

SEE/HEAR

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER ABOUT VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS AND DEAFBLINDNESS FOR FAMILIES AND PROFESSIONALS
A collaborative effort of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Texas Commission for the Blind

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We Mourn the Passing of Olivia Cruz,
a dedicated parent, an advocate for children
with deafblindness, and a friend.



Editor's Note: During the coming year, we plan to dedicate a portion of the Family section to highlight ways families are finding success with their children as they work on expanded core curriculum skills while having lots of fun. This edition focuses on recreation and leisure activities. When kids with visual impairments (including those with deafblindness and multiple disabilities) have a chance to participate in organized activities, not only do the kids find out more about what they like to do with their free time, but they also get a chance to work on those all-important social skills.

Who Needs Sports?

By Jean Robinson, Family Support Specialist, TSBVI Visually Impaired Outreach

Abstract: This article is the first in a series of articles that will be featured in this year's See/Hear focusing on elements of the expanded core curriculum. This article examines the benefits of working on recreation and leisure skills for students with visual impairments and deafblindness and offers some resources for parents and teachers.

Key Words: sports, recreation, leisure, athlete, blind, deafblind

I have wondered why anyone would choose to play sports. I hate to sweat, and even as a spectator, I feel bad for the losers. I identify with them, as I have little athletic ability. In high school I dreaded P.E. class and looked for excuses not to participate. During the early 70s it was easy for a female to graduate without having to endure much physical activity.

Thirty years later I have to admit that my limited participation in physical activity and team sports in my youth hindered my progress in developing skills that are useful in becoming a successful adult. Qualities such as self-confidence, determination, courage, persistence, openness, fairness, patience, and respect are hard to understand and develop without experiencing them. Participating in team and individual sports is a wonderful way to develop these qualities while having a great time with your family, other students, and within your community.

Yes, a child with blindness or low vision can become an athlete. It usually requires systematically teaching specific skills that others pick up by watching. It also requires having the opportunity to use those skills over and over again in order to develop competence. The biggest obstacle is not the blindness but the missed opportunities, due to preconceived notions, stereotypes, and attitudes.

Thirty-four students with significant vision loss from across Texas did not miss their opportunity to discover their hidden talents during two Sports Camps held during TSBVI summer school. These camps were made possible through a 2-year grant from the United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA) administered through the Department of Blindness & Low Vision at Western Michigan University (WMU). The goals of the camps are to introduce a variety of sports available for students with blindness and to teach specific skills to encourage their participation in their local school and community activities,



Track event at Sports Camp on the TSBVI Campus.

alongside their sighted peers.

The program is modeled after the Sports Education Camps for Visually Impaired and Blind Youth developed by Dr. Paul Ponchillia at WMU. A major objective is to train pre-professionals, regular education teachers, and especially PE/APE teachers on how students with visual impairments can and should participate in physical education, athletics, and community recreation programs in their local districts. The Senior Camp for 13-18-year-olds involves track and field, swimming, gymnastics, wrestling, bowling, and goalball. The Elementary Camp for 10-12-year-olds involves an introduction to running, throwing, jumping, swimming, gymnastics, wrestling, and goalball.

This first year many of the students were signed up for Sports Camp by their parents and were not looking forward to participating. They had bad experiences when it came to sports. The students' preconceived notions about sports were obvious from their answers on a pretest. They included: *I never love sports; I never feel that I am better in sports than most kids my age; I never consider myself a good athlete.* Other comments were: *I am picked on in regular gym class; I am not treated like everyone else; and I don't participate in gym class with my friends.*

During the weekend camps each student had one-on-one time to learn and practice new skills. The camps concluded with competitive events. I was amazed at the effort these students made on a hot summer day. The most rewarding result was seen on their faces when volunteers and family members yelled their encouragement as they completed their events. The post-tests substantiate the feelings of camaraderie and success. Their perceptions changed to: *I love sports; I am better in sports than most kids my age; and I consider myself a good athlete.* Most reported that they learned how to change a sport so they could participate. Many believed they could participate in sports offered in their local school and community. Almost all the participants wanted to return to Sports Camp next summer to improve on their athletic skills and have the opportunity to compete with others who have limited vision.

Hunter Mouton, a good-looking 16-year-old, discovered the fun of competing on a goalball team and wants to get a team together in the Houston area. He was so pumped up from his experience at the Senior Sports Camp that he returned to volunteer at the Elementary Sports Camp along with his dad, David. His mom, Suzanna, had these comments about the Senior Sports Camp:

I really thought it was one of the neatest things TSBVI has done during the summer. Camp Challenge was good, but the sports camp hit home because it was activities the kids could take back into their schools. My son hated swimming strokes and swore he couldn't do it. At sports camp he not only swam, but liked it! I felt like sports camp gave him the opportunity to experience some sports he never would have thought of participating in before. The other kids were so excited. I was very pleased to have been there. My husband also really enjoyed the Elementary Sports Camp. I'm a goal ball fan now!

If you are interested in learning more, please contact Hunter or his parents, Suzanna and David Mouton, by phone 281-955-7066 or email SUZANNA.MOUTON@cfisd.net.

What are your preconceived ideas of what your child can do? Have you ever met or read about a blind skier, wrestler, ice skater, or golfer? If not, take time to read a previous See/Hear article about Rebecca Soto from San Antonio who is totally blind <www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/seehear/spring02/ski.htm>. After applying for a scholarship to attend an outdoor sports program for persons with disabilities, she fell in love with downhill skiing and now is training for the U.S. Paralympic Ski Team.

USABA trains blind and visually impaired athletes in nine sports---alpine and nordic skiing, goalball, judo, power lifting, swimming, tandem cycling, track and field, and wrestling. Top athletes are selected to become part of Team

USA and are eligible to compete in the Paralympics. The Paralympics are a multi-sport, multi-disability competition of elite, world-class, disabled athletes. Sponsorships are available through such organizations as USABA. Read about the opportunities at <www.usaba.org> or call (719) 630-0422.

Power lifting is another sport wide open for blind athletes. Cody Colchado, Jr. is a national and world champion power lifter. Cody's motto is, *Adversity causes some men to break, and others to break records*. He was born deaf and due to an injury lost his vision. He continued to play football his senior year of high school, relying on cues from his teammates. To read how he faced his challenges go to <http://www.houseofpainironwear.com/makemefamous/cody_colchado.htm>.

I encourage you to educate yourself about the opportunities available and let your school district and regional service center know about your interest in sports, recreation and leisure activities. Most high schools have wrestling teams. The only modification needed for UIL competitive wrestling is for the participants to "touch start" and maintain contact during a match. The TSBVI wrestling team competes with other high school wrestling teams in the Austin area. Students with a visual impairment have the opportunity to go to regional playoffs just like their sighted peers. If you want to see them in action go to our website <www.tsbvi.edu> and enter keyword "wrestling" to find their schedule and past pictures.

Another opportunity is Sports Extravaganza held in the fall in the Dallas area. This event is open to children and youth with visual impairments. It has activities and competitions for all ages --- toddlers to teens. To read more about experiences from previous participants do a website search using these article titles on the TSBVI website: "Goalball Highlights Third Annual Sports Extravaganza," "My Day at Sports Extravaganza," "A Proud Mom," and "A Proud Athlete." Links to information about Sports Extravaganza can be found on the VI Supplemental Services page of the ESC Region 10 website <<http://www2.ednet10.net/ssvi/Vision.htm>>. You may also contact Kitra Gray at (972) 348-1580 or Randy Foederer at (972) 348-1570 to request information.

An informative list of national resources can be found at <www.tsbvi.edu/Education/toronto2002/sports.htm>. This includes information about where to order equipment.

The following articles demonstrate how parents were able to get their children involved in their local community.

"I'm a Ballerina!"

By Al' An Kessler, TCB Children's Specialist, Abilene, Texas

Abstract: A little girl receives dance lessons and achieves her dream of becoming a ballerina.

Key Words: Recreation, leisure, ballet, blind, empowerment

Editor's Note: Al'An shared this story with me back in 1998. I've never forgotten Amanda, who seemed to have a life "blossoming" experience just because someone chose to help her act upon her dream. I hope that wherever Amanda is now, she knows that there are a lot of people cheering her on as she achieves success after success.

I want to pass on a wonderful story about a girl named Amanda. When I met Amanda she was six and repeating kindergarten. She was tiny for her age, blonde, and had giant crystal-blue eyes. No one figured out that she was having trouble in school the year before because she couldn't see. Turns out, she has multiple vision problems --- ROP, amblyopia, strabismus and retinal scarring. She was painfully shy, afraid to play, afraid to run, and had no friends at all.

The first day I saw her, she stood and watched the other children play at recess while she held onto the fence rail. Her teacher said that's where she spent every recess. Her mom said that she tried to get her daughter to go out and play, but she was afraid because she fell down a lot. We talked for a while, and I asked Amanda about what she wanted. She told me in her whispery, almost not-there voice, that she wanted to be a ballerina. Her mother told me that Amanda went in her room when no one was looking and pretended to dance.

Texas Commission for the Blind was able to provide dance lessons to this young girl. The only teacher in her town didn't want to take her on and had to be coaxed ...hard. After all, the little girl couldn't see and might hold the others back. The almost spoken words were left unsaid that she wasn't the "type" of little girl that usually took ballet lessons.

After one lesson, the teacher called, her voice apologetic, and said how delighted she was to have her. After three lessons, her mother called and said, "Amanda has FRIENDS!!!" At her ARD, all the teachers and principal said, "Since she started dance she's like a different child. She runs, and plays and joins in everything; she has such confidence!"

In the spring I was able to see her dance in the ballet performance of *Peter Pan*. Her blond hair, pulled up on her head, dressed in her satiny pink costume, she twirled and gave me a hug. Amanda said to me, "I'm a ballerina!"

I got to say, "Yes, you are!"

Visually Impaired Young Athletes Play Beep Baseball Game

By Eric Garza, Monitor Staff Writer, Harlingen Texas, egarza@themonhar.com

Reprinted with permission from *The Monitor*

Abstract: Read about how children in the Rio Grande Valley are given a chance to experience the game of beep baseball.

Key Words: blind, beep baseball, sports, recreation, leisure

Editor's Note: Another sport specific to individuals who are blind is Beep Baseball <www.NBBA.org>. As described in the next article, staff at the Texas Commission for the Blind provide a great opportunity for students to be involved in local beep baseball teams.

Edinburg – A small crowd cheered feverishly Saturday morning as the next batter stepped up to the plate at South Park baseball field in Edinburg. When the umpire yelled "batter up" the crowd quieted and there was dead silence.

Though summer baseball games and children go hand in hand, this game was different. It was important the crowd stay quiet as possible, otherwise the players would not be able to hear where they were going. All the players on the field were blind or visually impaired. They had to rely on their hearing to hit and catch a special softball emitting a beeping sound.

Beep baseball is played much like a traditional baseball game but with a few changes. There is only one base for players to run to. As soon as the batter hits the ball, which is placed on a tee, the base begins to beep. In order to score a run, the batter must reach the 4-foot tall foam base before a defender finds the ball and lifts it above his head. All players are blindfolded to ensure fairness since some have partial eyesight.

Saturday's game featured a showdown between the Little Roadrunners and the Little Whitewings. The players

who formed the two teams came from across the Rio Grande Valley. Some participants came from as far away as Laredo.

“I personally see that it improves their self-esteem,” said Martin Aceves, an employee at the Texas Commission for the Blind in El Paso. “They are out there playing and hitting the ball and running. You don’t expect it overnight, but you do see their self-esteem improve.”

Aceves was contacted by the Texas Commission for the Blind in the Valley last year seeking help in teaching local children to play the game. The commission held the first beep baseball game in the region last year in Harlingen.

But teaching a child to play a game he has never even seen before can be an arduous task. He said someone who has never seen a baseball game might not have a perspective on how they should run or hold a bat.

“We have the perspective of how it’s done because we can see it,” Aceves said. “If somebody wins, great, but we have to teach them the basics.”

