



Chapter 2

Educational Personnel

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Issue I. Educational personnel should have the specialized knowledge and skills, and commitment to meet the educational and communication requirements of students who are deafblind, as stipulated in their individualized education programs (IEPs).

Issue II. Educational personnel should have the knowledge and skills to foster communication development including proficiency in the communication forms of students who are deafblind that will facilitate access to all aspects of the learning environment.

Issue III. Educational personnel should work collaboratively with professionals and other members of students' communities.

Issue IV. Educational personnel should possess skills to promote full participation of students' families.

Issue V. Educational personnel should be knowledgeable about teaching literacy and numeracy to students who are deafblind.

Issue VI. Specialized personnel should be accessed to provide direct and/or support services specified in the students' IEPs.

Issue VII. Educational personnel should ensure appropriate participation of communication support personnel in all facets of the educational process for students who are deafblind.

Issue VIII. Educational personnel should be knowledgeable about assistive devices and technology appropriate for students who are deafblind.

Issue IX. Educational and related service personnel working with students who are deafblind should have a supportive network of and supervision by persons knowledgeable in the education of these students.

Introduction

The student who is deafblind is usually served by a large, diverse educational team. The term educational personnel refers to those persons providing services within an educational setting. Educational personnel include but are not limited to teachers (both specialized and general), interveners, paraprofessionals, therapists, and other related personnel who provide service. Programs serving students with deafblindness should have appropriately qualified team members and provide ongoing supervision, mentoring, and professional development.

To ensure that quality services are provided, at least one member of this team (a deafblind specialist) should have an in-depth knowledge and expertise in deafblindness adequate to assure equal access to the student who is deafblind to all aspects of the learning environment. Each state has a federally funded deafblind project that can assist local education authorities with training and technical assistance to support this designated team member. (See <http://www.nationaldb.org/ppStateDBProjects.php>.)

This chapter presents the issues that should be considered by educational personnel who serve students who are deafblind. The recommendations in this section are based on the standards and guidelines of two national projects, Perkins National Deafblind Training Project and the National Consortium on Deaf-blindness (NCDB) and the recommendations of consumers and professionals working with students who are deafblind throughout the United States.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “All 50 States and the District of Columbia require special education teachers to be licensed.” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006-07). Many states require licensure and/or endorsements for teachers of students who are blind, deaf, or have severe developmental disabilities; however, very few states require licensure and/or endorsements specific to deafblindness. Several states have no disability-specific endorsement but rather offer a general special education endorsement. (See <http://www.personnelcenter.org/licensure.cfm>.)

The following issues have been identified related to personnel requirements for serving students with deafblindness.

Issues and Practices

Issue I. Educational personnel should have the specialized knowledge and skills, and commitment to meet the educational and communication requirements of

students who are deafblind, as stipulated in their individual educational programs (IEPs).

According to deafblindness census data from the last several years (Teaching Research, 2005), the vast majority of students who are deafblind have additional disabilities. These may include physical, developmental, and emotional disabilities. Students who are deafblind may receive educational services from a variety of professionals, such as special education teachers, regular education teachers, teachers of the visually impaired, and teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing. They may also receive related services from orientation and mobility specialists, speech and language therapists, physical therapists and/or occupational therapists. Specific areas of knowledge and skills and a strong sense of commitment are needed by all educators and related service personnel to interact effectively with students who are deafblind.

In order for students to develop their communication abilities, educational personnel should be proficient in a variety of communication forms specifically designed and selected to address combined vision and hearing losses. Team members who provide direct services should be able to use a variety of teaching strategies that are most beneficial to students who are deafblind. See Chapter 1 for common features of programs serving students with deafblindness.

The Perkins National Deafblind Training Project has developed a consensus document, *Competencies for Teachers of Students Who Are Deafblind* (McLetchie & Riggio, 1997) that identifies the knowledge and skills necessary for these teachers. (See Appendix A) Eight competency areas are delineated as follows:

- deafblindness,
- personal identity, relationships, and self-esteem,
- concept development,
- communication,
- hearing-vision,
- orientation and mobility,
- environment and materials,
- professional issues.

These competencies can be used to identify knowledge and skills needed by the deafblind specialist and individual team members. They are often used to develop appropriate inservice training and teacher preparation at the university level.

