

# Deaf-Blind Perspectives

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## Research-to-Practice Focus: Competencies for Teachers of Learners Who Are Deafblind

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Children who are deafblind require highly specialized and personalized teaching approaches because of their combined vision and hearing losses. Although children who are deafblind have the same basic needs as all children, the combination of sensory loss, accompanied in some cases by other disabilities, creates additional highly complex challenges.

The extent of vision and hearing loss varies within the population of children who are deafblind. Most have some residual use of either vision and/or hearing, while others have no usable vision or hearing. Some also have physical, cognitive, or emotional disabilities. Each child is unique, but all share communication challenges and the potential isolating effects of combined vision and hearing loss.

Teachers of children who are deafblind must have specialized competencies in order to provide their students with high quality educational opportunities. These competencies are in addition to the basic competencies required of all teachers of children with disabilities. This article provides an overview of *Competencies for Teachers of Learners who are Deafblind*, a document that lists the necessary knowledge and skills for teachers who work with deafblind children.

### How Were the Competencies Developed?

The competencies are the outcome of a collaborative process that involved the staff of the Perkins National Deafblind Training Project (a federally funded project created to improve educational practices), university level faculty who prepare teachers of children who are deafblind, and a state coordinator of deafblind services. The final set of competencies was revised based upon an extensive national review process.

### What Are the Competencies?

The competencies are comprised of 44 knowledge statements and 104 skills that are divided among the following areas: Deafblindness; Personal Identity, Relationships and Self-Esteem; Concept Development; Communication; Hearing-Vision; Orientation and Mobility; Environment and Materials; and Professional Issues. A brief example of knowledge and skill statements from the section on Personal Identity, Relationships and Self-Esteem is shown in Figure 1.

Some knowledge and skills statements, if read only at face value, could apply to teaching all children. However, knowledge and skills in these areas are especially important in teaching learners who are deafblind, since learners who are deafblind do not learn through incidental experiences. They must be carefully and thoughtfully taught what other children learn informally through overhearing and observing, and in their natural interactions with others. Each learner requires a highly indi-

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