Ralph Rangel, a regional director for the state Commission for the Blind, said he hopes the beep baseball games generate enough interest to have at least one event every year.

“The purpose of this is to bring the kids out to have a nice day but also to focus on their abilities and skills,” he said. They are able to participate in any activities that an able bodied person can play.”

Miguel Robledo, a McAllen resident, was at the game with his 9-year-old son, Luis. His son played the game for the first time last year in Harlingen. Miguel Robledo said the game gave the children a chance for them to participate in activities many people take for granted.

“This is great for them to do something that they don’t normally do,” he said. “You don’t expect blind people to play baseball. This is important for them because it really gives them the concept of what goes on when you go to a baseball game.”

Rising Trend, Ice Skating

By Stephanie Sparkman, Writer

Reprinted and edited with permission from the Midland Reporter Telegram

Abstract: A young lady with albinism qualifies for Southwest Regional figure skating competition.

Key Words: Sports, ice skating, albinism, teenager, blind

Competitive ice skating is not a sport that has often been tied to West Texas. In fact, not one nationally recognized ice skater has come from the Permian Basin area.

But, if three young Midlanders have anything to do with it, that fact might soon change.

Jentry Courter, 13, Stephanie Miller, 13, and Tiffany Miller, 10, all of Midland, qualified in Dallas to compete in the Southwest Regional figure skating competitions to be held in Colorado Springs.

At the Broadmoor Open — one of the largest and most prestigious figure skating competitions of the year —

Jentry, competing for the first time at the intermediate level, took home the Gold medal in the Artistic competition in a field of 70 skaters.

The Miller sisters' father, Brad Miller, said the families decided to enter the girls in the Broadmoor Open in order to get an idea about how the Midland girls' abilities compare to other skaters from around the nation.

Each of the girls has high aspirations for a career in figure skating.

"Lord willing, I want to shoot for the 2006 Olympics and, if that doesn't work out, then 2010," said Jentry.

The girls do more than just dream about becoming Olympic competitors. They have put their hearts, souls, and the majority of their time into their efforts.

While other kids are enjoying summer vacations, Jentry and the Miller girls are practicing, both on and off the ice.

While other kids labor in classes during the school year, the girls are laboring on the ice at the MGM Ice Rink in Odessa.

While all three girls are excited about the prospect of being the first Midlanders to compete as figure skaters in the Olympics, Jentry has an additional motive.

"I would not only be the first West Texan, but the first person with Albinism who is also visually impaired and yet can still skate," Jentry said.

Albinism, a genetic disorder that affects pigmentation in the hair, skin and eyes, quite often produces impaired vision.

"The impaired vision kind of messes me up a little bit," explained Jentry. "I can't tell how close people are to me and how far away the walls are, and I really have to concentrate on where everything is on the ice, so I don't run into the wall with a jump or anything."

And although physical differences set her apart from other skaters — her long, thick hair is white, her skin is flawlessly fair and her crystal blue eyes, from time to time, dart back and forth — Jentry refuses to let them prevent her from achieving success.

And her motives are not focused entirely on herself.

"I can show people who are just like me out there to get out there and just do it," Jentry said. "Just have fun and just praise God for it, and say, 'You know what? I may be visually impaired, but I'm going to go out here and I'm going to do this the best I can and just see what happens.'"

"I'm just the same as everybody else."

Watching her daughter is a source of inspiration for Gina Courter.

"She's visually impaired, but she doesn't let it effect her determination," Mrs. Courter said. "It's in God's hands whether or not we get to the Olympics, but at the same time, I'm just proud of her vision and her insight — which is

kind of a play on words, but she's very determined and her work ethics are strong."

"She's a good example," added Mrs. Courter. "She's a good example to everybody she meets."

"Everywhere we go, they remember her — partly because she has white hair and she's very different, but also because she has a great heart. She loves people."

Craft Guild Gives Students a Taste of the Potter's Art

By Linda Stewart Ball, Dallas Morning News Staff Writer
Reprinted with permission of the *Dallas Morning News*

Abstract: Students in Dallas take advantage of pottery classes specifically geared for people who are visually impaired.

Key Words: Blind, deafblind, recreation, leisure, pottery

Editors Note: At times there are physical and health reasons that keep a child from participating in a physical sport, but that does not need to limit their opportunities to learn about and develop other recreation and leisure activities. Excerpts from the following article clearly show how two children benefited from attending a pottery class.

The sound of a moist slab of clay repeatedly hitting the potter's wheel catches Erik Carrillo's attentive ear. But the cold, wet clay pinning beneath his fingers captures the Lewisville boy's heart.

"Oh, man," says Erik, 8, a smile spreading across his face. "I like it."

Neither he nor the other three students at a free pottery workshop for the visually impaired can clearly see the masterpieces they are making. But they can feel them. They can touch them. And after the pottery pieces are fired, glazed and fired again in a hot kiln, they can take them home to proudly display to family and friends.

Since 1994, instructor Sharon Komorn has been teaching the pottery workshops for the visually impaired at the Craft Guild of Dallas, a nonprofit organization for aspiring artists and craftsmen. Through the years, the guild's enrollment has dwindled to the point that volunteers outnumber students. The children initially involved in the class graduated and went off to college. So last year, Ms. Komorn opened the workshops to visually impaired adults, too.

"The main problem is transportation and time," Ms. Komorn says, explaining that students must have someone willing to drive them to the workshops. The sessions last about three hours, usually on two alternate Sundays. They're offered two to three times a year. Donations enable the guild to offer the clay workshops for the blind and visually impaired for free.

"There's definitely a need for it," says Tammy Durrett, whose daughter Taylor, 9, is enrolled in the classes.

Ms. Komorn agrees that the dwindling enrollment does not reflect the need in the Dallas area. "These types of programs are definitely people-driven," she says. "If you have people who have their heart in it, it survives."

Last year, the Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind stopped offering its free ceramics class, which mainly drew blind and visually impaired senior citizens.

“What we had to look at was, frankly, the affordability and the efficacy of doing that versus some other program,” says Steve Vanderpoel, the Dallas Lighthouse’s vice president for community relations. He says that limited funding, a lack of awareness and transportation issues led to the ceramics class’s demise.

Ms. Komorn, a potter with extensive background in the dramatic arts, was managing a nonprofit agency that taught volunteers how to read books to the blind. Through her work, she met people who were visually impaired, and she was inspired to create a “multisensory” arts workshop in clay.

To prepare, she went to Dallas’ Low Vision Clinic, where she strapped on goggles that allowed her to simulate various visual impairments. “Some vision is better than no vision,” she concludes, adding that the experience made her more empathetic.

In a pottery workshop for the visually impaired earlier this month, incense is burning and New Age music plays softly in the background. It’s Ms. Komorn’s attempt to appeal to all senses. She tells the students that they can see with their “third eye” - their mind and spirit.

To which Taylor Durrett, a spunky third-grader who has been blind since infancy, quickly replies: “I see with my heart and my hands.”

“This is so cool,” she says, holding one of two ceramic parrots with multicolored wings, a finished piece abandoned from another class. “And they don’t break?”

Ms. Komorn assures her that even if they did break, it wouldn’t be a problem. “We have a saying in this lab,” she tells the class. “There’s nothing that can’t be fixed.”

While Erik Carrillo is busy throwing clay bowls with assistance from instructor Stephen Sanders, who is also blind, others construct clay landscapes with a fall theme. It’s a multistep process that can get a little messy.

As Ms. Komorn lays out the palettes of paint, she asks students to decide whether they want to paint their creations “a real cinnamony” color, like a dark spice pumpkin pie, or a brilliant orange, like the bright sun. For the base, do they want to use a green that’s like stepping on grass or a rich chocolate brown? Her descriptions combine color with taste so often that at one point Taylor says she can actually smell the cinnamon on her paintbrush.

“I want it to be just right,” the little girl says, hesitating to apply the paint to her work. Her mother helps guide the brush in Taylor’s hand.

Meanwhile, Ms. Komorn generously doles out the praise as she walks around the room. John French ---- whose son, David, 26, of Irving, is in the workshop --- praises the guild’s facilities and says the art form is one of the few creative outlets for his son, who is legally blind.

“They certainly don’t have to do this,” Mr. French says. But he and the other students say they’re glad they do.

“I like working with the clay and meeting other people,” says Lisa Lacore, 20, of Flower Mound, who participated in the workshops as a child and returned.

The Craft Guild of Dallas is located at 14325 Proton Road in North Dallas. For more information about the pottery workshops, call 972-490-0303 or visit <www.craftguildofdallas.com>.

TAPVI Talk

Abstract: Learn about the newest organization in Texas for families with children who are visually impaired.

Key Words: blind, deafblind, TAPVI, parents, support group, listserv, challenger ball, toys

Editor's Note: In this newsletter we are beginning what we hope becomes a grand tradition of having a column devoted to sharing information from the newly formed Texas Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (TAPVI). The first executive board meeting of TAPVI occurred by conference call in September 2003. The parents are busy writing bylaws, creating a brochure, establishing a website, applying for grants, and giving each other lots of mutual support. All these activities are needed in order to affiliate with the National Association for Parents of Children with Vision Impairments. Additional family members are desired in order to have the greatest impact and to cover all areas of Texas.

One way to connect to other Texas families of children with vision loss, including those with deafblindness and multiple disabilities, is to sign up for the Texas VI Family Network listserv by going to the following website <<http://www.topica.com/lists/txvifamily>> or by sending an email to <txvifamily-subscribe@topica.com>. Most of the current TAPVI members are active on this listserv. If you are interested in joining TAPVI, read the letter from the co-chairs below and consider joining. There is strength in numbers!

CALLING ALL PARENTS!

It is with great pride and enthusiasm that we announce the beginning of TAPVI, Texas Association for Parents of Children with Visually Impairments. The TAPVI steering committee, comprised of parents, was a response to families like ours who struggle to gain support and educational resources for their visually impaired children. Our committee recognized that throughout Texas the visually impaired children and their families were lacking the information and camaraderie that can exist with a support group.

We need to address the unique needs of our children. We need to share all of our ideas, experiences, frustrations, and joys. By sharing our children's school experiences, social experience, and developmental milestones, we will help not only during school years, but also upon graduation and entry into the work force.

We feel fortunate to have met so many caring, committed families. I know together we can make a positive difference in our lives and the lives of our children. If you would like to become a member of TAPVI please contact TAPVI directly at 11816 Plainbrook, La Porte, TX 77571, by phone (361) 441-4712 or by email <tapvi@aol.com>.

Sincerely,

Laura Boenig, Co-Chair, TAPVI
cell: 361-441-4712
email: lboenig@aol.com

Alaine Hinds, Co-Chair, TAPVI
11816 Plainbrook
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CHALLENGER T-BALL

My name is Fredia Bassham, and I am grandmother to Heather Jo. I live in Baytown, Texas. I wanted to share some information about Challenger T-ball. Challenger T-ball is a fun and enjoyable sport to be enjoyed by all. The parents or volunteers assist wheelchair team members. Blind or visually impaired team members use a beeping ball and are assisted to the bases by volunteers.

The Challenger League is sanctioned by the Little League Club and participates in the opening and closing

ceremonies. Each child receives a trophy at the end of the season. The children have a feeling of independence and being included when they discuss their t-ball games with siblings, fellow classmates and family members. The rewards are wonderful for friends and family when they are able to go and watch the ball games.

For more information on starting a Challenger League in your area, contact Fredia Bassham at (281) 421-0150 or email at <frediabassham@yahoo.com> and include "t-ball" in the subject line.

PRODUCT REVIEW - PEEKABLOCKS™

I am Cheryl Whitten from Houston, Texas, and I am the editor of the TAPVI Newsletter. This morning, I discovered a new Fisher Price toy that has definite possibilities for my daughter Catie. Peekablocks™ come in several varieties and are lovely brightly colored blocks about 2" x 2". One set is called Touch Sensations™. They have a variety of textures on each cube that are wonderful for children with visual impairments since it gives them a chance to explore different types of textures. Another set is called Sound Sensations™, which make a variety of noises when shaken or when dials are turned. This set encourages your child to interact with the world and learn cause and effect.