The National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind (NTAC) has developed *NTAC Outcomes and Performance Indicators: A System for Documenting Outcomes for Children and Youth with Deaf-Blindness, their Families, and the Service Providers and Systems that Serve Them* (Killoran, Davies, & McNulty, 2006). This document outlines a very specific set of desirable outcomes from which to measure the impact of training and technical assistance efforts. (See Appendix B)

Issue II. Educational personnel should have the knowledge and skills to foster communication development including proficiency in the communication forms of students who are deafblind that will facilitate access to all aspects of the learning environment.

Students who are deafblind use a variety of communication forms depending on development, degrees of vision and hearing losses, and the presence of additional disabilities. Teachers must be able to assess, interpret, and respond to the presymbolic forms a student who is deafblind may communicate to increase their communication development, skills, and interaction. These forms include:

- body language (change in respiration or body tone, facial expressions, laughing, crying; see additional examples in Miles & Riggio, 1999, pp. 128-129);
- intentional use of signals (pushing an object away to stop an activity or pushing food away to indicate “no more”);
- natural gestures (pointing to an object or person within the visual field, guiding a teacher’s hand to reach a desired object, shaking head for “no”, nodding for “yes.”);
- object communication used receptively and expressively to represent people, emotions, activities, places, events and things;
- picture communication systems (drawings, tracings, commercial pictures, and photographs).

Educational personnel working with students who are deafblind also need to be knowledgeable about higher linguistic forms of communication, regardless of whether the student is using them or not, so they are able to model them for the students. These include:

- formal sign language systems, used visually and tactually;
- alphabet systems, used tactually and visually (fingerspelling, print on palm, alphabet block letters, braille on palm);

- tahoma method of speech reading;
- words in print or braille.

Teachers must be knowledgeable about cochlear implants and must ensure that their students are receiving ongoing speech therapy, support their speech goals, and use appropriate approaches to develop their communication abilities.

Issue III. Educational personnel should work collaboratively with professionals and other members of students' communities.

The education of students who are deafblind may require professional expertise from a wide variety of specialists, including special educators, regular educators, paraprofessionals or interveners, teachers of visually impaired, teachers of deaf and hard of hearing, orientation and mobility specialists, augmentative/alternative communication specialists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, assistive technology specialists, speech/language pathologists, interpreters, job coaches, personal care assistants, nurses, etc. The members of a team should be selected based on the student's strengths and needs. At a minimum, at least one team member should have a high level of knowledge and skills in deafblindness and the responsibility to educate other team members about the unique needs of the student who is deafblind and about appropriate assessment and intervention strategies.

Learners who are deafblind require true transdisciplinary planning by the team to minimize the confusion caused by limited access to the distant environment; to develop communication and social relationships; and to provide cohesive, meaningful, and motivating learning opportunities. Teamwork with a collaborative style of interaction has long been the standard for exemplary practice (Orelove, Sobsey, & Silberman, 2004, p. 3). Effective collaboration requires commitment from educational personnel and administrators. Specific skills and processes required for effective collaboration include:

- face-to-face interactions that build positive relationships while accomplishing important shared tasks;
- development of shared interdependence of goals, resources, and rewards for team successes;
- individual accountability of all team members;
- problem-solving and conflict resolution;
- interpersonal skills that build trust and maintain effective communication (Cloninger, 2004, p. 20).

Issue IV. Educational personnel should possess skills to promote full participation of students' families.

While educational services provided by teams in partnership with parents and family members represent exemplary practice in special education, they are critical for the learner who is deafblind. Family members have a great deal of knowledge about the unique learning abilities and needs of their child. These abilities and needs are often not apparent to all members of the educational team. Often, the educational team is quite large and creates a challenge for families to actively participate. (Giangreco, Edelman, Nelson, Young & Kiefer-O'Donnell, 1999, p. 170).

