned from each other; and all of us other adults learned from everyone.

The Usher Family Weekend was jointly sponsored by the state deaf-blind projects of Washington, Arizona, and Oregon, and by grants from Helen Keller National Center, the Oregon Commission of the Blind, and a private foundation in Arizona. To learn more about Usher Syndrome, go to http://www.dblink.org. If you would like to receive a paper copy of Dr. Gerald Chader's PowerPoint presentation, check out our weekend agenda, or read evaluation summaries with outcome measures, contact us at 800-572-7000 (Washington only) or 425-917-7827, or e-mail us at wsds@psesd.org.

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Recreational Activities for Children and Youth Who Are Deafblind

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Every individual has the right to participate in recreational activities that meet their needs. Recreational endeavors give us a break from work and the activities of daily living and are a constructive and enjoyable way to spend free time. Recreation provides opportunities to participate in normal activities and feel part of the larger community, and it is a wonderful way to socialize with family and peers.

The suggested activities and modifications described in this article are intended for children who are deafblind and may have additional disabilities, and who range in age from preschool to high school. This article complements one published in the Fall 2006 issue of *Deaf-Blind Perspec-*

tives about physical activities at home for children who are deafblind (Lieberman & Pecorella, 2006).

General Considerations

There are a number of factors to consider when providing successful and enjoyable recreational activities. The following are some general rules of thumb.

Take time to learn an activity

Allow plenty of time to introduce an activity to a child and help him or her to explore the playing area, become familiar with equipment, and learn game rules. A child who kicks a ball during a kick ball game and is led around the bases will not understand the concept of the game or have any idea why he or she is running in a circle. The child needs time to feel the ball and the bases, practice kicking and running, and learn the concept of the game in order to clearly comprehend what is happening once play begins. This type of orientation takes time.

For example, Darron had ridden a horse on several occasions, but he had always been placed on the horse and never had the opportunity to feel one from head to foot in order to gain an understanding of its size or physical features. This past summer when attending camp, he spent an hour just feeling the horse he was going to ride. He felt its tail, face, nose, back, and underside. It helped him to understand what horseback riding really was and made the experience more meaningful.

Juanita had been bowling many times, but she had never felt a bowling pin and didn't know how the pins were configured or the distance from the player to the pins. Because of this, she did not understand the need to make an effort to roll the ball hard. When the game was explained to her using a single pin and a model of all 10 pins, and she was able to walk the distance of the ball's travel, she began to comprehend the concept of the game. This motivated her to increase her effort and participation and resulted in more enjoyment.

Plan communication breaks

Ensure that there is clear communication before, during, and after an activity. Plan communication breaks to provide feedback and respond to a child's questions and needs. Planned receptive and expressive communication breaks are especially important for *continuous* activities such as rock climbing, biking, running, or swimming. Let the child know when communication breaks will occur. For example, it may be necessary to stop after running half of the length of a track or swimming one width of a pool in order to check in with the child. *Discrete* activities such as bowling, shot put, or archery have naturally occurring opportunities for communication (Arndt, Lieberman, & Pucci, 2004).

In addition to planned communication breaks, establish ways to communicate important information about a specific activity while it's occurring. These could include signs or cues to indicate "finished" in rock climbing, biking, or swimming; signaling a right turn while bicycling; signaling that a rock is on the right at 3 o'clock for rock climbing; or letting the child know that there are five more strokes until the end of the pool when swimming. Using pre-established ways of communicating will help children to feel comfortable and safe (Arndt, Lieberman, & Pucci, 2004).

Promote socialization

One of the great benefits of recreational activity is that it provides opportunities for socialization. For example, Irish dancing helped one girl who is deafblind to develop balance, endurance, and agility, but it also helped her stay in touch with her heritage and gave her something to do with her sister and something to talk about at school with her peers. She made several lasting friendships through the program and even performed in a talent show at school. Dancing was a normal activity that helped her feel a part of the larger community.