I invite other parents and family members to share their information and experience by submitting articles to me by email: <Cherylw16@aol.com>.

An Introduction to Dr. Lilli Nielsen's Active Learning

by Stacy Shafer, Early Childhood Specialist, TSBVI Visually Impaired Outreach
Reprinted from *VISIONS* newsletter, Volume 3, No. 2, June 1995

Abstract: This article discusses some of the basic strategies of Dr. Lilli Nielsen's Active Learning Theory.

Key Words: blind, deafblind, Lilli Nielsen, Active Learning, Little Room, play, objects

Editor's Note: We are beginning a series of articles about Dr. Lilli Nielsen's Active Learning theory that will continue in each edition of See/Hear this school year. We would especially love to share information from people who are using Active Learning with their students. If you are one of these people and are willing to share your experiences, please contact Stacy Shafer at <StacyShafer@tsbvi.edu>. We are beginning the series with this article that covers some of the basics of Dr. Nielsen's theory of Active Learning.

Dr. Lilli Nielsen has worked as special education adviser at Refsnaesskolen, National Institute to Blind and Partially Sighted Children and Youth in Denmark since 1967. She was trained as a preschool teacher and psychologist. She has performed research in the area of spatial relations with infants who are congenitally blind and has written several books and articles about educating children with visual impairments and multiple disabilities. Dr. Nielsen's approach is called Active Learning. She has presented week-long training sessions on developing the full potential of young children with visual impairments and multiple disabilities in countries around the world. We were very fortunate that she presented in Dallas, Texas, May 1994. This is some of the information she shared there.

All young children learn through play. They need to be encouraged to explore their environment and objects in their environment. Dr. Nielsen believes that all very young children learn by being active, rather than passive recipients of stimulation. We need to observe typical children to see how they learn to move their own bodies (raising their heads, reaching for objects, sitting up, etc.); use their bodies to explore their surroundings (including any and all objects within their surroundings); and actively participate in interactions with other people. A visual impairment prohibits a child from having enough opportunities to develop these abilities and have these experiences without intervention. She encourages the adults to set up the child's environment so that he can do this.

DR. NIELSEN'S RECOMMENDATIONS WHEN DEVELOPING THE CHILD'S ENVIRONMENT

Observe the child. It is imperative that we know what the child can do, what activities he enjoys, what type of objects he like, etc. Assessing the child's existing skills and preferences is the first step in programming. Observation will help you note the current developmental skills the child has. A child's preferences are indicators of the underlying strengths of his system. These preferences can guide you in the selection of objects and activities. You need to know a child's repertoire so you can notice change and improvement.

Provide the child with more activities and objects that are similar to those he enjoys. This will encourage the child to explore and experience new things and broaden his knowledge base. Young children with visual impairments need to be encouraged to explore not only toys from the toy store, but also everyday objects around the house.

Give the child opportunities to practice and/or to compare. As adults, we are often tempted to remove materials as soon as the child shows that she can use them. We all relate new information to things we already know. For example: The first time you successfully drove a car around the block, you still needed lots more experiences driving in different environments, on different types of roads and highways, different vehicles, different times of the day and night, in different types of traffic, with the radio on and off, and with friends in the car, before you really mastered all the skills and concepts about driving. When a child begins to bang one object on another one, she needs to be given the opportunity to bang lots of different objects on lots of different surfaces. (The sound produced when banging a metal spoon on the couch is much different than banging it on the coffee table or a metal mixing bowl.) Children need to be able to repeat an action many, many times, in order to learn.

Provide a few materials and activities that are at a slightly higher developmental level to provide a challenge for the child, so he doesn't become bored. When you present information to the child, you only model how to use the objects or complete the activities. You do not expect him to imitate what you do until he imitates of his own accord.

Do not interrupt a child by talking when she is actively engaged in play. Most of us have had the experience of talking to an infant who is busily kicking her legs and having the child stop kicking to listen to our voice. When a child is exploring or playing with an object or practicing a new movement, don't interrupt with a comment. We need to wait to talk with the child about what she was doing until she turns to us to share her experience, or at least until she takes a little break in the activity. This does not mean that we need to stop talking to our young children with visual impairments, just that we need to pick our moments.

Slow down, when interacting with a child. We must be willing to wait and give the child time to take a turn in the interaction. When playing with a child, Dr. Nielsen tells us to give the child time to explore an object alone, rather than jumping in and showing her/him how to use it. At a conference, during a child demonstration, Dr. Nielsen offered a battery operated facial brush to a child. She let him explore the brush in his own way. He held the brush against various body parts, moved it from hand to hand, turned it over, put it on a tray, moved it against other objects on the tray, picked it back up, put it to his lips, and did many other things with it. Then he turned to Dr. Nielsen to share the experience. That was the moment she talked with him about the facial brush and the things he had done while playing with it.

Let the child have control of her/his own hands. Dr. Nielsen feels it is important when we are interacting with a child who has a visual impairment, that we not take her/his hand and bring it to the materials. Instead, we need to develop alternate strategies for presenting objects to the child (e.g., gently touching the toy to the child's arm or leg to alert him of the object's presence, making noise with the object to arouse his curiosity to encourage him to reach out, placing several objects so that they are touching the child's body or very close to it so any movements he might make will bring his body in contact with an object).

Dr. Nielsen has developed several pieces of equipment to provide children with visual impairments the opportunities to actively participate with their environment. One of these “special environments” is the Little Room. The Little Room consists of a metal frame supporting three side panels and a Plexiglas ceiling from which a variety of objects are suspended which the child finds interesting and enjoyable. This gives the child the opportunity to experience the properties of objects, to compare different objects, and try out different things to do with the object on his own without adults interpreting that experience for him. Since the objects are stable, it allows the child to repeat his actions with an object as many times as he needs to, at one to two second intervals, without dropping and losing it. The immediate repetition enables the child to store the information gained from the experiences in his memory.

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Communication Systems to Last a Lifetime: Implications and Strategies for Adolescents and Young Adults

By Maurice Belote, Project Coordinator, California Deaf-Blind Services
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Abstract: This article is about preparing individuals who are deafblind to have a seamless transition from special education to adult services. It discusses the importance of leaving the school system with an “effective, functional, dynamic, and accessible communication system.”

Key Words: deafblind, transition, communication

Meeting the needs of individuals who are preparing to leave educational systems and enter adult services and adult life is a challenge. Among the many considerations that are unique to this population, it is vital that students leave school with communication systems that are effective, functional, dynamic, and accessible. Access to a formal communication system is not just an IEP goal or a task to consider once the appropriate funding sources have been identified. It is, rather, a basic human right, and allows individuals to lead fulfilling, enriching lives that include the sharing of feelings, emotions, deep desires, concerns about the future, and the delights of the past.

It is first necessary to define two terms so the intent of the following strategies is clear. The term “formal communication system” refers to a system that is documented, used consistently among various people and locations, and follows the individual wherever he or she goes—from program to program and into adult life. It is a system that is, in most cases, unique to one person only, and designed to effectively address a specific individual’s expressive and

receptive communication needs. The term transition age refers not only to an individual’s chronological age—typically 14 to 21—but also to the nature of that individual’s school program, which probably by this age includes community based instruction, life skills, work experience, and job training.

The following are strategies or suggestions that might assist educational teams and families as they consider how best to meet the needs of their students, clients, sons, and daughters.

Create the best communication system possible while the individual who is deaf-blind is still receiving special education services

In many cases, the level of support that individuals who are deaf-blind receive while in school far exceeds the level of support they will receive once they leave school and enter the adult services system. Chances are the adult service system will not provide communication specialists at the same frequency level and with the same skill level as provided by the school system.

The result is that, for most individuals, the communication system they have when they leave school is the system they will use for many, many years. The communication system will probably not be significantly expanded or improved after the individual is graduated from school.

Admitting this, however, is not the same as acceptance; we can and must strive to build adult services that are as individualized as possible. We also know of exceptions, e.g., supported employment programs that have access to augmentative and alternative communication specialists who will adapt communication systems to match specific interpersonal and environmental needs. Family members may also be in the position to assist in expanding and making improvements to the communication system. In addition, the individual who is deaf-blind will always be expanding or changing the system—adding new signs, new photos, new drawings, etc. But this does not guarantee that these changes or additions will be documented or formalized into the system without the assistance of a knowledgeable service provider.

The goal is to create dynamic systems that allow for growth and change, while at the same time be aware that the systems may remain static for long periods of time.

Document the individual’s communication system

It is critical that an individual’s communication system be documented. Too often, students who are deaf-blind are forced to learn new communication methods every time staff and/or program changes occur because their communication system doesn’t follow them from program to program, or because new staff isn’t adequately trained in using the existing systems.

There are many components to an individualized communication system that need to be documented. For example, if an individual uses sign language—expressively and/or receptively—it is important for the people who serve that individual to know exactly which signs are used. For most individuals, the sign systems that develop throughout a person’s school career are a mix of ASL signs, SEE signs, and home signs. Home signs are signs created specifically for that person. Sometimes home signs are needed because a sign for something the individual wants to communicate about doesn’t exist. In other instances, home signs are used because at the exact moment a particular sign was needed, the teacher or family member didn’t know the correct sign, so one was invented “on the spot” and the individual who is deaf-blind never forgot the made up sign.

If an individual’s system includes objects, the exact objects will need to be documented so that if objects are lost in transition from one program to another, replacement objects can be gathered quickly. Documentation of objects will

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need to include either photographs or very clear drawings of each object so that someone unfamiliar with the system will have a clear idea of each object.

Even spoken language should be documented if the individual has enough residual hearing to take advantage of spoken language, especially in cases where the individual may only recognize or respond to a limited number of spoken words. For example, a person who is deaf-blind may understand the question “Do you need the bathroom?” because the question has been asked the same way—with those same words—for many years. If the person then enters an adult work program and the question is posed “Who needs the lavatory?” or a staff member shouts “This is your chance for a restroom break,” these phrases may not have the same level of meaning to the individual who is deaf-blind. Some service providers may consider their clients as falling into two distinct groups—clients who are deaf and therefore unable to respond to speech, or clients who are hearing and therefore able to respond to all speech. It’s not that service providers are uncaring or unwilling to understand—it is just that they are probably not experts in sensory loss and need to be oriented to the person’s specific hearing loss, i.e., frequencies they can and cannot hear, environmental considerations, and specific words and phrases the person is most likely to hear and understand.

There are many ways to document communication systems. A personal communication dictionary can be created that describes through text and drawings the various components of a specific individual’s system. Videotape is also an effective method, especially when documenting home signs or modified signs. For instance, if the individual who is deaf-blind signs bathroom—not with a shaking “T”—but with a closed fist at ear level, it may be very helpful for future service providers to be able to see this on video in case a written description alone isn’t clear enough to fully prepare the service provider to recognize and respond to this modified sign.

Remember that an effective communication system often includes many modes, and a person’s expressive modes and receptive modes may not be the same

When children are young, their communication systems are not usually too complex. The team decides, for instance, that the child will use an object system, later to be paired with sign language, and then Mayer-Johnson symbols, and so on. As the child ages, the communication system often becomes more complex and more complicated to use.

By the time the individual who is deaf-blind has reached transition age, their communication system may utilize many components. For some individuals who are deaf-blind and have other disabilities including cognitive impairments, a typical communication system might include signs, objects, photographs, line drawings, touch cues, speech, and print or Braille. It is all of these components, when documented and formalized, that make up a person’s unique communication *system*.

