

TX SenseAbilities

A Bi-Annual Publication about Visual Impairments and DeafBlindness for Families and Professionals

Summer 2017

Volume 10 | Number 3

CONTENTS

FAMILY WISDOM	2
The Unexpected	2
A Family's Participation in ECC Activities at Region 13	3
'Behind a Closed Door': Ava's DeafBlind Ability Statement	4
Parker's Poems	4
Letter from the TAPVI President	6
'Tips for Home or School': Questions for Parents of School Age Children in Planning Transitions to New Teachers	7
'Tips for Home or School': Promoting Wearing of Glasses	8
EFFECTIVE PRACTICES	12
Understanding Concept Development and Related Challenges for Academic Students with DeafBlindness	12
Active Learning Approach and the Standard Curriculum	17
I Can't Hear You; It's too Dark in Here	20
Where Are All the Babies? Early Identification of Visual Impairment and Combined Vision and Hearing Loss	24
Paddles Up! Building a Dragon Boat Team at TSBVI	26
NEWS AND VIEWS	29
What's New in Short-Term Programs	29
Sensory Day at the Meadows Museum	30
Curricula & Resource Guides to Assist the TVI, COMS, and Families in Assessment, Instruction, and Adaptations in the Core Curriculum and Expanded Core Curriculum Areas	32
National Federation of the Blind Launches Ride-Sharing Testing Program	33
Texas Medicaid Mosquito Repellent Benefit Aims to Protect Texans	34
A New Comic Book Supports Special Needs Siblings	35
Working with Partners	37
Websites of Interest to Families	38

TX SenseAbilities is a collaboration of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Texas Health and Human Services Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program (BCVDDP).



The Unexpected

Heather Joy Magdeleno, parent, Phoenix, AZ

Abstract: The author shares her personal journey of understanding the unexpected challenges and gifts of being married while bringing up two children with disabilities. We invite you to check out Heather Joy's other blogs at HeathersJoys at <https://heathersjoys.wordpress.com/2017/05/06/the-unexpected/>

Keywords: advocacy, problem-solving

I didn't expect marriage to look like this. Maybe I was imagining what some of us might imagine before getting married and having children: going on trips together, creating a home together, him doing his own creative projects, me gardening, us supporting each other, loving each other. Him taking care of the bills, me doing the shopping. Maybe we would find an "open-minded" church together, maybe we would build community. Friends would come by for a bonfire in the front yard, we would host neighborhood dinner parties. We would give birth to our beautiful children, at home, in water. I would breastfeed and practice attachment parenting. We wouldn't need to go to the doctor much because of our conscious eating and living. We would visit family whenever we wanted, in Santa Barbara and Colorado. We would visit beautiful places with our kids and camp and walk on the beach and love each other in the night. We would have the world in the palm of our hands and we would look at each other and be proud. This is the life I imagined, some of the reasons why I thought marriage and kids might be a good idea. Although I didn't really know. Just this

feeling of what it could and should be.

Then we had two babies that required constant care. The nights were broken up, rarely a full night's sleep and our regular conversations were suddenly about pumping and breastmilk and poop and lack of it and exhaustion and fear of the future and survival. Our days blended into the nights and we were overwhelmed. We had moments of calm and connection and loving each other, but mostly we were caring for our babies, at times, just keeping them alive. Our marriage began to slip away. Out of fear I became controlling. Everything was out of my control, so I tried to control my husband, my mom, my family. I survived only and lived fearing the future. I started to question, "What is the point of being married anyway?" This became my attitude and I was no longer able to see my ally by my side. Walls were built and we spent more energy keeping them up than if we had softened our hearts. We lived like this for years. Unhappy. Fighting against the very person we needed.

Then one night my heart opened up to him. It was a miracle. I thought we were over. For almost a year we had been living together, lovingly taking care of our children, determined to not let go of this, but we were no longer "together." Suddenly, on this full-moon night, my heart opened and I knew it was the right thing. This man wasn't going anywhere, he was not going to leave my side. He had been with us through thick and thin and I knew I needed him.

A Family's Participation in ECC Activities at Region 13

Fran Shafers, parent

Abstract: Parent Fran Schafers describes how participation in the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) activities offered at the Region 13 Educational Service Center affected her family.

Key Words: Expanded Core Curriculum, encouragement, Goalball, social network

As you may know, the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) is composed of nine skill areas of instruction that were created specifically for children with blindness or visual impairment. The nine skill areas include compensatory access, sensory efficiency, assistive technology, orientation and mobility, independent living, social interaction, recreation and leisure, career education, and self-determination. Many of us learn these skills by observation. Children with visual impairment have limited opportunities to observe such skills and therefore need specific instruction in order to learn and use them in their everyday lives.

Kylie's participation in the ECC programs offered through the Region 13 Educational Service Center has helped her to develop more confidence in her skill levels and have enhanced her ability to participate with her peers at school. She has used her iPad and BrailleNote for communication with her peers. They have expressed interest in how Kylie uses braille and speech-output programs. Kylie has really come leaps and bounds since beginning middle school!

In addition, participation in the activities through

Region 13 has helped our family bond together. When we took part in the rowing activity as a family (which we never would have thought of doing, because of Kylie's fear of trying new things), we saw Kylie develop a desire to improve herself by hearing words of encouragement from her peers. To her surprise, with multiple attempts she did it!

Through Goalball, she has increased her fitness and communication skills. When she goes to practice it makes her feel like she's part of a team. It gives her the sense of belonging and that she is not the only blind child, but there are others who can do amazing things! She comes out of it with more motivation and drive to excel because her teammates and her coach teach her to push through to succeed. Because when you get hit, you get back up! They are giving her the tools she'll need to carry her through the obstacles she'll face throughout her life and that to me is invaluable.

To be with other families that have children with same disability gives you a sense of hope, peace and encouragement. It gives us the opportunity to come together and share our experiences for our children to take and use with them to succeed in their lives.

Knowing that you are not alone, and there are other families that deal with the same challenges, is the greatest gift because, when we share our experiences, we hope to encourage other families to do the same.

I just want other families to know that there are resources out there that are within your reach. Our

children need to connect and build the social network they need to feel a part of a community.

‘Behind a Closed Door’: Ava’s DeafBlind Ability Statement

Ava Bullis, student, New Jersey

Abstract: A young author, who is DeafBlind as the result of Usher Syndrome, shares a poem she wrote for a school assignment where she was encouraged to express her abilities in artwork.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, DeafBlind, Usher Syndrome, language arts, disability awareness, self-expression, self-determination

People have many different disabilities.
Do you know their capabilities?
Try and see the friend they can be ...
Ask questions. Be kind.
And have an open mind.
Don’t shut the door.
You could be missing out on so much more.
Like all of us, they are a piece in our world.
Like a stitch in a hem.
So be who you are.
And make a new ... FRIEND!

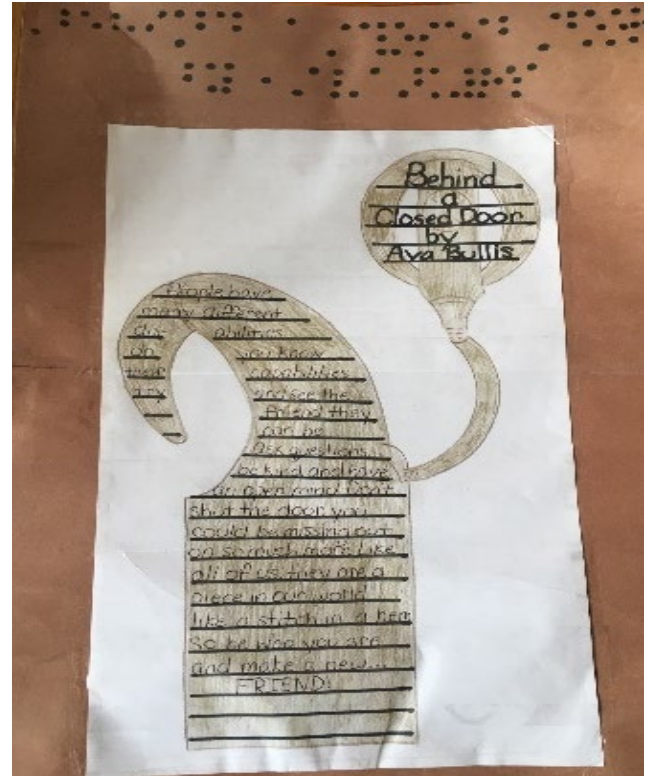


Photo of a page with poem titled “Behind a Closed Door,” with author’s name in braille with poem written in the drawing of a cochlear implant.

Parker’s Poems

Parker E., student, Round Rock Independent School District

Abstract: Parker, a second-grader in school year 2017—2018, is a dual media learner. Parker’s mom shares that he loves technology, karate, and writing funny poems and stories on his BrailleNote.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, blind, visually impaired, language arts, disability awareness, self-expression

Introduction by Belinda Fayard, Certified Itinerant Teacher of the Visually Impaired: Parker is very creative and the first poem, "Marker," really touched me because he writes with 20/20 pens. I thought so many of our low-vision kiddos can appreciate his description of a marker.