Modifying Activities

Activities should be modified to meet each child's abilities and needs, but not all recreational activities require adaptation. Canoeing, horseback riding, and riding a tandem bike, for example, can all be done with relatively few modifications. Many activities, however, do require modifications to equipment, playing areas, and game rules to suit each child's preferences and abilities.

Visual, auditory, and tactile modifications

Visual modifications make equipment and play areas more visible. Examples include using brightly colored tape to mark a playing area, such as the beginning of a bowling lane, and brightly colored balls for any type of ball game.

Auditory modifications like the following make an activity's objective more apparent to children with usable hearing: positioning a sound source behind a goal (for example, behind a basketball hoop or horseshoe stake) that helps the child to

know where to aim, affixing balloons on an archery target that make a popping sound when struck, and using a radio playing at one end of a running track to help a child keep track of the number of laps he or she has completed.

Children who rely on tactile cues may benefit from the use of tactile markers in activities. For example, a guide rail may mark the start of a bowling lane, or a small floor mat may identify an area for jump rope or aerobics.

Physical modifications

One very useful physical modification is to perform an activity while seated. Most activities can be done while sitting or standing, but some children may only be able to sit during an activity and others may find that an activity is easier when seated. This is particularly helpful when first learning a new skill. For example, archery involves a variety of skills. A seated position provides balance and allows the child to focus on other skills, such as holding the bow and aiming. Other activities that can be done while seated or in a wheelchair include volleyball, horseshoes, shot put, tennis, and basketball.

Altering distances is another great way to match activities to children's physical abilities. For example, if a child does not have the strength to hit a golf ball to the first hole of a golf course, intermediate holes can be created using hula hoops or bright rope.

Closed-skill activities versus open-skill activities

Individuals who are deafblind often find it easier to participate in closed-skill activities than in open-skill activities. Open-skill activities have characteristics that change often, such as the speed or trajectory of a ball, or the use of both offensive and defensive strategies. Activities that involve open skills include volleyball, basketball, tennis, football, and soccer. Closed-skill activities have characteristics that do not vary and include running on a track, archery, bowling, shot put, ice skating, and biking. Although closed-skill activities are often easier, many open-skill activities can be modified. For example, basketball rules can be adapted to allow a child to shoot from the foul line and get 1 point for hitting the backboard, 2 points for hitting the rim, and 3 points for a basket. Modifying open-skill activities increases the variety of sports and activities that children can enjoy (Lieberman, 2005).

Cooperative activities

Competitive activities can be modified to become cooperative activities. This is especially helpful when a child is learning a new skill. For many, activities are more enjoyable if there are no winners or losers. For example, in archery, horseshoes, or bowling, one can add up a team score instead of individual scores. In running, biking, or swimming, one can total the number of laps or distances for all the children collectively to see the accomplishments of the group.

Selected Activities

Following are suggestions for modifying several games using the principles described above.

Ping–Pong

Ping-pong can be played while standing or sitting. Regular ping-pong rules can be used, or the objective of the game can be changed to be cooperative rather than competitive. For example, a goal for the players might be to see how many times they can hit the ball over the net without making a mistake. A child can even play ping-pong alone by folding half of the table up and hitting the ball against the upturned section. Adaptations to the table and ball can be tailored to each individual's needs. Table modifications include adding 2- to 4-inch boards to the sides, so that the ball does not fall off the table, and removing the net so the ball can go back and forth easily. A large bright ball or balloon can be used instead of a typical ping-pong ball. Children with hearing may be able to track a ball that has a bell or noisemaker inside. Children with hearing may also enjoy a similar sport played by blind athletes called Showdown (http://www.ibsa.es/eng/deportes/showdown/presentacion.htm).

Horseshoes

In the game of horseshoes, two metal stakes are placed in the ground about 30 feet apart. Each side is given two horseshoes, made of metal or plastic, to throw at the stakes. The object of the game is to get the horseshoes around a stake, and points are awarded for the number of horseshoes that go around a stake, lean against a stake, or that are closest to a stake for each round. Adaptations include using brighter stakes, additional stakes (e.g., five to ten), lighter horseshoes, and varying distances between stakes. The game can be played by individuals or teams.