The practices of educational personnel should be guided by principles of both family-centered and student-centered services. Some common educational planning tools and processes that employ a family-friendly approach are Personal Futures Planning (PFP) and Choosing Options and Accommodations for Children (COACH). Educational personnel should be aware of and employ collaborative teamwork skills and strategies. Without a collaborative team framework, parents and families can become disregarded, and ultimately disrespected. Therefore, the involvement of skilled, family-sensitive professionals is essential when planning to meet the complex educational needs of students who are deafblind. Families need help accessing resources such as parent organizations and library materials, and they need to be treated as equal team members. Personnel working with students who are deafblind should create a child centered environment where parents can:

- be confident that the information they possess about their child (e.g., communication, behavior, routines, vision and hearing abilities, likes and dislikes) will be used in the assessment process and in determining future goals and effective practices,
- communicate strengths, needs and concerns about their child's education and about their needs for specialized supports (e.g., a nurse, paraprofessional/intervener),
- share their priorities for their child's education.

Issue V. Educational personnel should be knowledgeable about teaching literacy and numeracy to students who are deafblind.

All students who are deafblind, regardless of the extent of their disability should be exposed to literacy, numeracy and other academic skills. These skills are strongly linked to the development of communication skills and students ability to successfully participate in the general curriculum. Those professionals providing direct educational services should be knowledgeable about the various approaches that can be used to help the student gain exposure to words and numbers, and they should encourage reading, writing and math skills development. Techniques will vary, depending on the amount of useful hearing, vision and development of the student. (See chapter

4, Issue III, for skills that personnel need to assess the literacy levels of students.)

Literacy

Students' abilities to read and write will affect their ability to access the general curriculum and to build communication skills.

A child who is deafblind and who also may have additional disabilities usually has unique and limited experiences. Often such a child's world extends no further than the reach of her hands; her concepts are therefore very basic and concrete. The teacher must think about how to gradually expand the child's experiences and thereby assist them in building concepts about the world beyond themselves. Experiences become the vehicle for developing concepts, upon which language and literacy can be mapped.

The experience of a child who is deafblind differs so significantly from most children's experience that standard reading programs are not usually effective in the beginning stages of literacy learning. Reading and writing need to be meaningfully connected to the hands-on exploration, experiences and interests of each child who is deafblind (Miles, 2005, p. 7).

With effective exposure and teaching, some students who are deafblind will be able to read at a basic level while others can become proficient braille and/or print readers. Regardless of the individual student's challenges, he or she should have consistent exposure to literacy.

Numeracy

Skills in numeracy provide students with access to the general curriculum as well as life skills such as mobility, time and other abstract concepts. Concepts that are easily grasped visually are often more difficult to understand through touch.

Early experiences of using concrete objects for counting are important for all learners, including those who are deafblind. Students require many opportunities for learning these skills in natural environments (e.g., pairing shoes, buying items from a store or vending machine). These experiences are the foundation for numeracy. With effective teaching, some students who are deafblind can develop basic math and others can access and understand college-level math concepts.

There are a wide range of techniques for adapting the numeracy curriculum for students who are deafblind. These may range from the use of tangible symbols, manipulative objects and line drawings to the use of braille computerized math programs.

Issue VI. Specialized personnel should be hired to provide direct and/or support services specified in students' IEPs.

The following personnel provide needed support for students who are deafblind.

Deafblind Specialist

Educational teams working with students who are deafblind should have input, in the form of direct service or consultation, from a deafblind specialist. This professional understands the unique effects of combined vision and hearing losses upon all learners who are deafblind (e.g., communication, challenges in accessing information, orientation and mobility) (McLetchie & Riggio, 1997, p. 6). He or she also possesses skills to build a relationship with the student with deafblindness, to communicate in ways that are most meaningful and natural for that student, and to facilitate the student's acquisition of social, communication and developmental concepts and skills that will enhance opportunities for learning, building social relationships and independence.

A deafblind specialist can observe the student and assist the team in conducting a comprehensive and appropriate assessment for the purpose of developing and implementing goals and adaptations. The state deafblind projects provide links to such specialists, who can be hired or contracted through specialized schools or other programs in the state. Specialists trained in deafblindness have the unique combination of skills, knowledge, and experience that address the combined impact that vision and hearing loss has on all areas of human development.

Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments

Teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) are educators who have been specially trained to work with students who are blind or have low vision. They are not therapists, but rather hold teaching licenses issued in their special field. They are teachers who are trained to provide services to students from birth through age 21 with uncorrectable vision pathologies and/or to children who function as blind, including students with multiple disabilities. (Pugh & Erin, 1999, p. 165).