Photo of Parker kneeling in a field of bluebonnets and Indian paintbrush.

Marker

A marker has 1,000,000,000 pens in it
scribble scribble
It is like a computer printing
scribble scribble
When you touch it, it is printing on you
scribble scribble.

This poem is called "Things that are craycray," which is slang for crazy. It's just cute and funny.

Things that are craycray

Tickling your sister,
eating paper,
hitting the car window with a water bottle,
throwing your jump-house in the air,
going on a slide backwards,
dancing in the rain,
jumping off the stairs.

This poem is called "My Color Poem." Parker's creativity and vivid imagination are evident in this beautiful piece.

My Color Poem

Orange is bored of sitting in the car.
Yellow is me on my red scooter.
Green is me on the grassy field
and brown is sad and sick.
Purple is me under a disco ball.
Blue is me on a sailboat at sunset.
Black is anger and loneliness
and red is excitement.
Today I am feeling purple.

This last submission is written from the perspective of a developing chick inside the egg. His class had eggs in an incubator and learned all about the stages of growth.

From inside the egg

Wow, what is this place? Where am I?
I am hot. Boom boom boom boom! Am I asleep
or is it so dark?
What is the yellow stuff about? Can I get out? Or
is this my home and is someone sitting on me?
I need a friend! I see my blood vessels! I need to
get out or a friend and night light.
Am I sitting in space? Well I can't move, so not.
Just do something.

Letter from the TAPVI President

Karen Whitty, president, TAPVI

Abstract: The status of the Texas Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairment is described, including ways to get involved with TAPVI.

Keywords: dynamic, parent, volunteers, impact

It's hard for me to believe that my term as president of TAPVI is almost over. Being part of such a dynamic team, which strives to connect, support and educate families around Texas affected by visual impairment, has been amazing and I have grown so much from the experience. What excites me even more is to see new leadership come along so that others can let their gifts and skills help grow TAPVI.

Since I became a board member, in 2015, our organization has grown tremendously. Our membership is composed of families and professionals all across the state of Texas. We have started support groups in Dallas, Austin, Fort Worth and soon we will be starting a support group in Houston. TAPVI has many goals to positively affect families around the state, but to do this we need our members to get involved. TAPVI is a nonprofit organization that is run solely by volunteers which means we need help

TAPVI board elections are held annually from May 1 to May 20 and we are always looking for leaders to help with serving on our board. Our board is composed of parents who have a child

or family member with a visual impairment and our advisors are composed of professionals and community members.

Aside from board elections, we also need volunteers who fit the descriptions that follow and would like to chair a committee or work within one of these committees:

- Parenting a child with visual impairments
- Leadership skills
- Desire to connect to other parents
- Passion to help families
- Enjoy meeting new people
- Computer skills
- Organizational skills
- Grant writing
- Nonprofit skills
- Legal skills
- Marketing skills
- Fundraising skills
- Event-planning skills
- Any nonprofit board experience

If you are interested or have questions, please email us at tapvifamilies@gmail.com.

TAPVI looks forward to continued support of families throughout Texas. Remember, together we are better and together we will help alleviate the isolation that can be brought about by visual impairment. On behalf of the TAPVI Board of Directors, I thank you for being a part of TAPVI.

'Tips for Home or School': Questions for Parents of School Age Children in Planning Transitions to New Teachers

Idaho Project for Children and Youth with Deaf-Blindness

Abstract: The following "Tips for Home or School" can support families in preparing for changes in their child's educational team membership. We are grateful for the Nevada Dual Sensory Impairment Project's permission to reprint and encourage you to check out their other "Tips for Home or School" at <http://www.unr.edu/ndsip/secpagesEnglish/tips.html>. All tips sheets are available in English and Spanish.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, DeafBlind, transition, new teachers and team members, school collaboration

1. Does the teacher have information about my child's medication needs?
2. Does the staff know how to recognize what is, and what is not, a medical emergency for my son or daughter?
3. Does the school have a medical release and insurance information on file?
4. Is all the staff familiar with support staff terminology (e.g., abduction, supine, etc.) that is used when discussing my child?
5. Is the school staff familiar with my child's particular positioning requirements with regard to the purpose of particular positions, equipment, proper use of and precautions, amount of time in certain positions and equipment, and what kind of activities my child can be participating in during those times?
6. Is the staff familiar with how my child communicates through his/her body language? Have they created a body language dictionary for staff members and other children?
7. Is the staff aware of the signs and communication systems that my child uses at home? Are they the same signs and systems used at school?
8. Has the staff conducted any form of person centered planning (e.g., MAPS) for my child? Is that information included in my child's file?
9. How will the general education teacher receive information about my child?
10. Has the general education teacher observed my child in his or her current classroom?
11. Is the general education teacher familiar with my child's IEP goals and objectives?
12. Has the general education teacher been included in transition meetings?
13. Does the special education staff have a copy of the general education classroom schedule?
14. Has an instructional schedule matrix been developed that demonstrates where my child has an opportunity to practice his or her goals and objectives?

15. Do we, as a family, have priority goals and objectives (e.g., communication)? Have we discussed our priorities with the school staff?
16. Have classroom participation plans been developed for my son or daughter? (e.g., adaptations, modifications, etc.)
17. How does the staff know that my child is meeting his or her goals and objectives?
18. How, when and why do they make changes in my child's program?
19. How often does the staff communicate with me? How do they do it (e.g., daily notebook, telephone, team meeting)?
20. Does my child's team meet on a regular basis?
(Note: Regular is a relative term and may mean once a week for some students and quarterly for other students.)
21. Does the team keep meeting minutes?
22. Does the team always leave with an action plan?
23. Are we always included in the team meetings?
24. Has the team developed a portfolio of information that describes my son or daughter's program (e.g., videotapes, signs used at home and school, classroom participation plan examples, meeting minutes, etc.) that can be given to new teachers and staff?

'Tips for Home or School': Promoting Wearing of Glasses

Jill Grattan and Alycia Burton

Abstract: The following "Tips for Home or School" can be beneficial to both families and educational staff in finding ways to help a child wear his or her eyeglasses. We are grateful for the Nevada Dual Sensory Impairment Project's permission to reprint and encourage you to check out their other "Tips for Home or School" at <http://www.unr.edu/ndsip/secpagesEnglish/tips.html>. All tips sheets are available in English and Spanish.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, DeafBlind, vision, eyeglasses, programming

Finding out your child needs glasses can be an

unsettling experience, but it may also bring good news. Corrective lenses can make a helpful difference both in your child's education and in your child's day-to-day life. They may allow your child to have an easier time seeing your face, seeing schedules (e.g., object or pictures schedules), working on a tablet or computer, completing homework, and reading or looking at a book. Glasses can help your child see and recognize important people, make it easier for your child to find and play with toys, and recognize objects and places. Glasses may cut down on eye strain and headaches. Glasses do not have to be a traumatic experience for you and your child.

Helpful terms from the American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus:

- Ophthalmologist — a medical doctor (a minimum of eight years of medical training) who specializes in vision and eye care who can diagnose and treat all diseases of the eyes. An ophthalmologist can practice medicine and surgery in addition to prescribing eyeglasses and contact lenses.
- Optometrist — a health-care professional (not a medical doctor) who provides vision care, such as eye exams and vision tests, and prescribes glasses and contacts. Optometrists can detect certain eye abnormalities and prescribe a limited number of medications for some eye diseases.
- Optician — a technician who designs, verifies, and fits eyeglass lenses and frames and contacts. Opticians do not test vision, write prescriptions, diagnose, or treat eye diseases.

Tips to make a trip to the eye doctor easier:

- Before going to an optometrist or ophthalmologist, call ahead and ask if the ophthalmologist or optometrist has experience working with children with special needs. If the staff does not have experience working with a child with special needs, consider trying to find an office that does.
- Ask if they have experience fitting frames to the face of a child with unique facial features (for example, microtia, a condition in which a child has only one ear; many genetic conditions are signified by facial features of slightly different proportions).
- Ask if you and your child can visit the office before the appointment so your child can

become familiar with the office and the equipment.

- Ask if the staff will allow extra time for your child to process the information.
- Ask what times are the quietest or least busy and make an appointment accordingly.
- Ask the eye doctor if there is a charge to refit your child's glasses if the glasses get bent.
- For more ideas and information, see our "Tip Sheet: Questions for Your Eye Doctor."

When you and your child go to get the new glasses, there are two important things to verify before you start encouraging your child to wear his or her glasses.

- The frames must fit your child's head correctly. It is important to work with your child and his or her doctor to pick out frames that are appropriate and comfortable.

A. Make sure the frames do not pinch your child's nose or ears. This may require several trips to the eye doctor to fine-tune; make sure to take the time and plan for multiple trips to ensure the glasses are comfortable. There are many different ways for glasses to stay on your child's face — frames curling behind ears are only one option. Ask about the options available and determine what is most comfortable for your child.