Bocce

Bocce is played with one small white ball, approximately 3 inches in diameter, and eight larger colored balls, approximately 8 inches in diameter. The white ball is thrown in the grass 6 to 20 feet from the participants. Two to four people can play at a time, and the object of the game is to score points by rolling the larger balls as close as possible to the small white ball. Players are also allowed to hit other players' balls away from the white ball. Bocce can be adapted by using even larger balls, by varying the distance the white ball is thrown, and by giving the players verbal or signed feedback to let them know where a previous player's ball landed. Points can be calculated, or the game can be played just for fun.

Volleyball

A volleyball net can be set up in a backyard, garage, or basement. Volleyball can be played standing up or sitting down, with a regulation volleyball, trainer volleyball, beach ball, or balloon. Volleyball provides an excellent example of how rules can be modified to make a game more inclusive. The rules can be changed to allow players to serve closer to the net, hit the ball more than once, or catch the ball in their hands. Players may even walk with the ball and throw it over the net or be given physical assistance. The game can be played competitively, or it can be played by adding points for the number of times the ball goes over the net or for how many people get to touch the ball in a point.

Summary

These are just a few examples of recreational activities, games, and sports that can be adapted for children who are deafblind. There are a wide variety of additional games that, with modification, can be fun and engaging for children who are deafblind. Each child has the right to be self-determined and experience a variety of recreational activities. It is worth the time and energy spent to modify the activities to meet the needs of each unique child. See the Fall 2006 issue of Deaf-Blind Perspectives for additional resources and suggestions.

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Resources

Book:

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Web site:

American Printing House for the Blind Physical Education Web site: http://www.aph.org/pe.

DB-LINK Web site: http://www.dblink.org (See "Play and Recreation" in the "Selected Topics" section).

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Teacher Preparation for the Education of Students who are Deafblind: A Retrospective and Prospective View

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Nearly 15 years ago, Barbara McLetchie, my respected colleague and friend, wrote about the status and projected future of teacher preparation in the education of learners who are deafblind (McLetchie, 1993). McLetchie focused her discussion on (a) an ongoing need for federal funding of teacher preparation, (b) the expanding roles of teachers caused by increasing diversity of the population and more frequent inclusion of children who are deafblind, (c) the need for national standards for teachers, and (d) the need for meaningful links to adult services. In this article, I reexamine teacher preparation in these areas over the past 15 years, and address additional current challenges.

The Need for Federal Funding and Program Stability

The need for federal funding of teacher preparation is as important today as it was 15 years ago. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) within the U.S. Department of Education currently funds the following university programs that provide a focus on deafblindness: Boston College; California State University, Northridge; Hunter College; Texas Tech University; University of New Orleans; University of Southern Mississippi; and Utah State University. The following universities also offer preparation in deafblind education: University of Alabama, University of Arizona, North Carolina Central University, and San Diego State University (Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, n.d.; Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, n.d.). While on the surface, the number of programs may seem adequate to meet the need, the programs that existed in the 2003–2004 school year collectively reported 32 graduates (National Center on Low Incidence Disabilities, 2005), falling short of McLetchie's (1993) estimated need for 80 to 100 new teachers each year.

The field of deafblindness faces an ongoing problem with instability of teacher preparation as evidenced by the closure of programs when funding wanes and when faculty leave or retire. Only 5 of the 10 programs identified by McLetchie and MacFarland in 1995 exist today, although new programs have been developed. OSEP has consistently provided grants for the preparation of teachers to work in the area of low-incidence disabilities, but it has reduced annual awards by one-third over the past several years. Of note, there has been a trend to fund personnel-preparation programs for longer time periods (5 years instead of 3). This has reduced the amount of time that faculty must invest in writing grants, freeing them to engage in other work such as research that is vital to the identification of evidence-based practices.

Programs in the area of low-incidence disabilities are not typically a funding priority for university administrators. If programs in deafblindness (and other low-incidence areas) are to be valued equally with other programs, universities must be given incentives to develop and support them. One option that has been used in other fields is for states to include dedicated funds in their budgets so that program costs are shared with universities. The resulting program stability would be vital to attracting talented young teacher educators.