As described by Pugh and Erin, a teacher of students with visual impairments may:

- conduct functional vision assessments;
- make referrals for clinical low vision testing;
- assess and assist in the use of optical (e.g., low vision devices) and non-optical devices (e.g., reading stands);
- determine appropriate visual materials based on size, color and contrast of objects or pictures for communication board, picture/print labels, and reading materials);
- acquire materials from the American Printing House for the Blind (APH);
- make visual modifications to written materials;

- assess and modify the visual environment;
- provide braille instruction.

Orientation and Mobility Specialist

Orientation and Mobility instruction provides students who are deafblind with a set of foundational skills to use residual visual, auditory and other sensory information to understand his or her environment. (DB-LINK , 2004, p. 1).

The Orientation and Mobility (O&M) specialist working with a student who is deafblind should have the skills necessary to communicate with the student in his/her primary mode of communication. This may require the use of sign language, alternate communication forms, and/or the development of touch cues or object cues. Orientation and Mobility specialists receive training designed specifically to equip them to teach and assess independent travel skills. Students who are deafblind are entitled to an Orientation and Mobility assessment and an Orientation and Mobility specialist. Assessment should occur on a regular basis because needs change with growth, development, and transitions. The Orientation and Mobility specialist may:

- provide training related to body awareness;
- help the student learn about his/her environment and develop the language to talk about it;
- help the student develop safe travel skills, within the classroom, school building, and/or community;
- develop accommodations that enable the student to interact with the public (e.g., presenting a communication card to a bus driver).

TVIs and O&M specialists may not have the ability to communicate effectively with students who cannot learn from verbal instruction. These professionals may require additional training or support from a deafblind specialist to make their services useful to the student.

Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Students who are deafblind may require direct or consultative services from a teacher of the Deaf who has knowledge and skills related to deafblindness. This specialist may be able to assess and assist in the use of appropriate:

- communication methods for the student,
- assistive listening devices,
- literacy issues related to hearing loss.

Similarly, teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing are well trained in visual communication strategies, but many have no experience or training in working with individuals with visual impairment. These professionals may require additional training or support from a deafblind specialist to make their services useful to the student.

Issue VII. Educational personnel should ensure appropriate participation of communication support personnel in all facets of the educational process for students who are deafblind.

Interveners

For many individuals who are deafblind, an intervener is needed to provide ongoing access to information and support for communication which connects them to the world. By definition, an intervener is a one-to-one service provider who has training and specialized skills in deafblindness (Alsop et al., 2007). The use of an intervener may be appropriate for students who require that another person provide continual, careful sensory access and interpretation to support conceptual development and understanding. Intervener training programs provide the knowledge and skills needed by persons specifically supporting students who are deafblind. All guidelines above presented for paraprofessionals apply to interveners as well. (Alsop, Blaha, & Kloos, 2000, p. 12)

Linda Alsop (2002) defines the role of the intervener to:

- facilitate access to environmental information usually gained through vision and hearing, but which is unavailable or incomplete to the individual who is deafblind;
- facilitate the development and/or use of receptive and expressive communication skills by the individual who is deafblind;
- develop and maintain a trusting, interactive relationship to promote social and emotional well-being (Alsop et al., 2000, p. 49).

Interveners must have training and specialized skills specific to deafblindness. (See Appendix C-Recommendations on the Training of Intervenors for Students who are Deafblind)

Paraprofessionals

Students who are deafblind, by nature of their disabilities, require some level of support for their communication, sensory access, and delivery of direct instruction. Some will also require direct personal care, assistance with movement, medical or health care. Paraprofessionals, also known as instructional aides or assistants, are often required to provide support to the student during part or all of the school day.

The number of paraprofessionals working with students who are deafblind is increasing (Alsop, 2006, p.8) and this means that more careful attention to their roles and training is needed. Often paraprofessionals are the least-trained members of the educational team but have primary responsibilities for direct instruction of the student who is deafblind. For this reason, training of paraprofessionals that is tailored to the needs of the individual student should be available to all staff and is the responsibility of the local education agency (LEA).