B. When trying on glasses, have your child play. Glasses fit differently when lying on your back than when sitting in a chair or looking down to examine something on the ground. Make sure the glasses are comfortable and positioned correctly for your child in all of the positions he/she may play and work in.

C. Remember, even with modifications (like a sports band to hold the glasses in place), have your child play in a variety of positions; the modification may work great when sitting but may fail to hold the glasses in the proper place when your child is looking down.

D. If you are having trouble getting the eye doctors to understand how the frames are not working for your child, take pictures of the situations in which the frames are uncomfortable (more on this below).

E. If your child's glasses get bent, simply make an appointment with the eye doctor to get the glasses refitted to your child's face.

- The lenses must match your child's prescription and that prescription must be accurate and current. If your child is having a hard time wearing the glasses or if his vision is not improved with the glasses, have the prescription checked.

A. Remember, your child's vision may change throughout time. For example, a prescription may work one year; however, your child's vision may change, so the prescription may not work the following year.

B. To have your child's prescription checked, make sure to take the glasses with you to the eye exam.

C. It is important to ask if your child should only wear the glasses during certain activities or throughout the day.

Remember, your child needs time to adjust to the prescription. Your child's vision with glasses is different from what had previously been his normal vision. This change in vision might make

your child feel disoriented, dizzy, or uncomfortable until he gets used to the prescription. It may take time for your child to realize that he sees more clearly with glasses.

Ideas on how to help your child tolerate wearing glasses:

- If possible, have your child help pick out the glasses. If your child helps to choose the glasses, she may like the glasses much better and be more inclined to wear them.
- Consider purchasing a really cheap pair of glasses or sunglasses (e.g., dollar store, supermarket) and practice wearing the glasses. Practice taking the glasses on and off and let the child experience what wearing glasses will feel like. If the glasses you buy for practice actually correct vision, then remember to take the lenses out so that the child does not get blurry vision from the practice glasses. Make it fun to wear the practice glasses!
- Initially, have your child wear her glasses during an activity she enjoys where the lenses will make the most difference (reading books, watching a movie, playing with toys, doing an art project). This allows your child to see the glasses really do make a difference. Make sure this activity is an interactive one between you and your child and that your child enjoys the activity.
- Build time into your child's daily routine for wearing glasses. Initially, this time may be very short (two to five minutes). As your child demonstrates tolerance (does not complain, fight to prevent you from putting the glasses on her face, throw the glasses), gradually increase either the number of times per day

the child wears the glasses OR the length of time the child wears glasses.

- Very slowly build up the length of time your child is required to wear glasses.
- Gradually, increase the number of activities in which your child is required to wear glasses.
- A timer may help your child tolerate wearing glasses; when the time is up, the glasses come off. Again, initially set the timer for short periods of time. For some children a visual timer may be helpful.
- Provide lots of praise for your child whenever she wears her glasses, keeps them on for the designated period of time, does not complain when you put them on her, puts on her glasses independently, etc.
- Initially, small rewards may be helpful (stickers, tokens, special toys that are only for wearing glasses). Deliver the reinforcer if your child keeps her glasses on for the designated amount of time.

Just as important as learning how to wear glasses is learning to take glasses off in an appropriate manner. Teach your child to always hand his glasses to an adult when he takes them off. Praise your child for giving his glasses to an adult. Even if he takes them off before the designated time, for example, you might say, “Thank you for giving me your glasses. It is not time to take them off yet,” and put the glasses back on your child.

Specialty frames companies make glasses to customer specifications — for example, these companies advertise they make glasses for children with special needs and unique facial features (e.g., different facial proportions, children with one or no ears, children who wear

hearing aids of all types). These companies are not endorsed by NDSIP. This is a list simply for your convenience:

Specs4us — <https://www.specs4us.com/>

Spokiz — <https://spokiz.com>

Swissflex — <http://www.swissflex-eyewear.com/en/home>

References

American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus. (2011). Difference between and ophthalmologist, optometrist and optician. Retrieved on February 23, 2017, from <https://www.aapos.org/terms/conditions/132>

Anthony, T. (1996, September). Guidelines to parents on introducing glasses to young children. See/Hear Newsletter, Summer 1999. Retrieved November 12, 2002, from www.tsbvi.edu/outreach/summer99/parents-glasses.htm

Fassler-Nelson, E. (March 27, 2015). Help! My special needs child has to get glasses. Retrieved on February 23, 2017, from <http://community.fireflyfriends.com/blog/article/help-my-special-needs-child-has-to-get-glasses>

Weber, S. (2015). Kids need glasses; won't tolerate anything on face. Retrieved on February 23, 2017, from <https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/2015/05/29/autism-challenge-kid-needs-glasses-wont-tolerate-anything-face>

Understanding Concept Development and Related Challenges for Academic Students with DeafBlindness

Matt Schultz, DeafBlind Education Consultant, Texas DeafBlind Project

Abstract: This article is a research-based examination of ways to understand the development of concepts by students with DeafBlindness. It also provides practical suggestions on how to teach and reinforce those concepts for academic students with DeafBlindness.

Key Words: concepts, concept development, DeafBlindness

Much of the information in this article was obtained through collaboration between the Texas DeafBlind Project and the educational team that supports Natalie Avila at McNeil High School in Round Rock, TX. Team members include Rachel Collins, teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI); Brit Budd, teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing (TDHH); and Jennifer Groeshen, intervener and classroom teacher. Natalie is 17 years old and in the 11th grade. She attends classes within the Regional Day School Program for the Deaf at McNeil High School in Round Rock, Texas. Natalie is congenitally DeafBlind and has no vision. She wears a cochlear implant and can hear some environmental and speech sounds. She uses tactile sign language to communicate and reads and writes braille.



Natalie 'listens' to her teacher explaining concepts using tactile sign language

Students with DeafBlindness often have difficulty accessing incidental information from their environment. This lack of access to information, stemming from a combined hearing and vision loss, can lead to difficulty in developing concepts. For example, students with DeafBlindness often have difficulty understanding how the world works, how parts of the world relate to other parts, how these parts are the same and how they are different.

These types of misunderstandings can result in conceptual gaps. If the students have not touched “it” or experienced “it,” they will probably not have a complete understanding of “it.” This poses a real challenge for students with DeafBlindness being served in academic settings. In order to meet those challenges, we need to increase awareness of how humans develop a conceptual understanding of the world we live in. The work and research of Jean Piaget, a French psychologist; Jan van Dijk, a Dutch psychologist and expert in DeafBlindness; and Kurt Fisher, an American psychologist, can help provide a better understanding of how concepts are formed.

Jean Piaget described the period of exploration and interaction that typical learners undergo during the first two years of life as the sensorimotor period. During this foundational period of learning, children pair motor movements with sensory experiences. We tend to refer to these explorations as “play”; however, these opportunities extend beyond playtime. Students with typical hearing and vision spend every waking minute receiving sensory information through their auditory, visual, olfactory, gustatory, and vestibular systems. They are continuously listening, looking, touching, tasting, and feeling objects, as well as people, in their environment. A two-year old child’s brain and body has had millions of sensorimotor experiences by the time a second birthday party rolls around. The neurological framework for all future learning is formed during these foundational explorations and interactions.

Piaget also explained that, for children to move from one stage of development to another, three factors must be in place. The

first factor is physical and physiological growth. The second factor is sensorimotor experience, the acting on and thinking about real objects. The third factor is social interaction. This is interaction that occurs by playing, talking, questioning, and working with others, especially peers.

Jan van Dijk told us that all we know can be traced back to our actions and experiences. Our experiences moving through the world and interacting with people, places and things form our conceptual understanding of the world. These experiences help us form concepts that may be unique to us. We are often drawn to strong conceptual experiences based on our own personal preferences. For example, my father grew up on a ranch. He loved ranch life and working with his favorite uncle on the ranch. His experiences growing up and working on the ranch resulted in his becoming a skilled horseman. I was raised in the suburbs; I can’t tell you the difference between a quarter horse and an Appaloosa, let alone get one to a gallop! In short, we learn the most about topics that we are exposed to and enjoy. When we are allowed to initiate a learning experience based on our preferences, the neural pathways that are formed around the concepts involved grow at an increased rate and strength. Concepts learned in this fashion become embedded within us and form a framework for other concepts to be built upon.

Kurt Fischer said we build on basic concepts by adding bigger and bigger conceptual pieces to our understanding, systematically adding new pieces of information on top of existing pieces. For example, when a child first plays with Legos, they learn about the individual properties of one Lego: its size, color, shape

and texture. Next, they may discover those same properties in another Lego. Eventually they learn how the two Legos fit together. All the while, these children are developing an understanding of what a “Lego” is and that there can be “Legos” of different sizes and shapes. This is the process of concept building. New concepts are built by attaching them to existing concepts.

The information about concept development provided by Piaget, van Dijk, and Fischer highlights some important questions for our students with DeafBlindness served in academic settings, students like Natalie. How do we provide sensorimotor learning opportunities for Natalie? How can we create the repetition that occurs during this period for typical learners? Can we create repetition that includes social interaction? How can we attach new concepts to existing concepts? How can we create rich experiences that are based on Natalie’s interests?