In addition, an individual’s expressive communication mode(s) may not be the same as their receptive mode(s). For example, after many years of exposure to sign language, signs may be an effective receptive system for an individual who is deaf-blind, i.e., the individual understands when others sign to her or him, but that same individual may have little success in forming signs to use expressively. She or he may, however, be a competent user of a voice output system that will meet expressive communication needs. In this case, it probably doesn’t provide much information to simply describe the person who is deaf-blind as “a signer” or as “a voice output board user,” as these descriptions cannot fully describe the complexities of the person’s receptive and expressive abilities.

Develop a communication system that meets everyone’s needs

When developing or modifying a specific communication system, it is important to remember that the system has to meet *everyone’s* needs, and not just the needs of the service providers and family members. The system needs to include components that allow the individual who is deaf-blind to communicate what she or he wants to communicate about. The system should also consider what same age peers are interested in, and include language on subjects that

will interest peers so that peers can use it effectively as an “ice-breaker” to start conversations.

The only way to be certain that a communication system meets everyone’s needs is to develop the system using a team approach, and employ this same approach when significant modifications and adaptations are made to the system. The team would include the individual who is deaf-blind, family members, service providers, and peers. The inclusion of peers on the team will ensure that current topics, interests, slang and colloquial expressions are included.

Remember that the system must be accessible to its user at all times

The communication system for an individual who is deaf-blind must always be accessible. This is true regardless of the individual’s age but becomes a greater challenge for a student of transition age. Meeting this challenge is intensified because students at the transition level are frequently off-campus for much of their school day. They may be grocery shopping at a local supermarket, participating in job training programs at community work sites, and/or accessing community recreational resources such as libraries, health clubs, and teen centers. In addition, each of these activities may require public transportation, which means time spent waiting at bus stops and time on buses and subways, locations that do not necessarily facilitate ease of communicative interactions.

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The communication system designed for a specific individual must take into account the issue of accessibility in all locations in which it will be used; it would be unfair to the system’s user to deny the availability of the system in one or more locations. This doesn’t mean the entire system must be portable. For instance, if the individual uses a picture schedule, he or she may have a master calendar at home and/or school, and may have a smaller accordion-style schedule to take off-campus that covers shorter periods of time. If an individual uses sign language effectively at school and home but doesn’t live in an area where community members are likely to also know sign language, a back-up system could be developed, e.g., communication cards with printed words and line drawings, that allow the individual to be as successful a communicator in public places as she or he is at home and school.

Don’t let yourself be overwhelmed if your time with the individual is limited

For teachers of transition age students, it can be overwhelming to welcome a new student into the program who is 18 or 19 years old and who may have had little or no prior access to a formal communication system. It may seem like an insurmountable task to undertake—to compress into two to three years what other students receive throughout their entire school careers. This same scenario may also be true for foster care providers, or anyone else who serves teenagers and young adults.

It is important to remember, however, that *anything* and *everything* that is accomplished in the area of communication will be tremendously valuable to the individual who is deaf-blind throughout their adulthood. For example:

- Teaching a student to give a physical location to the sign for “hurt” in order to differentiate between ailments may help that person not have to sit through a day of work when he or she has a terrible headache.
- Teaching calendar skills may allow an individual to make sense of the activities over the course of a day or week, and lessen or eliminate the frustration and anger that can develop when life is a constant surprise.
- Teaching reading may save the individual the embarrassment (and danger) of walking into the wrong restroom in public places.
- Teaching an individual to make and use experience books may give that individual the opportunity to experience the joy of reliving special occasions in a way that would otherwise be nearly impossible.

- Teaching the use of a sequence board may help an individual follow a complex job routine that would otherwise require a full-time job coach using invasive physical prompts.
- Documenting a communication system may help ensure that new service providers understand adapted signs or systems that an individual who is deaf-blind has used—successfully—for years, such as a unique sign for bathroom or a symbol/word card that means “If someone doesn’t help me soon I’m going to lose it!”
- Considering peers when designing systems may allow the individual who is deaf-blind to make a new friend at a party or gathering by discovering a common interest or life experience.

Transitioning from school to adult life is a scary time for students and families. Families report that they are asked to be at the highest levels of involvement and energy, and at the same time they are exhausted after years of navigating systems and meeting their child’s needs. For students, they are asked to be at their absolute best—this is the time they are probably being evaluated and considered for inclusion into work and supported living programs—at the same time they are upset and nervous over the significant changes occurring in their lives. The more we can all do to prepare individuals who are deaf-blind to have a seamless transition from special education to adult services has value beyond measure.

The Importance of Auditory Training for Children who are Deafblind

By Jim Durkel, CCC SPL/A and Statewide Staff Development Coordinator, TSBVI Outreach
With help from Jenny Lace, Gigi Newton, and Kate Moss, TSBVI Texas Deafblind Outreach

Abstract: This article discusses the importance of including auditory training in curriculum for students who are deafblind. It also offers some suggestions for activities and resources related to providing auditory training.

Key Words: deafblind, auditory training, auditory assessment, hearing aid, cochlear implant

Children who are deafblind need to develop skills in using auditory information. Children who are deafblind need to learn to use whatever residual hearing they may have for a variety of reasons including travel safety, identifying people, literacy, communication, and so forth. They also need to learn how to use adaptive devices and equipment such as cochlear implants, hearing aids, and voice output devices. Auditory skills development, just like visual skills development, requires well-thought-out instruction that is provided regularly and consistently throughout the child’s school career. Learning to listen, a skill we all need help with, is a skill that is critical for these children.

STEPS IN PROVIDING AUDITORY TRAINING

For children with visual impairment or deafblindness the first step in auditory training is to provide access to as much auditory information as possible. If there is a hearing problem, this starts with the use of hearing aids or a cochlear implant. Key to the use of these devices is good behavioral audiological assessment. This is because the best hearing aid or implant fit can’t be obtained without behavioral testing.

Any child who is unable to participate in pure tone conventional screening, may need the educational team to compile information about his functional use of hearing before going to the audiologist. Some of the same activities that teach listening can be used to check hearing. By including listening activities at a level appropriate to the child, the child will learn to respond better in more formal hearing assessment situations. The team that knows exactly what behaviors indicate a child with limited communication skills has heard something can be very helpful to the audiologist who may

not know what to look for as a response.

The next step is getting consistent use of the device (implant, hearing aid) if the child needs one. A hearing aid or implant is of no help to the child if the child doesn't wear it regularly.

The third step (if the child has some type of device) is to establish a system of daily checks of the hearing aid or implant to make sure it is working properly. Wearing a broken device is an additional impairment to whatever residual hearing the child might otherwise have available to use.

It is important to understand that, even though a child consistently wears an appropriate device in good working condition, he may still not have the same access to auditory information as another child. Each child will have a unique blend of abilities in the areas of hearing, vision, thinking and communication. Some children can become very sophisticated users of a wide range of auditory information while other children may be able to learn to use some, but not as much, auditory information. However, any child will benefit from learning to use any and all auditory information they can.

AFTER THE HEARING AID OR IMPLANT, THEN WHAT?

Auditory training does not end with putting on a hearing aid or implant. The child needs help to learn how to use the device and the information the device allows him to hear. The goal of auditory training is to help a student discriminate sound (in increasingly fine steps from gross sounds to speech) in order to gain meaning from the sounds he hears.

Goals at the highest level of auditory training focus on helping a child use speech. Using speech well requires a person to make very fine discriminations of pitch, loudness, and timing. When we hear a child give an appropriate verbal response to another person's spoken word or phrase (verbal stimulus), we know that he is making those fine discriminations. For most children the social benefits of responding to others' verbal communication is enough reinforcement that they learn quite naturally to make these discriminations and responses. For example, a baby eagerly says "bye-bye" again and again, just to trigger his grandmother's delight and keep her interacting when she announces it's time to go home.

Remember that auditory training is about helping a child make finer and finer discriminations. A gross discrimination is being able to recognize absolute quiet from a very loud sound. The sound is there or not there. A fine discrimination is the difference between the sound "s" like the first sound in "sun" and "f" like the first sound in "fun." Even people who are hearing have trouble hearing the difference between these sounds (especially over telephones!)

Moving from a gross discrimination like the presence or absence of sound, one step towards a finer discrimination would be to hear the difference between a loud sound and a quiet sound. The next step from there is to hear the difference between a loud sound, a medium sound, and a quiet sound.

Now, it is not just enough to be able to hear these differences. We want our children to recognize why these differences are important. We want our children to respond in a way that demonstrates that sounds have meaning. For example, a car horn honking is important to pay attention to; it signals danger. A loud knock at the door or the sound of a doorbell lets you know that someone is outside and wants to come in for a visit. The telephone ringing, the sound of the alarm clock ring, and many other sounds have meaning in our world. Think of other situations where the presence or absence of a sound means something; all of these sounds can be used in auditory training and can be tied to real-life, functional activities for the child.

Of course, it is not fair to ask a child to make discriminations or responses that are beyond their ability. It would be like asking someone without eyes to read print (braille might be ok!) or asking a 6-year-old to play basketball like

Michael Jordan. That's why it is important to start with gross discriminations, utilizing sounds you know that the child really can hear. You want the child to have success at each step in learning to use his hearing. When listening becomes too difficult or aversive, the child is likely to shut down. Listening should be a rewarding experience for the child.

FITTING AUDITORY TRAINING INTO THE CHILD'S DAY

It is important to do a quick check of a child's auditory skills every day to make sure his or her hearing aid, cochlear implant, or assistive listening device is working. Doing this type of activity when the student arrives at school can catch problems with technology, but it also serves as a good time to tune the child into listening for voice. A quick way to do this is to use the *Ling Six Sound Test*. The Six Sound Test is used to determine the student's ability to detect and/or discriminate speech sounds. The six sounds are used because they cover the speech range from low frequency to high frequency. The six sounds are "a" as in "baaaa", "u" as in mooo, 'e' as in we, "sh" as in shoe, "s" as in sun, and "m" as in mom. This test is given live every day voiced by the adult with the student's own hearing aids, cochlear implant, and/or assistive listening device.

First, check the student's amplification as you normally would. Then, as the student wears the amplification, say the six sounds either from behind or in front with your mouth hidden from view. Ask the student to respond in some way to the sounds such as clapping, raising his/her hand, jumping up and down, etc. This is done to test for detection. If you ask the student to repeat the sound you can test discrimination. It is important to be consistent. Always say the sounds at the same volume and distance from the student. However, vary the order in which you say the sounds every day.

If, all of a sudden, you notice the child not responding as well as they have been, it may be that the child's amplification is not working or the child's hearing has changed. (As might happen if the child has an ear infection.)

It often works best to have a regularly scheduled time to work on auditory training, especially if you are introducing a new activity. Sometimes this can be scheduled as a small group activity or can be done with an individual child. It is easy to turn listening into a fun experience or a game. A child with very little hearing can sit on the floor near the door and listen for you to knock. He can open the door and pretend to be surprised to see you. She can put the baby doll in a bed "to sleep" and make the baby wake up when the alarm goes off. A group of children can dance to the music and freeze when it stops.

Practice, throughout the day, on listening skills learned in more formal lessons helps the child generalize the skills. For example, the student can listen for the teacher to call his or her name to come line up. For the child with very beginning discrimination skills, the student can listen for a drum sound (off/on environmental sounds). Another child might be asked to listen for his name as you target the skill of off/on awareness of voices. For the child a little farther along, you might ask her to discriminate between names that are very different in length and vowel/consonant structure such as "John" and "Latisha." Another student might be asked to discriminate between a normal voice and a whisper or between two very similar names such as "Bill" and "Will." Letting the child play teacher and have the other children listen can also reinforce their interest in tuning into sounds.

Every lesson in school or every activity at home has potential for working on auditory skills. Have the child listen for a timer to go off to let you know that his oatmeal is ready. Ask the bus driver to honk his horn when he stops out front. Listen for the sound of Dad's truck when he comes home in the evening. (With the help of a cell phone you can even keep the wait short if he gives you a call when he is just down the street.)