The Impact of Student Diversity and Inclusion on Teacher Roles

Teacher preparation programs must prepare candidates to be culturally responsive. McLetchie recognized the influence of student diversity on teacher roles. According to Villegas and Lucas (2002), students of minority status will be a statistical majority by 2035. Thirty-six percent of the children on the *2004 National Deaf-Blind Child Count Summary* (NTAC, Teaching Research Institute, n.d.) are children of minority populations. Some of these students experience a mismatch between their family's language and the language used in schools. Quality teacher preparation programs are founded on research, yet there has been very little research on how to teach bilingual learners who are deafblind. In addition, children who are deaf-blind have highly diverse needs in the areas of vision, hearing, physical development, cognitive development, and health. No other disability group is so diverse, and this challenges university faculty to prepare educators who can teach to the many needs and strengths these children bring to the classroom.

As McLetchie articulated 15 years ago, inclusion has changed the roles of teachers. Teachers who work in inclusive settings must have the knowledge and skills to support co-teaching models, and they must be comfortable as supervisors of paraprofessionals (French and Pickett, 1997). Paraprofessionals in inclusive settings usually have the most day-to-day responsibility for the instruction of the child because the supervising special educator is seldom present with them in the general education setting (Giangreco and Doyle, 2002).

The Need for National Standards

Recommended competencies for teachers and paraprofessionals were developed in 1997 by the Perkins National Deafblind Training Project. The publication, entitled *Competencies for Teachers of Learners Who Are Deafblind* (McLetchie & Riggio, 1997), articulates teacher competencies in the following areas: the impact of deafblindness; personal identity, relationships, and self esteem; concept development; communication; hearing and vision (structures, function, assessment, augmentative devices); orientation and mobility; environment and materials; and professional issues (including collaboration and advocacy). This document was developed for use by universities in curriculum planning as well as by school districts to better understand the many competencies

that must be mastered by teachers working with deafblind students. A companion document, *Competencies for Paraprofessionals Working with Learners Who Are Deafblind in Early Intervention and Educational Settings*, was published in 2001 (McLetchie & Riggio). In 2004, the SKI-HI Institute and the National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind (NTAC) created a "community of practice" to focus on the competencies required of interveners and paraprofessionals serving children who are deafblind. This group produced *Recommendations on the Training of Interveners for Students Who Are Deafblind* (Alsop et al., 2004), a document that built on the earlier work of McLetchie and Riggio.

Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, and MacFarland (1997) clearly described the effects of the increased use of paraeducators to serve children with special needs and noted that "the proliferation of instructional assistants in public schools often has outpaced conceptualization of team roles and responsibilities, as well as the training and supervision needs of instructional assistants" (p. 7). This issue is still relevant today, but significant progress has been made in the development of competencies and of preparation programs for paraeducators. Teachers must be familiar with the standards of practice for paraprofessionals because they have responsibility for preparing and supervising them.

The Need for Links to Adult Services

The Helen Keller National Center–Technical Assistance Center (HKNC–TAC) developed a model for transition to adulthood planning and for implementation that called on states to form interagency teams at the local and state levels. This model proliferated in various forms across the nation throughout the 1990s, improving transition outcomes through a collaborative approach that included the child, family, consumer advocates, local school districts, adult service agencies, state deafblind projects, and universities (Rachal, 1995). In my experience, this collaborative effort influenced curriculum in university programs as professors became more knowledgeable about the realities of providing services to adults and about the transition services available within their local and state communities. These service linkages are of equal importance today.

Additional Challenges to Teacher Preparation

In addition to the issues identified by Barbara McLetchie 15 years ago, which are still relevant today, teacher preparation in deafblindness faces additional challenges. These include pressure to increase the amount of course content offered in the general education curriculum, a need for advanced study and research in deafblind education, and an increased need for collaboration through teaming.