Let’s explore each question, one at a time.

How do we provide sensorimotor learning opportunities for Natalie?

It is not appropriate to simply surround Natalie with objects and ask her to “play” all day at school. She has moved beyond the sensorimotor stage of development. However, creating lesson plans that allow for sensorimotor experiences that are tied to her academic curriculum is an appropriate and necessary way to foster her concept development.

This type of experience took place during a recent lesson in Natalie’s agriculture class. During classroom instruction, Natalie was informed that pig breeds can be classified into two categories,

pigs with drooping ears and pigs with erect ears. After the lecture and note-taking portion of the class, Natalie and her intervener traveled to a nearby farm. She was provided an opportunity to walk through the pig stalls and tactually explore each animal to see if they had drooping or erect ears. This exploration led her to discover some sheep. She eagerly explored their ears asking questions about their characteristics. She expressed a great deal of interest in the softness of the sheep’s wool and the difference in fine wool, medium wool, and long wool. Natalie was delighted to learn that that soft wool is used to make clothes. This information connected to a past lesson about clothing fabric. It was a topic in which she had shown interest in the past and she was delighted to feel wool on the sheep! This sensorimotor learning experience allowed Natalie to explore and make conceptual discoveries on topics that were meaningful to her.

Natalie’s team is working on scheduling a regular time in her daily or weekly schedule for experiential learning opportunities. The planning for such experiences involves multiple members of her educational team: the TVI, the TDHH, her intervener, the content specialists, the Orientation and Mobility Specialist, and Natalie’s family.

How can we create the repetition that occurs during the sensorimotor period for typical learners during Natalie’s school day? Can we create repetition that includes social interaction with peers and familiar adults?

Repetition is beneficial to all learners.

Teachers of all students create and administer lessons by pre-teaching, teaching and re-teaching. For Natalie, special attention needs to be paid to this process. Pre-teaching the

main components of her lesson before diving into the content allows Natalie the opportunity to gain a clear understanding of how to categorize the information that follows. For many of our DeafBlind students served in academic settings, facts come at them in fragmented bits and pieces of information. When they have a clear understanding of the main points, it allows them to grab the pieces and tie them to the bigger picture with greater ease. Taking time before each lesson to carefully explain the main points of each lesson creates a level of efficiency in the learning that otherwise would not exist.

Allowing Natalie to write the information down and engage in conversation about the vocabulary and concepts involved will support her reading and writing skills as well as her concept development. Natalie's team sets aside time in class for her to braille vocabulary words and definitions associated with each lesson. They support her in creating an organization system for each class that she can reference when she desires. Her team also creates time at the end of the day where re-teaching of main points from the day's lesson can occur. This time provides Natalie an opportunity to ask additional questions and participate in additional conversations about the day's instructional content.

Additional opportunities for repetition can be provided through alternative homework assignments. Natalie could be assigned to discuss parts of her lesson with classmates or family members. To help structure these discussions, support can be provided in creating interview questions or mini presentations of the material. Team members can facilitate an interview process between

Natalie and classmates both in and out of the classroom environment. The team can allow her to create a record of these interviews, one that she can read during independent time at school and at home. She may need the team's support in sharing the information gathered from these conversations. E-mail may be a way for her to facilitate additional conversations.

How can we attach new concepts to existing concepts?

We know that new concepts are built upon existing concepts. This means that we must evaluate related existing concepts before beginning instruction. The TSBVI Requisite Concept Evaluation (in development) is an assessment option that can help teams gain insight into existing concepts and any conceptual gaps.

Natalie's team evaluates her concept development by asking her open-ended questions related to her lessons and listening carefully as she responds. For example, when introducing a lesson about Brazil, Natalie's teachers carefully selected a few open-ended questions to ask her. The questions were: "Which continent is Brazil on?" "What types of food do people in Brazil eat?" and "What language do people in Brazil speak?" These questions were specifically selected because Natalie has an understanding of the continents as well as foods that are specific to various regions of the world. They were unsure, however, if she knew this information specific to Brazil. They asked her the questions and listened to her responses. They avoided asking simple "yes" and "no" questions.

To gain additional information about Natalie's

existing concepts, her team can talk to the people that know her best: her family. Regular phone calls or email communication related to Natalie's prior experiences with instructional content can greatly support her teams' understanding of existing concepts. Supporting Natalie in developing a student-parent interview form that she can take home to interview her family about an instructional topic would also be a useful tool and process. Ask her to report the information to her classmates and teacher. Remember, these additional opportunities for social interaction which are built around her class topics are necessary to facilitate her concept development.

How can we create rich experiences based on our student's interests?

Team members can collaborate with Natalie and her family in creating a list of preferred topics, activities and interests. The list, as well as conversations that can occur while making the list, can inform instructional planning to include opportunities for Natalie to participate in learning about and around topics that she enjoys. Her team can consider ways to incorporate these interests into the existing curricular content as well by creating supplemental learning opportunities.

Natalie and her family enjoy hiking and swimming. When learning about new countries, she will often ask questions about what types of land masses exist in the country. She will ask if there are mountains, streams, and volcanoes. In response to this information, she enjoys exploring tactual maps of the country while asking questions about what it would be like to traverse these various land masses and bodies of water. The vocabulary

that she is introduced to during these question and answer sessions has real meaning to Natalie. Because her team is aware of her interest in hiking and swimming, they allow her to relate those interests to new information in geography class.

Summary

In conclusion, the challenges posed in supporting Natalie's concept development are real. She, like many individuals with DeafBlindness, requires a unique presentation of information to accommodate her dual sensory loss. This presentation is very different from what we see in typical academic classrooms. Her combined vision and hearing loss affect every moment of her learning and therefore must be considered in every moment of her instructional planning.

Working to help Natalie meet and overcome these challenges is itself a challenge that requires teamwork and creativity. Working to support and inform a student's perception of the world is important work. Helen Keller, in her memoir "The Story of My Life," describes what life was like before she developed a strong conceptual understanding of the world. She wrote, "Have you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a tangible white darkness shut you in, and the great ship, tense and anxious, groped her way toward the shore with plummet and sounding-line, and you waited with beating heart for something to happen? I was like that ship before my education began, only I was without compass or sounding-line, and had no way of knowing how near the harbour was."

In our work with students with DeafBlindness, we are tasked with helping our students learn

how to connect to the world around them, to provide them the information they need to use their conceptual compass and sounding line, and help them come out of the fog and fulfill their vast potential as learners and people.

References

Keller, Helen. (1961). *The story of my life*. New York, NY: Dell Publishing Company.

Peterson, Rosemary. (1986). *The Piaget handbook for teachers and parents: Children*

in the age of discovery, preschool-third grade. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Coch, D., Fischer, K. & Dawson, G. (2007). *Human behavior, learning and the developing brain: Atypical development*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Durkel, Jim. "What a Concept."
<http://www.tsbvi.edu/resource-pages/2992-what-a-concept-1>

Active Learning Approach and the Standard Curriculum

Kate Hurst, Statewide Staff Development Coordinator, TSBVI Outreach Programs

Abstract: This article explains how Active Learning, an educational approach developed by Dr. Lilli Nielsen, can be used to provide instruction for students with the most profound disabilities in both the standard curriculum and the expanded core curriculum.

Key Words: Active Learning, standard curriculum, expanded core curriculum, prerequisite skills

When a student has a visual impairment or DeafBlindness with significant cognitive and physical disabilities (especially if the condition is congenital), unique instructional strategies must be used to systematically teach what other children learn incidentally. One of these strategies is known as Active Learning, an approach developed by Dr. Lilli Nielsen. This approach uses specific equipment and

techniques to help students from birth through high school who are functioning developmentally at ages younger than 4 years or 48 months. This approach focuses on creating environments for the learner to develop foundational concepts and skills in all areas. It can be used to provide instruction at an appropriate learning level in both the standard curriculum and the expanded core curriculum for these students with the most profound disabilities.

Some teachers and administrators have questioned the use of Active Learning because it looks very different from typical instructional approaches used in most educational settings. It looks like "play" to many people. However, very specific learning goals and prerequisite skills are the focus of a true Active Learning approach.

In a guidance letter from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS), Department of Education (November 2015), the appropriateness of a focus on prerequisite skills aligned to the standard (or general) curriculum was discussed. Below are pertinent excerpts from this document related to these students:

Based on the interpretation of “general education curriculum” set forth in this letter, we expect annual IEP goals to be aligned with State academic content standards for the grade in which a child is enrolled. This alignment, however, must guide but not replace the individualized decision-making required in the IEP process. In fact, the IDEA’s focus on the individual needs of each child with a disability is an essential consideration when IEP Teams are writing annual goals that are aligned with State academic content standards for the grade in which a child is enrolled so that the child can advance appropriately toward attaining those goals during the annual period covered by the IEP.

