**Communication With Children Who Are Deafblind**

**Lesson 4 Part 2 Described Transcript**

**Narrator:** Teaching Children Who Are Deafblind: Professional Development for Educators

Communicating With Children Who Are Deafblind

Lesson 4: Complex Language

Part 2: Supporting Children Who Use Complex Language

**[On-Screen Text]** Sandra Gillam

Liam’s Mom

Teacher of Students With Visual Impairments

**Sandra Gillam:** I wish they knew how capable he was. And that, you know he can do things, and it just is gonna look different. And it might take a little more work. You just gotta think outside the box and be creative, but that he is able, and he wants to do things. That's what I wish educators could see right away. They typically figure that out eventually. But I wish that they knew that about him specifically, that he can do things, and he wants to do things, and he can communicate. And he does have things to say, and he wants to have those connections with his peers, with the staff. He wants to know what's happening. He wants to, you know, say what's on his mind. He wants to be included. So I wish that would be, the one thing is include him.

**[Visual Description]** A teenage boy leans over an electronic piano to look closely at sheet music.

**Narrator:** Before we discuss strategies for supporting children who use complex language, sometimes also called “proficient communicators,” it’s important to address two common misconceptions about them.

The first is assuming that children who are deafblind cannot be high achieving students.

**[Visual Description]** A teenage boy types on a keyboard while looking at a computer screen.

As with all students who are deafblind it's important to have high expectations and not make assumptions about what they know or are capable of.

**[Visual Description]** A teenage boy sits in a wheelchair at the front of a room and smiles as he signs. An adult sits next to him and watches.

The vast majority of children who use complex language are high-achieving students who are motivated to learn and want to be highly engaged.

The second, and perhaps even more common misconception, is that because they are fluent in a language, children who use complex language don’t need any additional help, adaptations, or accommodations.

**[Visual Description]** A series of videos - A young boy and his intervener look at a computer screen. The boy points to a search bar on a tablet device then types on the on-screen keypad. He uses his thumb to scroll through a page on his tablet device and the intervener points at an image on the screen. The boy looks at several tablet devices propped up in front of him. The boy and his intervener talk as she makes notes on a board with a marker.

This misconception is complicated by the fact that many of these students are skilled at compensating for their lack of information. They might seem like they are getting everything presented during a lesson, but they may be masking what they’re missing—and they could be missing a lot of important information.

Although children who are deafblind and use complex language are fluent in a formal language, they have many of the same challenges that all children who are deafblind have with limits to the information they can gather through vision and hearing.

**[Visual Description]** A boy sits between a teacher and an intervener at a desk in a busy classroom. The teacher is signing and he rests his hands on top of hers. In front of him are a large gourd, an ear of corn, and a small pumpkin. He follows his teacher’s hand to the gourd and begins to explore it with his hands.

To best support their communication development, it’s important to understand how deafblindness impacts their access to contextual and incidental information.

**[Visual Description]** A boy types on a laptop.

Let’s start by talking about the pace of instruction in a typical middle or high school class, which these days can be very fast.

**[Visual Description]** A boy looks closely at an activity on a computer monitor.

A child who is deafblind will have to work much harder than their peers with typical vision and hearing to keep up.

**[Visual Description]** A young boy sits in the front row of a classroom and looks at a slide projected on the white board in front of him.

For instance, their hearing-sighted peers can listen to a teacher and at the same time, look down at their desk and

* take notes
* refer to a map
* or study a written equation

They can

* watch the teacher draw a diagram or write the homework on the board
* while listening to their explanations.

**[On-Screen Text]** Maurice Belote

Deafblind Consultant and Educator

**Maurice Belote:** Students who are deafblind don't have that advantage. So they are either focused visually, and for students who may have some hearing who may be classified hard of hearing, they're going to rely on their vision much more to make sense of what's going on in the classroom, even even though they may have a cochlear implant, and are getting some information auditorily, but they don't have the advantage of being able to do both—to receive vision and hearing information at the same time.

**Narrator:** Without the ability to access complete information through hearing and vision simultaneously, students who are deafblind often miss important information.

Sometimes what’s missed is a key part of an assignment, which happened to Dalton in third grade.