Giangreco, Edelman, MacFarland, and Luiselli (1997, p. 7) demonstrate that the practice of using the paraprofessional to plan and conduct program activities is common. Recent research, however, underscores the inappropriateness of relying on the paraprofessional to do the job of the trained teacher or specialist and highlights the importance of having the instruction planned and implemented by an appropriately trained professional. (Giangreco et al., 1997, p. 16; Hudson, 1997).

Paraprofessionals should be trained by qualified professionals to understand and meet their responsibilities to the student who is deafblind. Paraprofessionals should be supervised and evaluated regularly by the qualified teachers who have primary responsibility for the education of the student. The following practices are recommended:

- Paraprofessionals should be trained in deafblindness and the unique needs of the students prior to being assigned and they should receive ongoing training to develop knowledge and skills further as the student grows and learns.
- Modeling, coaching, and monitoring by professionals skilled in deafblindness are essential for effective utilization of paraprofessional supports.
- Paraprofessionals should have clear job descriptions and accountability, based on clear lines of authority with the supervising educator as instructional leader.
- Paraprofessionals should have written information and instructions about procedures for care and instruction, protocols, data collection, and record keeping. (Riggio & McLetchie, 2001, p. 17).

Interpreters

Some students who are deafblind use sign language as their primary language and may require the services of a specially trained interpreter (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2006, p. 88). Interpreter services should be tailored to the student's specific needs. The interpreter may provide contextual information by signing what is missing because of the student's visual loss. Some students require tactile interpretation which requires specialized training in interpreting for people who are deafblind.

Issue VIII. Educational personnel should be knowledgeable about assistive devices and technology appropriate for students who are deafblind.

There are a variety of assistive devices that may enhance learning and improve quality of life for students with deafblindness (e.g., hearing aids, low vision devices, and augmentative and alternative communication devices). Teachers need to learn how to use these devices and teach students how to use them for access to the school curriculum and to communicate with family, peers, and others at home and in the community.

Personnel also need to be knowledgeable about the full range of devices for people with hearing and/or vision loss. These include, but are not limited to, vibrotactile devices, which are valuable for students who are deafblind and unable to detect environmental sounds. These devices and vibrating alert systems translate sounds from sources such as doorbells, alarm clocks, telephones, and smoke detectors into vibrations.

Examples of additional devices include the telebraille, which is used to spell out braille and print messages for telephone and face-to-face communication, and the braillephone which can be interfaced with a computer that has braille output to provide access to most Microsoft Windows screen-reading software (Silberman, Bruce, & Nelson, 2004, p. 514).

Many devices that provide access to print, speech, or braille have been developed for individuals with visual impairments. These include braillewriters, closed-circuit television (CCTV), screen-reading software with voice output, braille translation software, braille embossers, and screen enlarging software.

Personnel working with students who are deafblind should also become familiar with the assistive technology devices available from the field of deafness. One device that might be of value to some students who are deafblind is a text telephone (TT), also called a teletypewriter or TTY, with a large print display. If a hearing person does not have a TT, an operator, voice or video, relay system can be used (Silberman et al., 2004, p. 495). Other devices for students who have some useful vision include lights that flash for the doorbell or smoke alarm.

In addition to the assistive technology devices specific to individuals with hearing or vision loss, personnel should work closely with occupational and physical therapists, and assistive technology specialists to ensure that they are familiar with and can support the student's access to the full range of assistive technology devices, from the simple to the sophisticated.

Issue IX. Educational and related service personnel working with students who are deafblind should have a supportive network of and supervision by persons knowledgeable in the education of these students.

Educational personnel should have opportunities to learn and develop through a support network of and with supervision by persons knowledgeable in the education of students who are deafblind. Because a local school district may have only one student who is deafblind, it may be necessary to bring in out-of-district support for educational personnel.

State deafblind projects have resources and specialists who can consult with team/education personnel to offer support and guidance. For a list of state projects, see the web site at <http://www.nationaldb.org/ppStateDBProjects.php>.

Professors from personnel preparation programs and/or professionals from other districts or specialized schools who have extensive expertise in deafblindness may also be available for consultation and support. These consultants can provide technical assistance to the educational administrators for the purpose of conducting meaningful job performance reviews for personnel.

Personnel serving students with deafblindness need to have access to a full-range of support and mentoring. This includes an ongoing systematic program of technical assistance and professional development and coaching and mentoring to incorporate new knowledge and skills into their practice.

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