The Department recognizes that there is a very small number of children with the most significant cognitive disabilities whose performance must be measured against alternate academic achievement standards, as permitted in 34 CFR §200.1(d) and §300.160(c). ...The standards must be clearly related to grade-level content, although they may be restricted in scope or complexity or take the form of introductory or pre-requisite skills.

(Excerpt from pages 4–5 of a guidance document from OSERS on alignment to the standard curriculum, November 2015).



Photo of a young girl in a HOPSA Dress explores a plant.

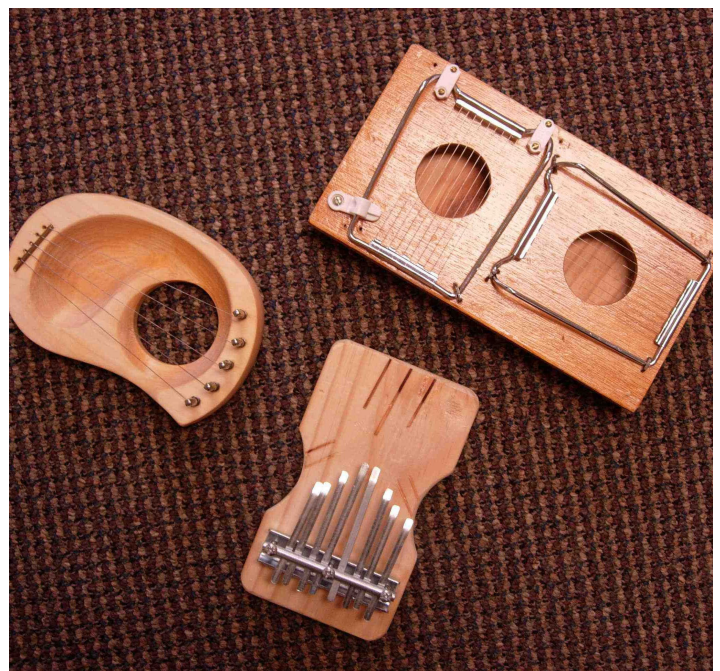


Photo of small musical instruments including a kalimba, a lyre, and Lilli Neilsen's harp.



Photo of a kitchen utensils including spoons, measuring cups and spoons and wire whisks made from metal, wood and plastic.

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach Program has developed a process for aligning instruction for these special learners that utilizes Texas Early Learning Pathways, Pre-K Guidelines, Essence Statements, and Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). This is done by utilizing the Functional Scheme assessment and other assessment tools to determine the learner's current developmental levels prior to developing the PLAAFP and setting priority areas for goals and objectives. For learners at this level, many, if not all, of these goals are focused on prerequisite skills.

We invite you to learn more about Active Learning and utilizing this approach at Active Learning Space <http://www.activelearningspace.org/active-learning-and-general-education>, a special website developed by Penrickton Center for Blind Children, Perkins School for the Blind, and Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. You may also want to view a webinar about Active Learning, alignment and instruction which can be found at <http://library.tsbvi.edu/Player/12992>.

References:

Functional Scheme: Final Skills Assessment (2000). Lilli Works, <http://www.lilliworks.com>.

OSERS Policy Guidance on Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, November 16, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.wrightslaw.com/law/osers/fape.acad.content.close.gap.1117.2015.pdf>

I Can't Hear You, It's too Dark in Here

Student artists from Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired exhibited their art in the fine arts building on campus and were listed as a studio stop on WEST, the West Austin Studio Tour May 20, 2017.

Enjoy these creative works by students with blindness, visual impairment, DeafBlindness, and multiple disabilities.

Keywords: visual art, texture, multimedia art



Charzard Sleeping, Ahmed H.



Cuckoo Clock, Graham P



From Madness To, Joy Matt A.



Get Lost (in art), Misael S



I'm Fly, Chanel D



Key Chimes, Julie V.



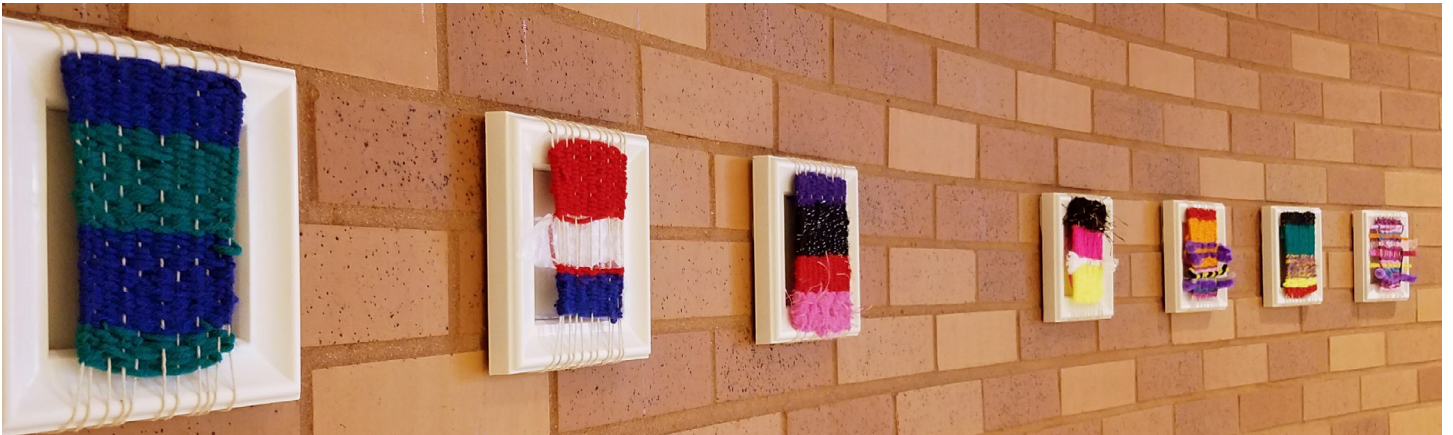
Land of Colors Quilt, Jordan L



Kint, Mya G.



Mark Riccobono - The President of the National Federation of the Blind - With His People, Tyler C.



The Forget Me Knot Collaboration View 1, Chanel D., Jordan L., Dimitri D.



The Conversational Doppelgangers, Hector and Misael



Tied to the chair, Kim B



Woven Flame, Adelyn G.



Titanic Pillow, Dixie L



Torn Jungle, Adelyn G.



The Monster Under the Bed, Devin G.

Where Are All the Babies? Early Identification of Visual Impairment and Combined Vision and Hearing Loss

Holly Cooper, Ph.D., Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach Program, Deafblind Early Childhood Specialist

Abstract: The importance of finding and serving infants and toddlers with vision impairment, and tips for sharing information with other professionals.

Key words: early identification, referral, early vision development

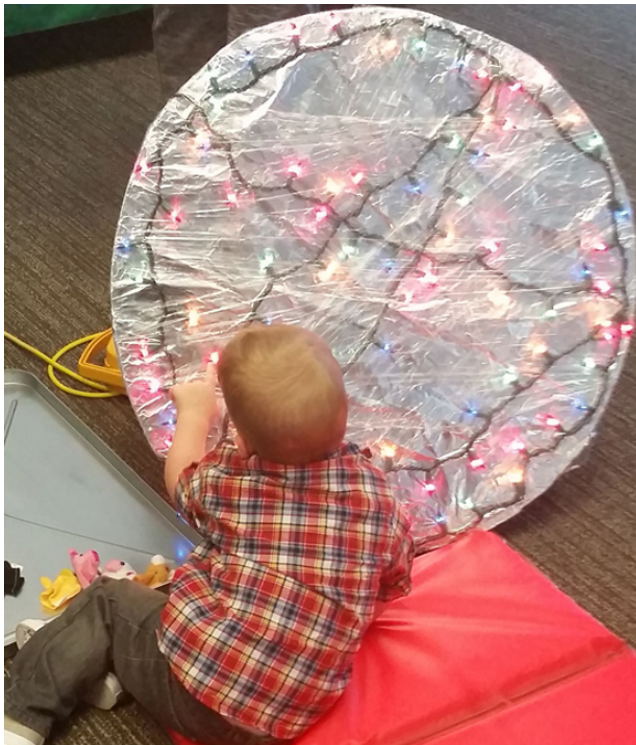


Photo of a toddler touching a teacher-made toy consisting of a large foil-wrapped circle with multicolored lights attached, all covered in clear plastic wrap.

Are you a teacher of students with visual impairment (TVI) or certified orientation and

mobility specialist (COMS) with concerns about very young children getting the services they need? You have good reason to be concerned. Examining the registration of students with visual impairment (VI Reg) and deafblind child count collect data from across Texas confirms the youngest children are under-identified. When we compare three-year age periods across all age levels, we find numbers of children 3 through 5 are considerably less than those age 6 through 8, and those age birth to age 3 comprise an even smaller group.