Schools have bells and alarms of all kinds; practice listening for the bell to ring before you go to lunch. When the principal makes an announcement over the intercom, encourage the child who hears it first to alert his classmates. As

you read “Three Billy Goats Gruff” have one child pretend to be the troll who hides under the bridge and listens for the sound of the goats tramping on the bridge. Have another child listen for the phrase, “Who’s that tramping on my bridge?” before responding vocally. Point out sounds as you take a walk and tie them to the objects and events that make that sound such as a loud air conditioner, a noisy cart in the cafeteria, or the sound of a ball bouncing on the floor in the gym.

There is no limit to the number of activities that teach and reinforce listening skills. Every child with a visual impairment, even those without an identified hearing loss, needs to develop good auditory skills. These play a critical role in developing other skills related to literacy, problem solving, following directions, orientation and mobility, and socialization. The auditory channel is a critical sense for learning for a child with deafblindness.

A child may initially only be able to discriminate gross differences between sounds, but with a lot of auditory training he may learn to discriminate very slight sound differences, even with profound hearing losses. Without training, a child with a very mild hearing loss may have difficulty making sense of what he hears.

WHAT PARENTS SHOULD DISCUSS WITH THEIR TEAMS ABOUT AUDITORY TRAINING

Both teachers of the visually impaired and teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing know the importance of listening skills. If your son or daughter is visually impaired or deafblind you should think about how well the child is able to use hearing for learning. Many children should have auditory training goals included in the IEP. As parents, you may need to get some help in determining where to begin with your child.

- Ask your team about how your child uses his hearing in the school setting.
- Observe situations at home or in the community where your child responds well to sounds or seems to have problems and share that information with your team.
- If he has not had a hearing check recently, you may want to consider having one done as soon as possible.

RESOURCES

There are a number of great resources for teaching auditory training, if you and your team are ready to get started. Check with your school’s speech therapist or teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing about materials they may have on hand to assess listening skills and ideas for auditory training activities. Here are a few resources that you may want to consider:

Curricula:

ASIPS – Auditory Skills Instructional Planning System

Foreworks

Post Office Box 82289

Portland, OR 97282

Phone: 503-653-2614

CASLLS - Cottage Acquisition Scales for Listening, Language & Speech

Sunshine Cottage

103 Tuleta Drive

San Antonio, TX 78212

Phone: 210-824-0579 ext. 244 or TTY/ 824-5563

CHATS, the Miami Cochlear Implant, Auditory & Tactile Skills Curriculum
 Intelligent Hearing Systems
 7356 S.W. 48th Street
 Miami, FL 33155
 Toll free: 800-447-9783
 Phone: 305-668-6102

DASL II – Developmental Approach to Successful Listening II
 Cochlear Corporation
 400 Inverness Drive South, Suite 400
 Englewood Colorado 80112
 Toll free: 800-523-5798
 Phone: 303-790-9010

SPICE – Speech Perception Instructional Curriculum and Evaluation
 CID Publications
 4560 Clayton Avenue
 St. Louis, MO 63110
 Toll free: 877-444-4574 (ext. 133)

Computer related

Visi-Pitch III
 Kay Elemetrics Corp.
 2 Bridgewater Lane
 Lincoln Park, NJ 07035
 Phone: 973-628-6200

This device is only good for use with children who have useable vision. This is a device that provides visual feedback to sounds the child produces, but it can aid the child in paying attention to speech sounds.

Earobics Software (Home version and Specialist/Clinician versions)
 Cognitive Concepts
 990 Grove Street
 Evanston, IL 60201
 Toll free: 888-328-8199

This device is only good for use with children who have useable vision. This software has games and activities to work on higher level auditory training skills.

Reader Rabbit
 Riverdeep – The Learning Company, Inc.
 500 Redwood Blvd
 Novato, CA 94947
 Phone: 415-763-4700

Riverdeep - The Learning Company, Inc.
 399 Boylston Street
 Boston, MA 02116
 Phone: 617-778-7600

This device is only good for use with children who have useable vision. This software has games and activities to work on higher level auditory training skills.

Braille Writing For Students Who Will Graduate in 2015

By Tim Connell, Managing Director, Quantum Technology, Australia
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Abstract: This article is a summary of a presentation given at Texas Focus 2003, and aims to examine the status and role of braille writing in early education within the USA.

Key Words: braille writing, braille writers, braille technology, history of education for blind students

I like to start my presentations with a world map, as it is something familiar and comfortable to most people. Until that is, the true representation of the world is shown, with Australia on top! It's always surprising to find how such a simple change in perspective can challenge people's deep-seated view of the world!

And so it is with braille writing. We have become so comfortable and familiar with traditional ideas about braille writing that it has tended to be overlooked in the braille literacy revival taking place today. I believe we need to change our perspective on braille writing to ensure that it not only remains a vital part of the literacy experience, but is encouraged and facilitated to evolve and meet the needs of students in coming generations.

As a general description, writing consists of both the process of writing, with the development of all the abstract concepts that entails, as well as the physical act of writing. These two aspects are closely interrelated and are common to all children irrespective of their level of vision. What distinguishes blind or vision impaired (VI) children is that they must always use some sort of tool for the physical act of writing. For a VI child, braille writing tools play a pivotal role in their early literacy experiences, especially when you consider that a sighted child often first begins to write using finger painting, drawing in the sand or on a frosted car window, well before formal education has begun.

A review of the history of braille writing tools reveals a lot about our current attitudes to braille writing. Space limitations do not allow any thorough examination in this article, however, there are some excellent resources available on the web. In particular, the Callahan Museum at the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) has a wonderful collection, details of which can be found at <http://www.aph.org/braillewriters/index.html>. It often surprises people to see how much innovative thought and effort went into braille writing last century. At the beginning of the twentieth century for example, technology for tactual writing was arguably more advanced than the equivalent writing technology for sighted people (see the The Kleidograph 1894 at right).



The Kleidograph 1894

So how far have we come in the last 100 years? In the US today, the two most prevalent braille writing tools given to beginning braille learners are the slate and stylus and the Perkins Braille. It was Louis Braille who not only gave us the braille code, but also the means with which to write it, the slate and stylus. He did this in 1829. The Perkins Braille was developed at the end of World War II, making it over 50 years old. Would we accept today two writing tools of a similar vintage as the only options available to sighted children for early literacy?

The reality is that sighted children have an extraordinary and growing choice of writing options (just look in any drug store, Wal-Mart or KMart) yet we accept a lack of innovation and choice as the norm for a VI child. When we consider the innovation and changes that have taken place in society generally (think computers, telecommunications, transportation, etc.) it begs the question as to why the innovation process has stopped so dramatically for braille

writing. It's not because of a lack of importance; we all recognize writing as fundamental to the literacy experience. It's also not due to having something to replace braille with; we learned that the hard way when synthetic speech was considered an alternative. We now have electronic braille writers such as the Mountbatten Braille and braille note-takers with refreshable braille such as the BrailleNote and Braille Lite, but the numbers of these being used as a first braille writing tool are still negligible.

So what have really been the barriers to innovation in braille writing? The first I believe is attitudinal. Teachers of VI children have correctly been taught that the process of writing is what's important, and it doesn't matter which writing tool is being used. But when this is combined with the prevailing 'attitude of scarcity' where VI teachers are "grateful for what we have" and are not demanding what is best (thereby driving innovation through consumer demand) stagnation has resulted.

Secondly, VI teachers are a small, geographically isolated community, and it is often hard to know what is happening in the next state, let alone in other countries around the world. Best practice is being defined within a personnel preparation system that is chronically under-funded and simply not able to afford the best technology available. In 2001 a survey of 600 VI teachers in the US revealed that only 5% of respondents were made aware of alternatives to the Perkins Braille as part of their teacher preparation program. In addition, a lack of funding for professional development compounds the problem. As new technology options arise, it is often left to VI teachers to train themselves on how to use them and to understand where and why a new technology should be used. A current example of this is the confusion and lack of research data on the role of braille writing versus braille note-taking.

And thirdly, people need to recognize what the real cost is of so-called "free" technology. The Federal Quota system has been a source of materials and products which have made a tremendous difference to millions of young blind Americans. However, when it comes to braille writing technology, it has had a profoundly negative effect. There are simply many new braille writing options available in other countries that never get sold in the US because they cannot compete with the "free" Perkins. Competition and innovation have effectively been stifled.

We live in an age where technology is changing so many aspects of our lives, yet we are failing to question this stagnation in braille writing technology. There is an abundance of evidence that it has resulted in reduced choice of braille writing options, reduced educational opportunity for students, and worst of all, low expectations. How many sighted children would struggle with a 50-year-old typewriter as their first writing tool?

Now before I get accused of unfairly throwing 50 years of tradition to the wind, let me say that the Perkins is and will remain an important tool for braille writing. And students need to be taught the appropriate skills to use them. What I am questioning is why the Perkins is so often the only option available when choosing the first writing tool for a young child. We should be expecting to have five or ten or more choices available, and to be able to select a tool that really meets the individual needs of each student. That will only happen when VI teachers, parents, and students themselves become better consumers and demand better products and more choices.

I am often asked to define what specific problems I see the Perkins as having, and the response usually includes the following three points. There is the whole question of ergonomics and hand and finger pressures required, and this has been acknowledged for some time now. In some areas though, people still find it acceptable that the writing experience does not begin until sufficient physical strength is achieved, and this can often be at 6 or 7 years of age! There is also the fact that the Perkins does not provide independent learning opportunities, and in inclusive settings this is increasingly becoming a problem. However, possibly the biggest problem I have with the Perkins is the effect it has on other people's attitude towards braille. It associates braille with the past, with something old and out-of-date. Students today need cool tools! Blind students are no different.

However, as we said at the beginning of this article, braille writing is not just the tools. To illustrate some of the other challenges I have borrowed a quote from Frances Mary D'Andrea of AFB: "I think too often our classroom teachers view braille as some strange thing from Mars, and not just a reading and writing system." Within general education there is a tendency for the classroom teacher to focus on a VI student's differences and not those things that are the same, such as literacy instruction and the writing process. We need to take the mystery out of braille.

There are also major changes in the skill requirements for our early learners involving not just computer skills, but different methods of information retrieval, and dealing with multi-format and multi-media information. Students need to learn these technology skills from an increasingly early age, integrated into their overall literacy experience and not separate from it.

There is also an increased focus on experiential learning, and we need tools and strategies that will enable that. For VI students that will mean having exposure and access to braille writing tools well before formal education has begun.

For all these challenges, the VI community relies on professional research data to determine best practice and to evolve new strategies, ideas and curricula. However, a review of the professional literature suggests that braille reading has far and away been the focus of professional research, with braille writing relegated to a very minor position. This is also evident in the professional resources available to VI teachers. This lack of research-based data relating to braille writing has resulted in a lack of understanding of the writing process and associated concept development, and often led to inappropriate tools and strategies being used (a speech-based note-taker like the Braille'n Speak Scholar being used as a first tool for braille literacy is just one common example).

One of the few research projects focusing on braille writing has been the Emerging Braille Literacy Research Project in British Columbia, Canada, conducted over 1998 - 2000, by Cay Holbrook (UBC), Anne Wadsworth (PRCVI) and Elaine Ferguson (SET-BC). The project involved sixteen primary aged students, their teachers and parents over a 3-year period and was aimed at developing objective data to guide their technology policies for early braille literacy. The results indicated that the use of the Mountbatten Brailier had very positive effects on braille reading and writing skills in addition to enhanced opportunities for inclusion (full results can be found at <http://www.setbc.org/projects/braille_lit/default.html>).

And it is very exciting that a new project focusing on braille reading and writing in Texas is just getting underway, called the Written Communication Technology for Early Braille Readers Project. This will be a collaborative project between Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) and selected regional Education Service Centers throughout Texas. The purpose of this project is to increase the quantity and quality of literacy experiences for early braille readers in general education classes in the state of Texas and will be administered by the TSBVI Outreach staff.

Students who will graduate in 2015 will be living in a world that we can only imagine. But we can be certain of some things, like the fact that they will have to be literate and that technology will play a much larger role in their lives than it does in ours. The VI education community simply has to come to grips with technology, including the costs, training and implementation of new products and strategies.

