

# Educational Personnel for Students with Deaf-Blindness

*Marianne Riggio & Barbara McLetchie (Eds.)*

*[Excerpted with permission from Deafblindness: Educational service guidelines, [Chapter 2 - Educational Personnel](#), pp. 24-28. Perkins School for the Blind, 2008.]*

---

## 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.

### **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.

## **REFERENCES**

Alsop, L. (Ed.). (2002). *Understanding deafblindness: Issues, perspectives, and strategies*. Logan, UT: SKI--HI Institute.

Alsop, L. (2006). A model for paraprofessional training in deafblindness [Electronic version] *Deaf--Blind Perspectives*, Spring 2006.

Alsop, L., Blaha, R., & Kloos, E. (2000). *The intervener in early intervention and educational settings for children and youth with deafblindness* [Briefing Paper]. Monmouth, OR: The National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deafblind. Retrieved October 11, 2006, from <http://nationaldb.org/NCDBProducts.php?prodID=50>

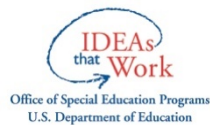
DB-LINK. (2004). *The importance of orientation and mobility skills for students who are deafblind* [Fact sheet]. Monmouth, OR: Author.

Giangreco, M. F., Edelman, S.W., MacFarland, S., & Luiselli, T. E. (1997). Attitudes about educational and related services provision for students with deaf-blindness and multiple disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 63, 329-342.

McLetchie, B., & Riggio, M. (1997). *Competencies for teachers of students who are deafblind*. Watertown, MA: Perkins National Deafblind Training Project.

National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE). (2006). *Meeting the needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing: Educational services guidelines*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Pugh, G. S., & Erin, J. (Eds.). (1999). *Blind and visually impaired students: Educational service guidelines*. Watertown, MA: Perkins School for the Blind.



*The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, #H326T180026. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. Project Officer, Susan Weigert.*