What are the reasons for this under-identification? Certainly the fact that many families with young children don't access any educational services until age 5 is a large part of this. Families may have a concern about their child's development but have difficulty accessing the appropriate medical professional. Medical professionals sometimes recommend a "wait and see" approach to parents' concerns about disabilities. Eye medical professionals may respond with "untestable" "delayed visual maturation" on examination reports when they have attempted to examine a child who cannot give consistent verbal responses to questions. Many times we find that therapists and early childhood intervention (ECI) specialists working with children with multiple disabilities don't realize some of the child's behaviors are due to visual impairment and not developmental or motor

delays. Families with children with multiple disabilities can be overwhelmed with the complexity of their child's disability and not have the time or resources to follow through on a recommendation for an eye exam. Parents may not wish to have additional early childhood professionals in their home. We frequently hear the statement from professionals and sometimes parents: "Vision is the least of the child's problems."

What can a vision educator do to find, identify and serve infants and toddlers with visual impairment?

- Make connections with professionals in local ECI programs.
- Do joint visits with ECI professionals (this is allowable under ECI regulations, because school districts don't bill for services, so the "double dipping" rule does not apply). When you collaborate with others, point out behaviors and responses that are affected by visual impairment. Ask ECI providers if they know of other babies who display similar characteristics who aren't known to have a visual impairment.
- Do a brief presentation or even a short announcement at an ECI staff development day and talk about signs of vision loss in infancy and how it affects developmental milestones.
- Share the "Eye Find" brochure with ECI staff members and distribute at ophthalmologists' offices and other locations in the community.
- Be aware that Child Find regulations allow TVIs and O&Ms to evaluate the child's functional vision and orientation and mobility if there is a suspected vision loss (even if the

eye report says "untestable" or similar nonspecific results). In fact, a comprehensive evaluation where visual impairment is suspected must include the Functional Vision Evaluation (FVE), Learning Media Assessment (LMA), and orientation and mobility evaluation as well as the eye medical exam.

Why should we be concerned when infants and toddlers aren't identified as having a visual impairment?

- Some researchers say 90 percent of learning in the early years of life relies on vision.
- Visual impairment may significantly affect motor development such as eye-hand coordination, crawling, and walking.
- Prior to the emergence of language, early learning is dependent on visual observation and imitation to a significant degree.
- Early vision intervention includes supporting parents and sharing information about vision and compensation for vision loss. TVIs and O&Ms empower parents by teaching them about their child's development and special skills the child will use to compensate for their vision loss.
- Vision professionals can help parents establish connections in the local community and access other resources that can be beneficial to their child. Resources may include National Braille Press, Texas and national library services for the blind, talking books programs, and downloadable braille materials, TSBVI Outreach training and services, and others.



Photo of a page from the book showing Perkins Panda and his hands (Belly Button, by Odds Bodkin, Perkins School for the Blind, Watertown, MA, 2002).

Educational services for young children with visual impairment or combined vision and hearing loss in the early years can support early movement including crawling, walking, and eye-hand use, tactual awareness and exploration. Involving infants in ordinary activities helps them learn concepts about the world. Literacy learning later in the school years is based on a strong foundation of language and real-world experiences. Early intervention by a teacher of students with visual impairment and an orientation and mobility specialist can make a critical difference in a child's life.

Paddles Up! Building a Dragon Boat Team at TSBVI

Scott Baltisberger, VI Education Specialist, Outreach Programs, TSBVI

Abstract: This article describes the creation of the dragon boat team at TSBVI and the skills that students must learn in order to paddle and race their boat. It also addresses the skills they needed to learn in order to work together successfully as a team.

Key words: dragon boats, ECC, recreation and leisure, social interaction skills, self-determination, sensory efficiency skills, orientation and mobility skills, listening skills

Dragon boat racing is a centuries-old sport that has been building in popularity at both the national and international levels. It is a team event that requires crews of 20 paddlers in 40-foot-long boats to match speeds in open-water races. Races are held across Asia, Australia, North America and Europe. There are local and international competitions and work is underway to include

dragon boat in future Olympic games. On the West Coast, dragon boat teams are appearing in colleges and high schools. Teams composed of blind and visually impaired paddlers are beginning to appear.

Within this context, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) has taken the initiative to form the first dragon boat team at a school for the blind and visually impaired. In 2015 and 2017, the team was fielded to compete in the Austin Dragon Boat Festival and Race. While no modifications in equipment or basic technique are required in order for the participation of blind and visually impaired paddlers, the undertaking was much more than simply handing students a paddle and seating them in a boat. Preparing for the race required significant problem-solving and task-analysis, and the results would affect multiple areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC).



Photo of a long rowboat full of students from TSBVI holding oars and rowing.

Racing a dragon boat requires considerably more skill and planning than a simple pleasure cruise in a canoe. In order for the boat to be propelled in the fastest and most efficient manner, it is essential that all paddlers be “in sync”; that is, everyone’s paddles should be striking and moving through the water at the same time. This creates a smooth, even and graceful ride. In contrast, being “out of sync” will

cause paddles to collide and make the boat rock and lurch in a slow and ungainly manner. Among sighted paddlers, achieving sync is achieved through visual orientation: each paddler watches the person seated in front of them and tries to match their speed and rhythm. For our students, this was not an option so we developed a training schedule that allowed us to address their special needs.



Photo of adults with visually impaired youth rowing a dragon boat

Our regimen started some eight weeks before the race with an orientation in the school gym in which we covered basic concepts about the sport, using a set-up of chairs that replicated the array of seating in the dragon boat. After this we moved to poolside practice in which students sat on the edge of the pool and learned correct technique for paddling. This was very important in helping students work on the orientation of their bodies and attend and respond to the sensory feedback received from their paddles as they move through the water. Next, we had everyone spend time paddling in three-man canoes. This provided everyone with the chance to practice the skills “on the water” and become accustomed to the feeling of being in a boat rocked by waves, but under close supervision by staff.

In addition to paddling, we had this entire time been stressing and practicing listening skills in following commands in order to move together as a team. These directions came not only in the form of voiced orders but also through rhythms beaten on a drum located at the front of the boat. Our prior training paid off so that, by the time we boarded the real dragon boat for our first of four practices, we were well-prepared and this final round of practice cemented our readiness for the race.

The Austin Dragon Boat Festival takes place over two days in April. TSBVI raced as part of the community team category and participated in two races. Everyone wore their team jersey with pride and, before each run, we made a spirit circle to chant our motto and raise our morale. For most of our students, this was their first

opportunity to engage in a team sport and many had invited family members to attend the event. There was plenty of time between races to relax and interact with other community members. TSBVI was a big hit with everyone and received a great deal of support and encouragement from other teams. We learned that there is a blind and visually impaired dragon boat team in Houston and everyone was excited by the possibility that the two teams may someday be able to meet to race and compare notes. We did not place first in either of our two races but, as one of our paddlers stated, “It wasn’t about winning; it was about showing everyone what TSBVI can do!”



Photo of the author, Scott Baltisburger, with teenage students pouring a thermos of water over him

What's New in Short-Term Programs

Nina Wibbenmeyer, M.Ed., Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments,
Short-Term Programs Department, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Abstract: In this article Ms. Wibbenmeyer shares what is new in the Short-Term Programs.

Key Words: Short-Term Programs, TSBVI, Google Classroom, individual instruction

Have you been wondering what we've been up to? In addition to our on-campus classes, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired's (TSBVI) Short-Term Programs (STP) department is offering new and exciting opportunities for students to receive the individualized instruction they need in academics and in the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). Through online learning and individualized instruction classes, teachers are serving students and collaborating with teachers of students with visual impairment (TVIs) in a whole new way.

Online Classes

Students can now choose from several different online classes that they can take at their own pace. These classes are offered through our STP Google Classroom site. You can register for these classes by referring your student to our programs in much the same way you would for our on-campus classes. Examples of our current classes include:

- Using the Orion TI-84+ calculator
- Google Classroom and VoiceOver
- Google Classroom and JAWS

Note this new summer 2017 offering: Summer Book Club. This will be a great way for students from across the state to connect! Students will read "A Blind Guide to Stinkville," by Beth Vrabel, at their own pace. However, there will be a structured timeline for students to complete each chapter. One of the awesome features of this class is that the students participate in group discussions and share with each other using the online forum.

More online classes will be introduced next school year.

Individualized Instruction

Last year, we decided that if "you want it, you got it!" You can now refer your student to STP and we will work with you to design a program for your student that fits your and your student's needs. For example, one way we have been serving some students is through a videoconferencing tool called Zoom. Zoom is easy to use. There's nothing for you to install. All you need is a computer with a webcam and audio capability. The STP teacher sends a Zoom link, you open it, and we begin our lesson with your student — all from the comfort of your own district!

We've also had students come for individualized instruction on our campus and we've even visited local students. Bottom line, we'll work with you to come up with a solution that works.

Social Media

We can't escape social media! So, in our department, we're harnessing it and broadening how we use it. We're posting instructional strategies, tips on how to create tactile tools, and ways you can incorporate the ECC into your lessons. Sign up for the following:

- Facebook page: TSBVI Short-Term Programs
- Pinterest site: TSBVI Short-Term Programs
- Twitter: @TSBVI_ShortTerm

Sensory Day at the Meadows Museum

Tammy Martin, Blind Children's Program Manager

Abstract: Ms. Martin provides highlights of a group skills training at the Meadows Museum.