In 1992 Alan Koenig called for the definition of literacy to be expanded to include the technology skills needed by blind and VI students to compete. In 1999, an AFB survey found that 68% of students in US primary and secondary education had never received an assistive technology evaluation. Do we know if or how that situation has changed?

There is an urgent need to integrate assistive technology skills and tools into the Literacy curriculum, and a new initiative by Donna McNear is attempting to do just that. Titled *A Framework for Braille Literacy* this seminar based

program offers instructions, methodologies and resources to help VI teachers understand the role of assistive technology and its importance to literacy for VI students (full description can be found at <http://www.gettingintouchwithliteracy.org/presentations/framebrl.html>).

I'd like to finish with two points. The first is that not all technology is so-called "high" technology involving electronics and computers. The slate and stylus is also technology, and with only a very few exceptions has also been allowed to stagnate. Imagine what braille writing options would exist if innovation of the slate and stylus had kept pace with innovations in computer technology. The Jot-a-Dot (available 2004) pictured at right is an example of a new low-tech braille writing device and symbolic of what can be achieved through innovation.



Jot-a-Dot

Secondly, I hope I have been able to demonstrate that what is important here is not any one product. What is important is the recognition of the role of innovation and how it is driven by consumer demand, and ultimately by the expectations we have for our VI students. By 2015, there is every chance that braille will have become fully digital, with full page refreshable braille displays of all shapes and sizes. Our policies, attitudes and practices of today will determine if that prediction becomes a reality or not. A beginning braille learner of today will be using technology all his or her life, and they will begin that journey with the simple act of writing braille.

Strategies for Passing the BCIS (Business Computer Information Systems) Class

By Holly Cooper, Outreach Technology Consultant, TSBVI, Visually Impaired Outreach

Abstract: This article is a list of pointers for teachers and other service providers who are supporting blind and visually impaired high school students taking the Business Computer Information Systems (BCIS) class.

Key Words: blind, deafblind, technology, computer education

Business Computer Information Systems (BCIS) is a required course for a high school diploma in some districts. In all districts in Texas, it is recommended for students pursuing a college preparatory high school diploma. To succeed in BCIS, students with visual impairments must be able to learn in this fast-paced class with content typically presented in a visual style. When using a computer, students must be proficient with the use of special technology such as screen magnification or screen reading software. In a collaborative effort with Outreach staff and local teachers of the visually impaired, we generated the following suggestions to assist teachers supporting visually impaired students taking this class.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Student should have a good background in computer use and use of other technology for people with visual impairments prior to taking BCIS.
2. Student should be a good advocate for his or her own special needs and modifications.
3. Student has a textbook in accessible format (large print, braille, voice, or electronic text).

POSSIBLE INSTRUCTIONAL MODIFICATIONS

1. Student completes assignments which are shorter than his or her classmates.
 - *Example: Student uses smaller subset of data to complete a data base assignment.*
2. Student completes fewer assignments than his or her classmates.
 - *Example: Student completes one project demonstrating skill instead of multiple projects.*
3. Student completes assignment with a peer.
 - *Example: Sighted student reads non-accessible portion of the website.*
4. Student works on a project in a cooperative learning context.
 - *Example: Visually impaired student contributes equally to the completion of the work.*
5. Student completes an alternative assignment which demonstrates the same skill sets.
 - *Example: Student is not required to use column format, but learns different formatting skills.*
6. Student demonstrates skill has been achieved and is not required to do the assignment.
 - *Example: Student shows sample of work previously completed.*
7. Student uses completed assignment from one class to fulfill the requirements of another class.
 - *Example: Student uses PowerPoint project for a history class to receive a grade in BCIS class.*
8. Student may use a different software application to complete a project.
 - *Example: Microsoft Word is used instead of a desktop publishing software that is less accessible.*
9. Student may use different media, more appropriate to their sensory needs, to complete a project.
 - *Example: Instead of photos, student adds recorded sound, music, tactile graphics, or objects to his or her presentation.*
10. Student completes assignments with additional instruction, tutoring or assistance from the vision teacher.
 - *Example: Student notifies the VI teacher of a need for additional assistance and arranges a meeting before or after school or other at some other time.*
11. Student completes assignments with the assistance of the computer teacher or content mastery staff.
 - *Example: Student arranges for additional assistance from the content mastery or computer teacher.*
12. Student works primarily in a self-paced format, completing assignments which demonstrate mastery of TEKS or other skills.
 - *Example: Many BCIS classes utilize a self-paced format, and students complete assignments independently or in cooperative learning groups.*
13. Student receives the basic content of a project from teacher in electronic format, and the student adds to it to demonstrate mastery of skill.
 - *Example: Computer teacher made CD containing sample projects to which VI student added content demonstrating skills.*

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

TEKS Technology Snapshots

<http://www.esc20.k12.tx.us/cut/materials/tek_snapshots.htm> A quick reference guide to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Technology for grades kindergarten through twelve. This resource lists examples of projects students might do to demonstrate mastery of skill levels.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Technology Applications:

<<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/ch126toc.html>> The state standards for technology for grades kindergarten through twelve.

TUTORIALS

The following are some websites that sell books, tapes, CD's and similar products for blind users who wish to learn computer skills. Whether you are a sighted teacher supporting a blind student, or a blind individual, these are good resources for learning computer skills using text to speech technology.

Iowa Assist: Iowa Department for the Blind, Accessible Step-by-Step Instructions for Speech Technology with Windows

<<http://www.blind.state.ia.us/assist/>> Tutorials for Windows users who are visually impaired on a variety of applications. These are products which must be purchased, but are low cost.

Access Technology Institute

<<http://www.accesstechnologyinstitute.com/catalog/courses/index.html>> Courses are available with a supporting textbook and CD ROM. See website for sample lessons.

National Braille Press, computer publications

<<http://www.nbp.org/comp.html#anchorwordquick>>

Microsoft Accessibility: Technology for Everyone

<<http://www.microsoft.com/enable/default.aspx>> This site contains keyboard shortcut lists, product information, tutorials and other information about Microsoft, its products, and adaptive issues.

The Evolution of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired in the 21st Century

Phil Hatlen, Superintendent, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Abstract: A discussion of the on-campus activities at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Key Words: TSBVI, blind, deafblind, programs

In the last issue of See/Hear, I presented a general picture of the evolution of schools for the blind. In this issue and the next, I will describe how the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired has evolved as we begin the 21st century.

While other schools for the blind have changed their focus in other ways, TSBVI continues to consider an on-

campus educational program that offers either day or residential placement as one of its highest priorities. This is based on a need for such a program, as expressed by local districts and parents throughout the state. Such a program offers definite advantages for students.

ON-CAMPUS PROGRAMS

TSBVI currently has programs in place, with highly skilled and experienced staff to provide educational experiences that include:

Individualized academic and practical curriculum

- Small classes with opportunities for tutorial help
- Courses offered at a local high school
- Instruction in practical academics
- Educational experiences especially designed for students at several levels (basic skills, early concepts, practical academics, applied academics, academic)

Career education

- Community-based enclave work experience
- Paid work experience in basic jobs
- Career awareness
- Career investigation
- Career preparation
- Career specialization
- Transition
- Work experience, job training, supported employment
- Courses in introduction to work

Self-esteem

- Success in small classes with individualized curriculum
- Opportunities to succeed in music, sports, art, and drama
- Individual and small group counseling
- A staff trained in understanding the dynamics of vision loss

Extra-curricular activities

- Sports, including track, wrestling, and swimming
- Music, vocal and instrumental
- Drama
- Arts and crafts
- Photography
- Cheer-leading
- Field trips throughout greater Austin

Education for challenging students

- Small classes
- Skills infused in daily curriculum
- Communication systems, language, behavior, and experience-based instruction stressed
- Community-based instruction
- Community-based work experience

Summer programs

- Social opportunities with other students with visual impairment
- Enrichment activities
- Specific instruction in braille, abacus, orientation and mobility, career education, and technology
- Recreation activities

Short classes

- Provided during the regular school year
- Intensive instructional experience with only a short time away from home
- Teach disability-specific skills that are pre-requisite to success in the regular classroom
- Provide individualized instruction to meet specific learning needs of academic students
- Provide temporary removal of multiple demands experienced in local schools
- Address learning gaps caused by instructional overload
- Provide opportunity for professional collaboration regarding the individual needs of students

This list provides examples of what TSBVI continues to offer to students in their on-campus, residential program. There are two movements of note in the evolution of this program. First, it is rare for a student to stay at TSBVI for more than three years. When a student is admitted to TSBVI, the local school district is informed that we will provide educational services based on specific needs of individual students. These needs are determined by the parents and local school district. When those needs are met, it is our intention to transition the student back to her local school. Second, please note that there is little reference to academic subjects in the list of services above. This is because local schools have become quite good at adapting and offering appropriate academic subjects. Reasons for referral to TSBVI are almost always for educational needs that are not related to academic courses.

However, over time it has become clear to many professionals that there are some academic subjects that are particularly difficult for braille-reading students. These are science, mathematics, and geography. Much of the learning material for these subjects is in spatial format, and braille is most efficient when read in a linear manner. TSBVI is beginning to offer algebra, geometry, biology, general science, and geography for students from local schools who cannot get these classes in an accessible manner in their local school district.

There are strong and compelling reasons why TSBVI must continue to be available for all blind and visually impaired students in the state as a campus-based program. There are programs the school has to offer that may not be available locally, or are difficult to adapt for these students. Local school districts, the parents, and TSBVI must work together to assure a shared partnership in the responsibility for the education of blind and visually impaired students in Texas.

There are a variety of ways in which TSBVI serves students in the state, and on-campus educational programs are just one. In the next *See/Hear* issue, many other services of TSBVI will be presented.

Consolidation Activities Begin

Terrell I. Murphy, Executive Director, Texas Commission for the Blind

Abstract: This article reviews the consolidation of health and human service agencies, particularly the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services. Initial consolidation of human resource, accounting and administrative departments has already occurred and public hearings have commenced.

Keywords: Consolidation; health and human services; HHSC; services to the blind; rehabilitation

In March I told *See/Hear* readers I didn't have a crystal ball into the legislative session. The only two things we knew for sure at that time were that the state was in an economic bind and that several bills had been filed to reorganize parts of state government, including health and human services. It was impossible to make accurate predictions about the future of services to blind Texans at that time because the state's economic situation, combined with the filing of several bills that proposed sweeping changes to health and human services, made accurate predictions on the effects on services to blind Texans impossible.

Well, it's the third week in September as I write this, and I still don't have a crystal ball. Most of you know by now that Texas will begin transitioning to a consolidated health and human service system. Transition to the consolidated system will be governed by a "Transition Plan" to be developed by HHSC and submitted to the Governor and the Legislative Budget Board by December 1, 2003. The Transition Plan will reflect the initial vision and timelines for the transformation to a consolidated system. Since it is anticipated that the full consolidation of HHS agencies and functions will take place over the next four to six years, modifications to the plan will be developed, reviewed and submitted as appropriate. Some of the consolidation and streamlining efforts have already begun, such as the consolidation of all human resource (personnel) functions from multiple agencies into HHSC and the migration to a common automated system for accounting and administrative transactions. The performance of administrative support services for all the entire health and human services system will be the responsibility of the HHSC.

H.B. 2292 by Representative Arlene Wohlgemuth is the bill that governs the transition process. The operations of the existing 12 Health and Human Services Agencies will be realigned by consolidating similar functions within 5 agencies. The Texas Commission for the Blind, as well as the Texas Rehabilitation Commission, Texas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and the Interagency Council on Early Childhood Intervention, will be abolished and all the powers, duties, functions, programs, and activities of the current agencies will be transferred to a new Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). There will also be three other new departments and the Health and Human Services Commission. The other new departments are:

1. Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS),
2. Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS), and
3. Department of State Health Services (DSHS).