Program course content. Teacher preparation programs specializing in deafblindness struggle to balance fulfillment of university and state licensure requirements for a specific number of credit hours in both general education subject areas (e.g., math, science) and in the general teacher-education curriculum, with time required for the extensive and unique preparation of teachers of children who are deafblind. Programs cannot simply increase the total number of required credit hours because students are reluctant to enroll in lengthy and expensive programs that do not yield professional salaries commensurate with the investment of time and tuition costs. This problem creates the need for collaboration between universities and organizations in the field of deafblindness to promote continued development of competencies in deafblindness through postgraduate professional development.

Need for advanced-level study in deafblind education. The field of visual impairment has already studied and sought to address its need for professionals with advanced university degrees by creating a collaborative doctoral program, the National Center for Leadership in Visual Impairment (http://www.pco.edu/nclvi.htm). The field of deafblindness must make a similar effort to ensure that there are educational opportunities for students in the areas of visual impairment, deafness, and severe disabilities to specialize in deafblindness at the doctoral level. The stability of teacher preparation in deafblindness is, in part, dependent on the ability to produce a sufficient number of faculty for the future. The field of deafblindness also has a need for advanced-level students to be prepared to conduct research in the future.

Increased need for collaboration. University programs are responsible for preparing teachers who can successfully collaborate with parents, other teachers, paraeducators, related service providers, educational interpreters, language translators, and interveners to educate deafblind youth

(Silberman, Bruce, & Nelson, 2004; Turnbull et al., 2004). Teacher candidates must also learn about the roles and services of organizations that serve deafblind children so they will know to whom they can turn for support and ongoing professional development.

Conclusion

The field of deafblindness has made important gains in the past 15 years. We have defined the knowledge and skills that competent teachers and paraeducators of children who are deafblind must have. Continued support from OSEP has been essential to teacher preparation in deafblindness and to the organizations that provide ongoing professional development opportunities to program graduates. More is being demanded of teacher preparation programs than ever before. It is only through thoughtful collaboration among universities, families, schools, the newly formed National Consortium of Deaf-Blindness (formerly NTAC and DB-LINK), the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults (HKNC), and organizations in blindness and deafness that we can meet the professional development needs of teachers and the educational needs of children who are deafblind.

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Research Update

Research on Literacy for Students Who Are Deaf-Blind

Amy R. McKenzie, Ed.D.
Florida State University

I am currently conducting research in two areas related to students who are deaf-blind. The first is emergent literacy supports, and the second is the selection of literacy media.

Emergent Literacy Supports

Emergent literacy is the phase of literacy development that begins at birth and continues until a child has achieved functional or conventional literacy (Sulzby & Teale, 1991). As a philosophy, it replaces earlier "pre-reading" philosophies. Emergent literacy is based on the idea that all children are developing readers and all behaviors and skills are integral components of literacy development. Research indicates that the environment, teaching strategies and activities, and teacher philosophies regarding literacy are all significant factors in the development of emergent literacy skills.

In the area of emergent literacy, there is a void in the research about children who are deaf-blind. This is particularly alarming given the focus of the federal government on the development of literacy skills in all children, as specified in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and its "Reading First" subpart, and on the need for research-based practices.

I am currently collecting data concerning support for emergent literacy of children who are deaf-blind through the use of case study research. Information about learning environments, teaching strategies and activities, and teacher philosophies is being gathered through direct observations, interviews, and document reviews. This research is a follow-up to an initial study of the emergent literacy supports of three preschool students with deaf-blindness (McKenzie, 2005). The goal of the current study is to expand the age range and educational placements of the children under study. Additionally, I am conducting a parallel study of the emergent literacy supports of students who have visual and multiple impairments. I expect to analyze and publish results in fall 2007. For more information, contact me at mckenzie@coe.fsu.edu.

Selecting Literacy Media

In summer and fall 2006, I conducted a study of the decision-making process used by teachers of students with visual impairments in the selection of literacy media for students who are deaf-blind. Using an on-line survey, 30 responses were collected from teachers nationwide. The data has been analyzed and submitted for publication. Overall results indicated that a majority of these teachers did not use Koenig and Holbrook's *Learning Media Assessment* (1995) for students who are deaf-blind.