Key Words: Blind Children's Program, blind, visually impaired, Meadows Museum, Group Skills Training

Group Skills Trainings from HHS' Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program work with parents and community partners to help clients and families learn new skills and work with children who are blind or visually impaired. These trainings expose clients to new activities and help them develop new skills. The trainings are open to family members and help clients build a network of peer support.

On Feb. 25, the Discovery and Development Program, along with SMU's Meadows Museum, Delta Gamma sorority and SMU music therapy students, hosted an event at the museum with art, movement and music activities, all of which increase fine motor skills and encourage social skill development. The Meadows Museum provided raised line and tactile representations of art pieces, making them accessible to those with no or low vision.



Photo of a child in a wheelchair wearing glasses looking into a shallow bowl.

"The sensory day at Meadows Museum was a huge hit for both of my sons. Visually impaired or not, every child enjoyed each activity throughout the morning," said Laura Leavell, whose child is in the program. In one activity, The Feel of Things (inspired by Joan Miró's oil painting, "Queen Louise of Prussia"), children used paint and primary colors to create works of art by painting on raised line shapes. They used a variety of papers and materials to create their own unique texture collage.



Photo of a child with albinism painting while a young woman looks on.



Photo of a girl rolling out play clay with a rolling pin, with the assistance of a young woman.

In other activities, children created geometric and organic forms using air-dry clay and tools to produce their very own sculpture modeled after those located in and around the museum. Families toured the museum's sculpture garden, where they were permitted to touch the sculptures that were described by docents.

The Sound of Things was an activity led by SMU music therapy students during which

children were exposed to rhythm and music through facilitated, therapeutic music experiences. Families were encouraged to interact and participate in the exploration of various musical instruments.



Photo of a small child standing with assistance from a woman, touching the strings of a guitar held by a young man.

Thanks to our partnership with the SMU Meadows Museum volunteers and students, the Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program was able to provide access to an inclusive event that promoted independence and community involvement through the multisensory exploration of art.

If you are interested in attending a group skills training, please contact your Blind Children's Specialist about upcoming trainings in your area.

Curricula & Resource Guides to Assist the TVI, COMS, and Families in Assessment, Instruction, and Adaptations in the Core Curriculum and Expanded Core Curriculum Areas

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Nemeth at a Glance: A Math Resource, Grade-Level Chart, and Evaluation Tool

This booklet supports the teaching and transcription of the Nemeth Braille code. It is a practical resource and quick reference that will facilitate Nemeth instruction and improve the quality and quantity of accessible mathematics materials for students who use braille. A sequence for the introduction of Nemeth symbols arranged by approximate grade level and a matching evaluation of Nemeth reading and writing skills are included. Also included are discussions on topics related to Nemeth code and math for tactile learners.

Yoga for Children with Visual and Multiple Impairments: Fun Movement Activities Inspired by Yoga

Yoga is a great way to incorporate skills students need to improve motor abilities. This is a fun, practical book delineating the benefits of yoga for students with visual impairments including body awareness, spatial awareness, motor development, sensory integration, balance and coordination, energy, strength and flexibility. This book also includes many yoga poses and information about yoga sessions.

Expanded Core Curriculum for Students with Visual Impairments (ECC) Resources for Evaluation and Instruction

This document is a compilation of resources for both evaluation and instruction in all areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). It is divided into sections for each of the nine areas. Each ECC section has a set of charts that includes: Evaluation Tools, Instructional Materials, and General Information. In addition to the printed copy of these resources, a flash drive is included that will enable you to link directly to the websites (for additional details) and ordering information.

The books listed above can be found at:
www.tsbvi.edu/publications.

National Federation of the Blind Launches Ride-Sharing Testing Program

News Release from the National Federation of the Blind

Abstract: Organization to Monitor Uber, Lyft Efforts to Accommodate Service Animals.

Key words: National Federation of the Blind, guide dogs, blind, visually impaired, ride-share

Baltimore, Maryland (May 8, 2017): The National Federation of the Blind today announced the launch of a program to test the effectiveness of ridesharing companies Uber and Lyft's efforts to accommodate passengers with guide dogs and other service animals. The NFB seeks the participation of blind people and other service animal users, or those who travel with them, across the United States and in Puerto Rico. Volunteers will be asked to fill out an online questionnaire to indicate whether or not they were denied service because of their service animals or if they were treated in a discriminatory or disrespectful manner. Both positive and negative experiences should be reported. Pursuant to agreements with the National Federation of the Blind, both Uber and Lyft are taking steps to prevent discrimination against, and improve service to, riders with service animals. The agreements require the National Federation of the Blind to provide feedback to the companies over a three-to-five-year period. The program is open to both members and non-members of the National Federation of the Blind. The online questionnaire is available in both English and

Spanish.

Mark A. Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind, said: "Companies like Uber and Lyft are empowering blind people to live the lives we want by providing fast, convenient and affordable transportation. This empowerment can only be real and complete, however, if all blind people, including those who use guide dogs, are able to access these transportation options when and where they need them, without fear that they will be refused service. My wife Melissa uses a guide dog, and consequently our family has occasionally experienced the refusal of transportation services, which violates the legal and civil rights of the blind and other people with disabilities. The National Federation of the Blind applauds the commitment by Uber and Lyft to improve their service to service animal users, and we look forward to working with these companies to ensure that their efforts to do so are meaningful and effective. I urge all service animal users to use our new online questionnaire often so that we can provide comprehensive feedback throughout the terms of our agreements with Uber and Lyft."

For more information about the program and to access the online questionnaire, please visit www.nfb.org/rideshare.

Texas Medicaid Mosquito Repellent Benefit Aims to Protect Texans

Excerpts from HHSC website

Abstract: This article details the expansion of Medicaid coverage of mosquito repellent to prevent the spread of the Zika virus.

Key Words: Zika Virus, Medicaid, HHSC

AUSTIN — Starting May 1, Texas will begin providing this year's statewide Medicaid benefit for mosquito repellent to prevent Zika virus transmission. The Texas Health and Human Services Commission is offering the repellent to more Medicaid clients to ensure additional Texans are protected from the virus that can be devastating to unborn babies.

For the first time in Texas, some boys and men will be eligible to receive the benefit, as well as women ages 45 to 55. Eligible recipients can pick up mosquito repellent at participating pharmacies without needing a prescription, as Texas Medicaid has issued a standing order for mosquito repellent for the benefit. "We want to support the health and safety of Texans," said HHSC Executive Commissioner Charles Smith. "The best way to protect yourself from the Zika virus is by using mosquito repellent."

Zika virus is transmitted to people primarily through the bite of an infected mosquito, but it can also spread by sexual contact. While symptoms are often minor, Zika can cause severe birth defects in the babies of some women infected with the virus during pregnancy. The benefit is for pregnant women, women ages 10–55, and males age 14 and up who are enrolled in Medicaid

managed care, fee-for-service, the Children's Health Insurance Program and CHIP-Perinatal programs. Recipients can pick up mosquito repellent without needing a prescription. In addition, individuals who meet the eligibility criteria for Healthy Texas Women, Children with Special Health Care Needs, or the Family Planning Program can receive the benefit. Eligible clients in the CSHCN program require a prescription.

The 2017 benefit includes up to two cans per month per eligible beneficiary. People are encouraged to call the pharmacy ahead of time because supply can vary by location. Last year, the HHSC and Department of State Health Services received approval to use state funds for mosquito repellents and announced the availability of this new benefit. The 2017 benefit will build on ongoing efforts to prevent transmission.

State health officials urge people to protect themselves at home and while traveling to areas where Zika is spreading. Precautions include consistently using mosquito repellent when outside, wearing long sleeves and pants, and using air conditioning or making sure window screens will keep mosquitoes out of the home. Texas is also calling on people to dump out containers that could hold standing water in and around their homes and businesses to deny mosquitoes a place to lay their eggs, decrease the overall number of mosquitoes, and help protect family members and neighbors from Zika.

For more information about the Zika virus, visit TexasZika.org (link is external).

Editor's note: Early studies of babies born with Congenital Zika Syndrome have discovered eye anomalies, optic nerve anomalies, cortical visual

impairment and hearing loss. Research is in the early phases. See the following for more information:

<http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2579543>.

A New Comic Book Supports Special Needs Siblings

Excerpts from Special Needs Answers

Abstract: Julie Averbach, 17, created a comic book that explores the experiences of being a sibling of a child with special needs.

Keywords: comics, graphic novel, special needs sibling

The challenges of being a child with special needs, or the parent of one, are fairly well known and documented. Less talked about and often ignored is the experience of being the sibling of someone with special needs. The role can bring with it a confusion of emotions, including frustration, anger, pride, shame, competitiveness, protectiveness, and a sense of having been abandoned in favor of someone with seemingly greater needs. All of these feelings are explored and dealt with in a new comic book, "Adventures From My World," conceived and written by a New Jersey teenager named Julie Averbach.