The bill also created a Health and Human Services Transition Legislative Oversight Committee to facilitate the HHS agency consolidation with minimal disruption of services and to provide ongoing guidance on the health and human services delivery system in Texas. The Committee will consist of two Senators appointed by the Lieutenant Governor, two Representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House, and 3 public members appointed by the

Governor. The executive commissioner will serve as an ex-officio member.

The Committee held their organizational meeting on September 12th in Austin. The HHSC will conduct public hearings throughout the state to take public input in to the transition plan beginning on September 15th and lasting through September 25th. The Transition Committee will meet again in October to take testimony on the draft plan and the plan will be submitted to the Governor by December 1, 2003.

Although the consolidation activities have just begun, we have been assured by HHSC that there will be a separate division for the blind within DARS and that they do not want to disrupt services to our consumers. Our intent is to remain the premier service division in the nation in providing services to persons who are blind. Keep tuned for more changes as they occur.

Don't Let Your Life Be RECC-less Anymore! **Using the *Resources for the Expanded Core Curriculum***

By Julie Prause, M. Ed., Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Columbus ISD
KC Dignan, Ph.D., Professional Preparation Coordinator, TSBVI Statewide Outreach

Abstract: This article provides basic information about the Resources for the Expanded Core Curriculum, located on the TSBVI website. Included is a brief scenario illustrating its use.

Key Words: RECC, Expanded Core Curriculum, resources for the Expanded Core Curriculum, instructional strategies

It goes without saying that with the evolution of the internet, finding information is faster, simpler and typically more successful. Consider how we found the information we needed 10 years ago. Usually, it meant hours at the library, holding discussions with someone who was familiar with the subject, or maybe even digging through “professional” papers from conferences, workshops and meetings. And that was if you knew where to look and with whom to talk!

Now, when seeking information, most people will consider the internet, either through a computer at home, work, or the library. Of course finding the information can still be a challenge, especially for parents and new VI professionals (teachers of the visually impaired or TVI's; orientation and mobility specialists or COMS).

The RECC or Resources for the Expanded Core Curriculum is an internet-based guide created to help new VI professionals and parents find what they need as quickly and efficiently as possible. You can find the RECC at <www.tsbvi.edu/recc/>.

WHY USE THE RECC?

Veteran VI professionals have established routes, or “rabbit trails” for finding new information. They have favorite websites, know which publishers print what type of books, who has information on independent living devices. That is, until there is a change in the needs of their students.

New VI professionals have not yet had the experiences needed to build their own “rabbit trails”. They can spend hours looking for information, not knowing that information is available, or otherwise being frustrated in the search for a needed resource.

For parents, each week brings something new. How to find new and existing resources remains a challenge in our

time-crunched world.

The RECC is intended to help people find short cuts to information, and to be able to preview resources available on a given topic.

HOW TO USE THE RECC

The RECC is broken into 3 levels: a listing of the domains, table of contents for each domain, and the annotated listing of resources.

The RECC is divided in 20 domains.

- **Core Curriculum** (Math, Science, Social Studies, Art Education, Physical Education, and Literacy and Communication Skills),
- **Expanded Core Curriculum** (Vision Efficiency Skills, Orientation and Mobility, Assistive Technology, Career Education and Transition, Independent Living Skills, Social Interaction Skills, and Recreation and Leisure Skills), and
- **Additional Areas** (Early Childhood, Deafblind, Service Delivery Resources, Visually Impaired/Multi-impaired/, Vision and Visual Impairments, Family, Assessment).

The annotated listing of resources for each domain includes a title, author, annotation, a link to the resources, either for direct use or for purchase, and the format of the information; book, website, kit, video etc. To give you a taste of how to use the RECC, a scenario is included below.

Joan has a student who is interested in art. Joan believes that using art activities will help the student's problem-solving and fine motor skills. She wants to learn more about her options.

Step 1: Select a domain

What Joan found: Art Education

Step 2: Select a topical area

What Joan found: Instructional Strategies

Step 3: Select a topic for review

What Joan found: *Art: A great tool for teaching students with visual impairments.*

Step 4: Click on the topic

What Joan found: An annotated table to read and determine if it seems appropriate.

Step 5: Click on the title link

What Joan found: An article by Holly Cooper from the *See/Hear* newsletter.

One area of interest is that each table of contents includes a “Parent Resources” section. This information is specially flagged as important to families and/or parents of visually impaired children.

In conclusion, the RECC was not designed to be an all-inclusive bibliography of “everything” available to the Teacher of the Visually Impaired and Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist. It was designed to give new VI professionals and parents direction when locating needed information. Try it out!

American Foundation for the Blind Launches Helen Keller Kids Museum Online

Abstract: Announcement of an online exhibition for children devoted to Helen Keller.

Keywords: blind, deafblind, Helen Keller, history, biography

On June 27, in honor of Helen Keller's birthday, The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) announced the launch of an online multimedia exhibition devoted to Helen Keller (1880-1968). The Helen Keller Kids Museum Online, <<http://www.afb.org/braillebug/hkmuseum.asp>>, is an addition to AFB's award-winning Braille Bug children's web site.

Utilizing AFB's Helen Keller Archives, the museum offers children a guided tour of Helen Keller's remarkably rich life from her early childhood, her adulthood as champion for the blind, to her final years. The exhibit includes rarely seen photographs of Keller, including photographs of Keller with Mark Twain and Charlie Chaplin, as well as video footage of Keller speaking and flying in a biplane. You can read a letter to Keller from Mark Twain as well as a letter Keller wrote to the student body of Germany in 1933 after they burned her book, *Out of the Dark*. Also featured are "Fun Facts" about Keller and engaging quotes from Keller's lifetime. For schoolchildren working on school projects or reports, there is a recommended reading list and biography of Keller.

As with the rest of the Braille Bug site, the Helen Keller Kids Museum Online is fully accessible to people with disabilities. Visit the museum at <<http://www.afb.org/braillebug/hkmuseum.asp>>.

CHARGE CD-Rom Now Available

Abstract: An announcement of a new CHARGE CD-Rom developed by Dr. Jan van Dijk.

Keywords: blind, deafblind, CHARGE syndrome, parent education; service provider education

Dr. Jan van Dijk unveiled his new CHARGE CD-Rom at the recent International CHARGE Conference. "Living with CHARGE: Assessment, Prevention and Intervention of Challenging Behavior" contains up-to-date information about the syndrome. Using an interactive format, four children are discussed in depth, their behavior is analyzed and suggestions for intervention are discussed or demonstrated. The CD-Rom will help family members, doctors, teachers and other service providers become more aware of the enormous impact CHARGE has on the unique behavioral and learning challenges of children with this syndrome. Additional information about "Living with CHARGE" can be viewed at <www.aapnootmuis.com>. To purchase a copy, send a \$35 check to: Joe Franken, 4619 Spyglass Drive, Dallas, Texas 75287. "Pay to the order of" Joe Franken. Please indicate "CHARGE CD-Rom."

A Process for Identifying Students Who May Be At-Risk for Deafblindness

Abstract: An announcement of a new manual to guide the process of identifying students with deafblindness.

Keywords: deafblind, census, assessment, identification

Region 12 Education Service Center, Deafblind Stakeholder Education Committee, worked together with Texas Deafblind Outreach to develop a process for educational teams, teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing, and teacher of the visually impaired to use in identifying students who would be considered deafblind. This process includes a variety of forms and articles to help guide educators in obtaining appropriate assessment of vision and hearing, appropriate inclusion on the deafblind census, and guidance in determining modification needed by the student who has been identified as deafblind. A downloadable copy of this process and forms is available on the TSBVI website at <<http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/deafblind/process.htm>>.

TEA Public Input and Information Meetings, Fall 2003

Abstract: An announcement from TEA about public input and information meeting on special education services including an ESC meeting schedule.

Keywords: Texas; Texas Education Agency, special education; public meetings

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Texas Education Agency and Education Service Centers will be hosting 20 public input and information meetings to gather input on special education services for students with disabilities. The input from this and other public meetings will help the State identify and address areas for improvement and also build on current strengths related to the provision of special education. These public input meetings are a part of the Texas Special Education Continuous Improvement Process (TCIP) and will be held on an annual basis.

Region 13 Austin

Wednesday, November 19th
6:00 - 9:30 p.m. - Joe C. Thompson Center
The University of Texas at Austin
2405 Robert Dedman Drive
Austin, Texas 78705
Contact Phone: (512) 919-5432

Region 14 Abilene

Monday, October 27th
Time: 5:30 - 9:00 p.m. - Region 14 ESC
1850 Hwy 351
Abilene, TX 79601
Contact: (915) 675-8616

Region 16 Amarillo

Tuesday, November 4th
5:00 - 8:30 p.m. - Region 16 ESC
5800 Bell Street
Amarillo, TX 79109
Contact: (806) 677-5210

Region 6 College Station

Thursday, October 9
2:00 - 5:30 p.m. - College Station Hilton and
Conference Center
801 University Drive East
College Station, TX 77840
Contact: (936) 435-2149

Region 19 El Paso

Thursday, October 30
1:00 - 4:30 p.m. - Region 19 ES C
6611 Boeing Drive
El Paso, TX 79925
Contact: (915) 780-5091

Region 7 Kilgore

Monday, October 13th
Time: 3:00 - 6:30 p.m. - Region 7 ESC
1909 N. Longview Street
Kilgore, TX 75662-6827
Contact: (903) 988-6908

Region 18 Midland

Wednesday, November 12th
Time: 1:00 - 4:30 p.m. - Region 18 ESC
2811 LaForce Boulevard
Midland, TX 79711
Contact: (432) 567-3276, or 3217

Region 5 Silsbee

Thursday, October 16th
4:00 - 7:30 p.m. - Region 5 ESC Silsbee
3545 Hwy. 96 Bypass
Silsbee, TX 77656
Contact: (409) 386-5507

Region 10 Richardson

Tuesday, September 16
6:00 - 9:30 p.m. - Region 10 ESC
400 East Spring Valley
Richardson, TX 75083
Contact: (972) 348-1536

Region 12 Waco

Thursday, November 6
3:00 - 6:30 p.m. - Region 12 ESC
2101 West Loop 340
Waco, TX 76712
Contact: (254) 297-1154

Join PBS KIDS' ARTHUR® on a Communication Adventure at www.pbskids.org/arthur

Abstract: An announcement about interactive games on the ARTHUR® website designed to help children understand their peers with communication differences.

Keywords: disability, children, inclusion, interactive games

In May the ARTHUR Web team at WGBH/Boston announced a series of interactive games designed to help children understand their peers with communication differences. A children's series based on the best-selling books by Marc Brown, ARTHUR is produced for PBS by WGBH Boston and CINAR Corporation and is currently in its seventh season. It remains one of the most watched children's television programs among two- to five- and two- to eleven-year-olds.

In the first game *About Face* - <<http://pbskids.org/arthur/games/aboutface>> - Arthur tells a story, and viewers choose the facial expression that best describes how the characters would feel. "The game is designed to enforce the idea that facial expressions communicate information..., a concept [that] is especially important when communicating with people who are deaf or hard of hearing." In *You've Got Braille*, children can type a message and have it translated into Braille. By clicking on the link, *Marina's Guide to Braille and More*, children can learn "five fun facts" about communication for the blind.

In *The Effective Detective* <<http://pbskids.org/arthur/games/effectivedetective/index.html>> kids will hone their observation skills and learn the benefits of using descriptive language, both of which are important, especially when communicating with someone who is blind or visually impaired. Another feature, *Sign Design* <<http://pbskids.org/arthur/print/signdesign/>>, teaches basic finger spelling and signing skills through demonstration and provides information on sign language around the world.

"The season focus on communication differences is an extension of some of the original goals of the series," says WGBH executive producer Carol Greenwald. "Since its 1996 premiere, it has been a priority that ARTHUR be accessible to all children. In addition, we have always strived to help children have positive attitudes and to accept and include others, in spite of their differences. The new Web features are a fun way to help kids do this." Since its premiere in 1996, the series has been closed-captioned for viewers who are deaf or hard of hearing. In 1997 ARTHUR became the first daily program described for viewers who are blind or visually impaired.