**[On-Screen Text]** Lanya McKittrick, Ph.D.

Dalton’s Mom

Project Director, Idaho Project for Children and Youth with Deafblindness

**Lanya McKittrick:** His grades were really good. He seemed like he was following along. He had friends in the class, but he just was, he was really struggling, and he was, you know, would cry at home because he didn't understand what he needed to do. And so there was really a disconnect between what we were seeing, what I was seeing as a mom when he came home, and what they were seeing in the classroom, cause they were seeing a smart kid who seemed to be following along, and I was seeing my son, and I could just tell something was wrong.

**[Visual Description]** A teenage boy sits at a school desk with a computer and two large monitors. He leans forward to look closely at what is on one of the screens.

[Loud sounds of many people talking]

**Narrator:** Let’s take a look–and listen–to the environment of a typical American middle or high school classroom—another factor that impacts a student’s ability to gather and process information.

Here you see Hunter, whom you met in the previous section. He’s working to set up his assistive technology and get ready for class.

Imagine how difficult it would be to concentrate with the competing noises and visual distractions!

**[Visual Description]** Lanya McKittrick and her son, Dalton, participating in an interview.

**[On-Screen Text]** Dalton McKittrick

**[On-Screen Text]** Lanya McKittrick, Dalton’s Mom

**Lanya:** Yeah, it's very distracting, I think, and in that particular year there was, there was times when there was a substitute all day, but then there was also times when somebody would come in from, you know, another helper to like, “Hey, can you watch the class while they're doing this work” or something. So there was always like a lot of in and out, and so opening the door, closing the door. Chairs moving, you know, just people moving around the classroom that I think hard, and, and so it was already hard for him to kind of capture everything in the classroom, but with all that activity going on, it was even worse.

**[Visual Description]** A teenage boy looks at a written activity on a desk. His hand rests on one side of the paper, and an adult’s hand points to something on the page.

**Narrator:** For many of these students, feeling like you’re falling behind or don’t understand something can be frustrating. All the time pressures and concentrated looking and listening leads to sensory exhaustion, which can cause heightened anxiety and stress.

**[On-Screen Text]** Maurice Belote

Deafblind Consultant and Educator

**Maurice Belote:** And what students tell us is that they are exhausted by the end of the day, and so we will see students who have much, who are much more engaged in the morning, say, than they are in the afternoon. So it's important for teachers and administrators to understand how exhausting it is to function as a deafblind student in a general education program.

**[Visual Description]** A teenage girl and her teacher sit side-by-side at a table upon which is a large sheet of paper with lines on it. The girl has her hand on top of her teacher’s hand as they feel different areas of the paper together. They sign to each other.

**Narrator:** For a geography lesson, a teacher and her student put tactile stickers on a map to identify areas of water and land.

**Teacher:** The water is called Red Sea.

**[Visual Description]** The teenage girl signs a question.

**Teacher:** Oh gosh, I’m not sure if you can swim in the Red Sea.

**[Visual Description]** The girl and her teacher continue their conversation, talking and signing.

**Narrator:** So, now that we’ve discussed many of the issues that complicate information gathering and communication for children who use complex language, let’s take a look at a number of strategies that can help.

**[Visual Description]** A young boy looks at the screen of a laptop that shows an adult signing.

Number one, teachers should do whatever they can to reduce the pace of instruction for their students who are deafblind. For example, building in pauses during class to give them time to process information.

**[Visual Description]** A boy holds a tablet device with both hands and looks at large font writing on the screen.

Many students will also benefit from receiving the teacher’s notes beforehand. This way, they can focus on instruction and what’s going on in the class rather than miss important information to take notes.

**[Visual Description]** A boy and his teacher look at text on a screen. The teacher points at something on the screen.

Another key strategy is pre-teaching. Pre-teaching is just that: Prior to class, helping the student become familiar with topics, vocabulary, and concepts to be discussed. The time spent on pre-teaching enables the student to more effectively process information during class time.

**[On-screen Text]** Sandra Gillam

Liam’s Mom

Teacher of Students With Visual Impairments

**Sandra Gillam:** We always make sure to have things ready ahead of time for him, and so like his team, as far as like, you know, the braille. He has a braillist. He has an access support person, he has an interpreter, SPED teachers, all of that.