As a follow-up study, I would like to interview teachers of students with visual impairments who work with students who are deaf-blind about perceived barriers to using the Learning Media Assessment with students who are deaf-blind. Additionally, I would like to collect current assessment reports on the selection of learning and literacy media for this group of students. The goal of this data collection is to aid in the design of future professional development training activities for teachers of students with visual impairments. Teachers in this category who are currently working with students who are deaf-blind, and who are willing to participate in a short phone interview and/or share assessment reports are invited to contact me at mckenzie@coe.fsu.edu.

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New Doctoral Dissertation

Effie Laman graduated from Texas Tech University in December 2006 with a doctorate in special education. Her dissertation was entitled *Multiple Case Study Examining Perceptions of Four Adult Siblings' Participation in the Individual Education Plan Transition Meeting of a Brother or Sister Who Is Congenitally Deafblind.* Her dissertation chair was Dr. Roseanna Davidson. The purpose of the dissertation research was to examine percep-

tions held by adult siblings concerning their own participation in a public school individual education plan transition meeting (ITP) of a brother or sister who is congenitally deafblind. The study found that the four participant siblings had:

- some fundamental knowledge of the ITP meetings,
- great variation in their knowledge of the future goals of their sibling, and
- differing views on their involvement in the ITP process (for instance, not all siblings wanted to be involved).

The study reflected a continuum in the quality of ITP processes, ranging from effective to ineffective as a result of such factors as how the meetings were conducted, family dynamics, and individualized education program team dynamics. For more information contact:

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For Your Library

Contact: Understanding of Specific Interaction Characteristics to Build Up Reciprocal Interaction with Congenital Deafblind Persons.

Janssen, Marleen; van de Tillaart, Bernadette. (2006). Sint-Michielsgestel, The Netherlands: Viataal.

Over the last several years, the authors have worked to develop and refine the characteristics of quality interactions for persons who are deafblind. This CD-ROM offers details and examples of their interaction model by demonstrating concepts such as opening and maintaining contact, initiative and confirmation, exchange of turns, proximity, attention, intensity, and affective involvement. The model can be used regardless of the age or communication level of the person who is deafblind. Implementation of the model is usually accompanied by complementary training and support of the interaction partners in a deafblind individual's life. Cost: $40.00. Available from: Vision Associates. Phone: 407-352-1200. Fax: 386-752-7839. Web: http://www.visionkits.com.

Hold Everything! Twenty "Stay-Put" Places for Infants, Preschoolers, and Developmentally Young Children with Sensory Impairments and Other Special Needs.

Clarke, Kay. (2004). Columbus, OH: Ohio Center for Deafblind Education.

This booklet offers detailed instructions and illustrations for building 20 play spaces for children with sensory impairments. Based on Lilli Nielsen's Active Learning approach, these play environments are characterized by high interest, multi-sensory materials, easy adaptability, and the capacity to facilitate repeated, self-initiated exploration. A quick reference chart for skills targeted for each play environment is included. Available on the web: http://www.ssco.org/ocdbe/PDFs/holdon.pdf.

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Conferences and Events

Camp Abilities Tucson
June 3–9, 2007
Tucson, Arizona

Sports camp experience available for elementary-, middle-, and high-school-aged children, who are blind, visually impaired, or deaf-blind. Provides an opportunity to participate in sports and recreational activities uniquely designed to meet the needs of participants. Contact: Megan O'Connell. Phone: 520-770-3188. E-mail: campabilitiestucson@cox.net. https://fp.auburn.edu/wertjea/tucsoncampabilities.

HKNC Summer Seminar for High School Students who are Exploring Future Vocational and Educational Opportunities
July 9–20, 2007
Sands Point, New York

A two-week seminar for junior or senior high school students who are deaf-blind and who are interested in learning about vocational rehabilitation services and meeting new friends. Participants will also have opportunities to learn ways to do some problem-solving and self-advocacy to promote a positive college experience. Contact: Dora Carney. Phone: 516-944-8900, extension 258. E-mail: drchknc@aol.com.