The ARTHUR website also provides teacher and parent guides for a variety of relevant topics, including safety, peer relationships, sibling relationships, dealing with feelings, and health information. Go to <<http://pbskids.org/arthur/grownups/index.html>> for a list of these resources and ideas. For the complete guide to ARTHUR's *Communication Adventure*, go to <<http://pbskids.org/arthur/grownups/teacherguides/communication/index.html>>.

New Additions to the TSBVI Website

Check out these links to new resources available on the TSBVI Website:

- *Math and Reading Continuums* free download <<http://www.tsbvi.edu/publications/videos.htm>>
- *Braille Instruction Resources* <<http://www.tsbvi.edu/Education/brl-resources.htm>>
- *O&M Night Travel* <<http://www.tsbvi.edu/Education/night-travel.htm>>
- *Move, Touch, Read!* <<http://www.tsbvi.edu/Education/move-touch-read.htm>>
- *Motor Activities To Encourage Pre-Braille Skills* <<http://www.tsbvi.edu/Education/pre-braille-motor.htm>>

Perceptions of Light - International

Abstract: An announcement about the development of a new photographic book on deafblindness.

Keywords: deafblindness, photography

A number of the staff from Texas Deafblind Outreach were fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in the Deaf-Blind International Conference in Toronto this summer. The experience of sharing information and ideas about working with individuals who are deafblind with professionals, family members, and deafblind individuals from all over the world, made a profound impact on them. Learning about work being done on topics like interaction, touch, sexuality education, and research into the impact of sensory deprivation on development left them feeling reinvigorated and challenged to bring back some of the ideas and information to the United States and in particular Texas. One of the other things they brought back to share was an exquisite book titled, *Perceptions of Light - Canada*, a moving photographic documentary book portraying the personal realities of Canadians who are deafblind. This beautiful book was created by Natalie Schonfeld over the period of six years. It shares through a series of black and white photographs “*an intimate portrait of the distinct culture of individuals with deafblindness, and is a testament to their strength and the elevation of the human spirit.*”

Natalie is about to take on a new project on this topic. She wants to create an international body of work to illustrate the differing realities of the deafblind experience around the world, this new work would be titled, *Perceptions of Light - International*. She would like to achieve the following goals with this project:

- *Include people of all ages who are deafblind (either congenitally or adventitiously), with different degrees of deafblindness, living under different conditions and in different environments*
- *The existence of, or lack of, communication and language*
- *The very distinct realities of countries reflected upon the development, or non-development, of social services to aid the deafblind individual*
- *Cultural influences on deafblindness*
- *Different school systems and educational settings*
- *Social interaction between individuals who are deafblind and their families, as well as, with their interveners*
- *Types of homes, residences, living arrangements, orphanages, institutions*
- *Therapies and methods used to develop language and communication skills, and those used to keep the body active and able to interact with the external world*
- *Moments of passage (births, marriages, friendships, birthdays, deaths)*
- *Technologies used (including Morse Code as a tool for communication)*
- *Accomplishments*
- *Family life, foster parents, single parents*
- *Native community*
- *City vs. rural life*
- *Seasonal activities, such as camp, vacations, etc.*

To quote Natalie: “*This project will also emphasize those moments of humanity that connect us all: moments of accomplishment, moments of laughter and joy, moments of isolation and struggle, moments of interaction, moments experienced through a different realm of perception.*” Her hope is that by raising awareness about the lives of people who are deafblind and by challenging our perceptions of ourselves and of one another, empathy and understanding will be built and ultimately contribute to healthier, more tolerant communities.

If you are interested in learning more about this project, visit Natalie’s website at <<http://www.bbhosting.com/documentos/perceptions/index.html>>. If you want to explore becoming part of the development of *The Perception of Light - International*, contact her by email at <natalie.schonfeld@sympatico.ca>, phone (416) 889-7761 or mail to 147 Winnett Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M6C 3L7 Canada.

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Mail or e-mail your new classifieds to Carolyn Perkins:

TSBVI Outreach, 1100 West 45th St., Austin, TX 78756, or carolynperkins@tsbvi.edu.

An up-to-date Statewide Staff Development Calendar is posted on TSBVI's website at <www.tsbvi.edu>.

Intervener Team Training

November 21-22, 2003

The Four Points Hotel
Austin, Texas

Featuring: Joyce Olson,

**Coordinator of The Provincial Outreach Program
for Students with Deafblindness
Richmond, British Columbia**

Texas Deafblind Outreach is pleased to offer this very special training event for Texas Interveners and their educational team. Limited support is available if needed to help the intervener and one professional team member participate. Additional team members are welcome, but not eligible for travel assistance. More information on the hotel will accompany acceptance letter. If you are an intervener who did not receive a registration form or need additional information, contact:

Contact: Beth Bible at (512) 206-9103

or <bethbible@tsbvi.edu>

Low Incidence Disability Project

Presents Dr. Lilli Nielsen

January 19-21, 2004

The Three Low Incidence Disabilities Decentralized Function is offering this special "by invitation only" opportunity for educational teams from each of the twenty education service center regions to participate in an intensive training event on Active Learning Theory. Participants will complete the assessment for the *FIELA Curriculum* and learn how to implement this curriculum. Teams will be expected to complete follow-up assignments and submit data on their targeted students. District teams are being selected by the ESC 3 LID Specialist or Deafblind Specialist. Each region will be sending two or three teams to this event. Contact your ESC Three Low Incidence Specialist or Deafblind Specialist for more details.

Usher Weekend in Austin

**A Special Opportunity for
Students with Usher Syndrome
and their Parents**

January 22-25, 2004

For Students with Usher Syndrome

TSBVI Special Programs offers a program for middle school and high school students and high school graduates under the age of 22 with Usher Syndrome. This on-campus class is offered through the Special Programs department in collaboration with Texas Deafblind Outreach at TSBVI. The weekend will be informative and will provide an opportunity for these students to come together and share experiences. More details about the program will be distributed on the TXVIN and the TSBVI web page. So be watching!

Contact: Lauren Newton (512) 206-9119

January 24-25, 2004 - For Their Parents

There will be a special program for the parents held in conjunction with this student weekend. Parents of students attending the Special Programs' class are invited to arrive on Saturday afternoon and stay over Saturday night for information sharing and support before picking up their children. Parents of children younger than middle-school-age with Usher Syndrome are invited to participate in the parent portion of this event.

Contact Beth Bible at (512) 206-9103

Save these Dates!

February 27-28, 2004 - Austin

**Dr. Christine Roman on
Cortical Visual Impairment**

Sponsored by Region 13 ESC, APH, and TSBVI. Registration and travel reimbursement costs are available for new professionals. For more information, visit the TSBVI website or contact Jim Durkel at (512) 206-9270 or email <jimdurkel@tsbvi.edu>.

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INSITE
A Home-Based Model for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers
Who Are Multiply Disabled and Sensory Impaired

Six days of training for school and ECI professionals working with families who have children birth through five years of age who have multiple disabilities and sensory impairments. Topics include information on vision and hearing loss, communication development, motor development, active learning, and working with families. Training sites for 2003-2004 include:

Houston

December 16 & 17, 2003

February 2 & 3, 2004

April 27 & 28, 2004

Contact: Karen Crone, Region 4 ESC
(713) 744-6368

Wichita Falls

January 27 & 28, 2004

February 24 & 25, 2004

March 30-31, 2004

Contact: Tricia Lee, Region 9 ESC
(940) 767-3836

San Antonio

September 18 & 19, 2003.

October 20 & 21, 2003

November 12 & 13, 2003

Contact: Deborah Thompson, Region 20 ESC
(210) 370-5433

Austin

Dates in May or June to be announced

Contact: Beth Bible, Texas Deafblind Outreach
(512) 206-9103

To request INSITE training in your region, contact
Gigi Newton at (512) 206-9272
<giginewton@tsbvi.edu>.

TSBVI Annual Parent Weekend
Saturday, January 31, 2004

The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired will host its 3rd annual Parent Weekend Saturday, January 31, 2004. Mark your calendars now and plan to spend lots of time with your child's TSBVI teacher, residential instructor, classmates and their families. The theme for this year's event will be "How to find and adapt recreational activities for your child".

Get ready to have some fun!

Contact Roy Martz @ (512) 206-9316
<roymartz@tsbvi.edu>

Transition Workshop
February 21-22, 2004

This two-day workshop will familiarize families with issues of adult life for young people with deafblindness. Participants will learn about the lives of young adults who are currently leading lives in the community. They will learn how to plan and prepare for a preferred lifestyle, and how to locate the support needed to make the plans become reality.

More details will be available later this fall. Watch for the flyer!

Contact David Wiley, or (512)206-9219
<davidwiley@tsbvi.edu>

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TSBVI Technology Workshops

This year TSBVI will not hold a single Technology Institute, but will offer several all-day workshops throughout the school year. Workshops will be held on the TSBVI campus. Cost is \$50.00 per participant; lunch provided. Paraprofessionals and Braille transcriptionists are free. Please see <<http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/tech-workshop.htm>> for complete details and to download registration forms.

Technology for the Student with Low Vision December 6 - Saturday

An overview of software applications for screen enlargement, whiteboard magnification using the Mimeo <www.mimeo.com>, and video magnification products.

Digital Talking Books January 16 - Friday

Talking books are now available in more compact formats than the old books on tape. This is an introduction to digital talking books and their available formats. Digital talking books and digital talking book players will be demonstrated.

Integrating Tech Into The Classroom for MIVI Students to Promote Literacy Awareness February 6 - Friday

Learn about generating meaningful activities for MIVI students, including promoting literacy awareness activities, using computer based talking books and other activities using PowerPoint, Clicker 4 and other applications.

TSBVI Distance Education

These presentations will be offered through the TETN network at the Regional Education Service Centers. Contact your ESC to learn if they are participating. For general information contact Karen Scanlon at TSBVI (512) 206-9314 or email to <karensanlon@tsbvi.edu>.

January 14, 2004

Beyond Single Switch Games & Toys: Advanced Level

February 18, 2004

Working Together-the VI Teacher & the Diagnostician

March 10, 2004

The Braille Note

April 14, 2004

Motor Issues for Babies with Visual Impairments

Functional Academic Curriculum for Exceptional Students Training December 2, 2003 ESC XI - Fort Worth, Texas

During this two-day workshop, participants will become familiar with the implementation of the F.A.C.E.S. curriculum modules in Science, Social Studies, Math, Personal Health, and Vocational. The primary purposes of the F.A.C.E.S. curriculum are to teach meaningful, age appropriate skills within school and non-school settings and to systematically evaluate students' progress within those settings.

Contact: Olga Uriegas at <ouriegas@esc11.net>
To register: Central Registration Information System
at <www.esc11.net>

AER Orientation and Mobility Division Conference December 13-16, 2003 New Orleans, Louisiana

Contact: George Tully or Lynn Gautreaux at
<oandm@lsvi.org>

ACCESS Conference December 9-10, 2003 South Padre Island, Convention Center

Contact: Debbie Buchanan at 956-984-6202 or
Clabelia Solis at 210-632-3285

AFB, Josephine L. Taylor Leadership Institute March 5-7, 2004 Washington, DC

Contact: Gabriella Smith, American Foundation for the Blind, 11 Penn Plaza, Suite 300, New York, NY 10001
212-502-7600 or afbinfo@afb.net

Moebius Syndrome Conference July 9, 10 & 11, 2004 Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas

For information email to <txmoebiu@flash.net> or visit
<<http://www.moebiussyndrome.com/2004/texas2004.htm>>

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SEE/HEAR

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Austin, Texas 78756

If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, please call Beth Bible at (512) 206-9103 or email to bethbible@tsbvi.edu.

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March 1st for the Spring edition
June 1st for the Summer edition
September 1st for the Fall edition

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