**[Visual Description]** A teenage girl signs into Liam’s hands.

So if we know what's happening ahead of time, often we will have the materials ready for Liam, and kinda just give them to him ahead of time, cause that pre-teaching really is important to him. So he knows what's happening. He can be more successful. He can be prepared especially when there's going to be social situations, too. We can kind of teach him ahead of time, this is what's to be expected. This is how you can participate. This is what they're gonna want from you.

**[Visual Description]** An adult signs to a teenage girl who sits across from her at a desk.

**Narrator:** Just as important as pre-teaching is time spent on post-teaching; that is, reviewing or “re-teaching” important information after a class. This will help a student to retrieve and more fully process key details and content.

**[Visual Description]** A teenage girl leans over a drawing of the human brain with labels for its different parts, which is about an inch away from her face. In one hand, she holds a pen.

This can also be a good time to do comprehension checks to ensure the student has a complete understanding of the topic at hand. And avoid just asking if they understand something–chances are they’ll say “yes.” It’s far better to ask them to explain it to you.

**[Visual Description]** A young boy sits at a table in a classroom with practitioners on either side of him. One practitioner signs into his hands, then leads his hand over to his water bottle, and the boy picks it up.

Because of the sensory overload they typically experience, many children will also benefit from hearing and vision breaks during the day.

**[Visual Description]** Dalton participates in an interview. His mom, Lanya, looks on.

**Dalton:** It’s like, it’s very difficult. So it's like even 5, 10 minutes, any of any amount of time, just to not hear a word, not hear any desks moving or just not seeing anything. It's just really helpful because to, like, resets my ears.

**[Visual Description]** A teenage boy sits in a large pillowy chair, his feet on the edge of the chair and his knees bent. He flips through pages binder.

**Narrator:** Study halls, resource periods, and other breaks built into the student’s day will also provide much-needed time for students to regroup and time for additional instruction to master essential concepts.

**[Visual Description]** A boy sits at a desk in a classroom and watches a monitor that shows a teacher pointing to words and images on a whiteboard.

Most children will also benefit from extended transition time between classes—time to pack up, get to their next class, set up any technology, and connect with any of their related service providers before the next class begins.

**[Visual Description]** A boy wearing headphones looks at a tablet device with large font writing on the screen.

Likewise, consider the second-half-of-the-day-fatigue that many students who are deafblind experience. If possible, have them schedule their more intensive classes in the morning.

For homework and in-class assignments, consider

* Reducing, modifying, or eliminating homework
* Providing additional time
* And giving the option for verbal or signed instead of written responses

**[On-Screen Text]** Patti McGowen

Hunter’s Mom

Family Engagement Consultant, PA Deaf-Blind Project

President, National Family Association of DeafBlind

**Patti McGowan:** And you know, sometimes these sound like excuses, but they're really just facts. Also, some of the classes, different sunlight would be coming in, you know, and you, you would be surprised, but between fluorescent lights and sun coming in, and who doesn't want to open their windows and let the bright light in? But that would, could change all kinds of dynamics.

**[Visual Description]** Hunter as a teenager looking at a computer screen with his hands on the keyboard.

And so it was really important, too, for Hunter to not only have those accommodations in his IEP, but to also know when he needed them and could use them.

**Narrator:** Let’s take a break and check what we’ve learned...

Suppose you have a student in your class who is deafblind and uses complex language. They are fluent in a language and appear to be keeping up with your instruction, understanding the content well. What could be wrong with this assumption?

Pause the video if you need time to think.

Assuming that because they are fluent in a language, children who use complex language don’t need any additional help, adaptations, or accommodations couldn’t be further from the truth.

Like all children who are deafblind, they will have to work much harder to keep up than their peers with typical vision and hearing. Because of limits to the information they can gather through vision and hearing, they’ll require support in many ways.

This ends Part 2 of Lesson 4. In Part 3, we’ll examine the use of language in concept development and in strengthening relationships with others.

**[On-Screen Text]** National Center on Deafblindness

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