Dr. Olaf R. McLetchie Training Institute
July 9–20, 2007
Watertown, Massachusetts

The Dr. Olaf R. McLetchie Training Institute provides training to address the critical shortage of teachers who have the necessary skills and knowledge to work with learners who are deafblind. Contact: Marianne Riggio. Phone: 617-972-7264. E-mail: marianne.riggio@perkins.org.

8th International CHARGE Syndrome Conference
July 27–29, 2007
Costa Mesa, California

For information contact the CHARGE Syndrome Foundation, Inc., 409 Vandiver Drive, Suite 5-104, Columbia, MO 65202. Phone: 800-442-7604.
E-mail: info@chargesyndrome.org.
http://www.chargesyndrome.org/conference-2007.asp.

14th Deafblind International World Conference
September 25–30, 2007
Perth, Australia

International and national speakers will be part of the conference based on the theme, "Worldwide Connections: Breaking the Isolation." An estimated 1000 delegates will attend from throughout the world. Contact: Senses Foundation, Inc., P.O. Box 14, Maylands WA 6931, Australia.
Phone: 61 8 9473 5400. TTY: 61 8 9473 5488.
E-mail: conference@senses.asn.au.
Web: http://www.dbiconference2007.asn.au.

Helen Keller National Center National Training Team Seminars
Sands Point, New York

The Helen Keller National Center National Training Team (NTT) was established to increase knowledge and support the development of skills specific to deaf-blindness. The 2007 schedule includes:

- "Same but Different": Orientation and Mobility Techniques for Deaf-Blind Travelers – May 20–25, 2007.
- Interpreting Techniques for the Deaf-Blind Population: Touching Lives – August 6–10, 2007.
- Enhancing Services for Older Adults with Vision and Hearing Loss: "The Best is Yet to Come" – September 17–2, 2007.
- Transformation: Person Centered Approach to Habilitation – October 15–19, 2007.
- Technology Seminar: The Magic of Technology - December 3-7, 2007.

Contact: Doris Plansker. Phone: 516-944-8900, extension 233. TTY: 516-944-8637.
E-mail: ntthknc@aol.com.
Web: http://hknc.org/FieldServicesNTT.htm.

A Collaborative Conference on Autism with Low Incidence Disabilities
July 30–August 1, 2007
Columbus, Ohio

The Ohio Center for Deafblind Education, the Ohio School for the Deaf, the Ohio State School for the Blind, and the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence are presenting this conference for parents and professionals. Contact: Sue Fraley. Phone: 866-886-2254 or 614-410-0321, extension 0739. E-mail: sue_fraley@ocali.org. Web: http://www.ocali.org.

Overview of Deaf-Blindness with an Emphasis in Communication
Online Course
New Mexico

The Project for New Mexico Children and Youth who are Deaf-blind is offering a web-based distance education course for families, individuals, service providers, and educational teams. The class explores and defines the causes and learning consequences of deaf-blindness. Phone: 877-614-4051 or 505-272-0321 (V/TTY). E-mail: nmdb@unm.edu.
Web: http://cdd.unm.edu/deafblind.

Online Courses on Early Communication
Oregon Health & Science University

Two new online courses are available from Oregon Health & Science University. Both are offered as self-paced noncredit learning opportunities. (1) Pre-symbolic Communication provides instruction on helping an individual to learn or expand pre-symbolic methods of communication and presents information on related research. (2) Tangible Symbol Systems provides instruction on all aspects of teaching an individual to use tangible symbols and also addresses the theoretical basis and research for this approach. Register online at any time. The cost for each course is $165. For complete information and online registration visit: http://www.designtolearn.com/pages/tsonline.html.

Deaf-Blind Perspectives

Paper copies of *Deaf-Blind Perspectives* are available free of charge to subscribers within the United States. E-mail subscriptions (provide notification that a new issue has been placed online) are available for International subscribers and others who prefer the online format.

All issues of *Deaf-Blind Perspectives* are available on the Internet at www.tr.wou.edu/tr/dbp

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