The 20-page comic book presents six illustrated stories of children confronting the challenges of having a sibling with special needs, in all cases a sibling who apparently has autism or developmental difficulties. Averbach created the storylines and wrote the dialogue, while three

students at the Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Art share the illustration credits.

In one story, for example, "Abby" worries about how her peers at school will view her when they find out that a new "weird" kid is her brother. In another, "Max" struggles with tutoring his younger brother on simple math problems while neglecting his own mountain of homework.

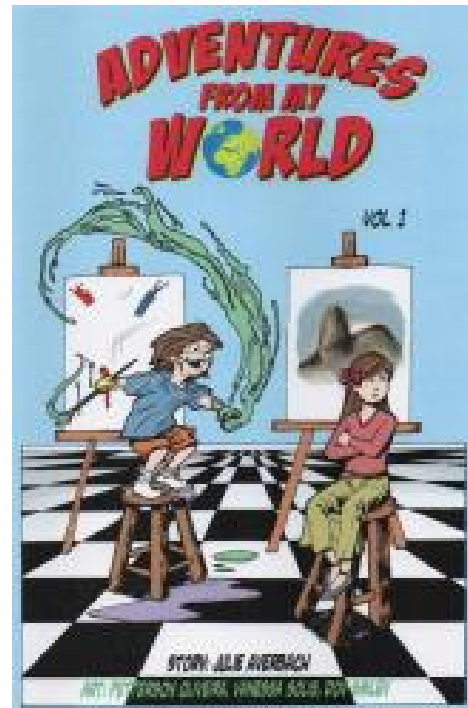


Photo of the cover of the comic book "Adventures From My World."

Averbach, who is 17 and a high school senior, told Special Needs Answers by email that her goal in creating the comic book was “to encourage siblings to express their emotions more openly, and to feel comforted by the fact that they are not alone. I also sought to create more awareness and compassion in my community about the struggles others face. Finally, I wanted to test the efficacy of the comic book medium as a means of therapy and promoting emotional intelligence.”

“Adventures From My World” had its start as a public service project for the Girl Scouts. Averbach says she was inspired to write it because of both her family experience and volunteering in the special needs community. “Through this exposure, I realized that, in many families, parents must dedicate so many resources to their children with special needs that the emotional needs of the other siblings are overlooked,” she said.

Averbach created the first story at age 14 after reading Marjane Satrapi’s “Persepolis,” a graphic novel that captures a young girl’s perspective during and after the Iranian revolution. At 16, Averbach wrote and sketched the five other stories, then had a local psychologist review them. She also recruited the three student artists (Petterson Oliveira, Vanessa Solis, and Dov Smiley) to bring her drawings to life “in a much more professional and visually appealing format,” she said.

“Adventures From My World” earned Averbach a Gold Award from the Girl Scouts (the equivalent of Eagle Scout status in the Boy Scouts) and on the strength of it she was selected as one of the Girl Scouts’ 10 National Young Women of Distinction for 2016.

The comic book is currently being distributed through special needs sibling support groups, hospitals, universities, special needs organizations, learning resource centers, and libraries in 19 U.S. states and four countries. (It was given out to all attendees of the recent Academy of Special Needs Planners 2017 annual meeting in New Orleans, which is how Special Needs Answers learned of it.)

“I am also hoping that mental health professionals will start to embrace the power of comic books to address other social issues,” Averbach told Special Needs Answers.

For more information about “Adventures From My World” and to order copies, visit www.adventuresfrommyworld.com. All profits from the comic book will be donated to nonprofit organizations supporting individuals with special needs.

Working with Partners

Cyral Miller, Director, TSBVI Outreach Programs

Abstract: TSBVI collaborates with many partner agencies and organizations to support quality education for students with visual impairment and DeafBlindness.

Keywords: education, STEM, collaboration

The blindness field in Texas has a long history of cooperative activities. It has resulted in higher quality and greater availability of services for children and youth with visual impairments. Not many states can boast the rich variety of activities that are jointly sponsored by the Education Service Centers, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI), Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and many related community groups. Family groups foster networking for families who might otherwise be isolated from peer support. Looking over the past year, there have been an astounding number of examples of professionals, families and agencies working together. Formal stakeholder groups like the Personnel Preparation Advisory Group and the Texas Action Committee for the Education of Students with Visual Impairments, the State Leadership Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and the DB Interagency Task Force all help to unite practitioners, university staff, family members, adults who are blind and/or DeafBlind and related agencies. A new group this year is developing a DeafBlind State Plan to guide the establishment of best practice for that unique population. Working together has been a sure road to progress.

One of the ways TSBVI strives to improve is by looking outside this state and learning from and with others. Joint sponsorship of Paths to Literacy by TSBVI with Perkins School for the Blind has led to a dynamic international literacy resource. The Activelearningspace.org website is a newer collaboration with the Penrickton School and Perkins School for the Blind, and another example of combining with others to advance the field.

Two training events this past spring highlight the benefits of this approach:

In March, the TSBVI Deafblind Project sponsored the Texas Symposium on Deafblindness. Speakers at this conference included many Texans, and others who came from Norway, Scotland, Pennsylvania, San Francisco and Ohio. The National Center on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB) set their annual summit at TSBVI for the following week so DB project staff from across the United States were able to join Texas participants. As a result, the conference buzzed with ideas that spanned continents as we worked together expanding our understanding on how to provide family support, quality educational services and life-long learning opportunities for students with DeafBlindness.

In April, TSBVI hosted the 4th Biennial Principals of Schools for the Blind (POSB) Math & Science Institute for Instruction on our campus. This is a national group designed to

build community among teachers of students with visual impairments interested in fostering math and science learning. Often, teachers don't have easy access to other teachers for guidance and support in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) topical areas. While POSB is part of the Council of Schools for the Blind, the audience included both specialized school staff and local district VI professionals. The POSB Institute included

networking and learning from Texas colleagues and those from New Mexico, Maryland, Missouri, Iowa, the American Printing House for the Blind in Kentucky, as well as many vendors.

We will continue to learn and grow by working with partners. Next year will bring more opportunities to share and improve our services, for the benefit of the students we all hope to provide a path to meaningful, successful lives.

Websites of Interest to Families

Reprint from Texas Parent to Parent

Keywords: websites, disabilities, blind, visually impaired, special education

Technology can be such a great resource! So I wanted to share with you some of my top sites. These are sites that are jam-packed with important information. They address a whole range of issues that affect individuals with disabilities or special health-care needs and their families.

Navigate Life Texas

Navigate life is a great resource for any parent of a child with disability or special health-care need. On this page you can find videos, information, resources, and answers to many questions in both English and Spanish. There are five main topics on the site including: health care, insurance and financial help, family support, education, transition to adulthood, and finding services, groups and events. One of the parts I find useful is the Special Education 101 section, where they have videos, terminology, and a breakdown of the system. It is a great tool for families who are new to the special education process.

Connectability.ca

While this site is based in Canada, the wealth of information, tools, lessons, and resources is impressive. While the site has information for parents of children and adults with disabilities and special health-care needs, I particularly liked the kids page, which included a tool to make free visual supports, lesson plans on social skills and anger management, songs, and so much more. I made this sample on my phone in just a couple of minutes, although searching for images may be more difficult on the phone. The only caution I have is that, because this site is based out of Canada, information on housing, parent support, and other things may not apply to families in Texas.

TexasMedicaidWaivers.com

This site is particularly helpful for parents who are new to diagnosis and/or Medicaid. Along the right side of the page is a list of programs and information that parents can click on to link them directly to the program. Or they can learn more about all of the programs and how to sign up. It also has a helpful comparison chart that shows

the different maximum budget limits so parents can understand the benefits of the different programs.

Texas Project FIRST (family, information, resources, support, and training)

This website is a place for education information for families of children with disabilities. Has your child recently been diagnosed with a disability? Do you have concerns about your child's learning and are trying to find help? Your child may be receiving special education services and you need to learn more. Wherever you are in the process, we've been there. We know the maze in which you find yourself. This website will point the way to information you can trust and understand and people or resources you can contact for more information and assistance. Texas Project FIRST is a project of

Family to Family Network and an activity of the Texas Continuing Improvement Process (TCIP) under the auspices of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and Region 9 Education Service Center.

Parent Companion

Raising a child with a disability can feel like a lonely journey. We know; we've been there. Our goal is to help eliminate those feelings of isolation with trustworthy information that is comforting, inspiring, meaningful, and relevant. Parent Companion is here to help parents connect with other parents who know what you are going through, as well as help you find the support and services you need to improve the quality of life for your child and your family.

Editor-in-Chief

Holly Cooper (512) 206-9217
cooperh@tsbvi.edu

Assistant to the Editor

Melanie Schacht
schachtm@tsbvi.edu

Website Editor

Stacey Rayos
rayoss@tsbvi.edu

Family Wisdom Editors

Edgenie Bellah
bellahe@tsbvi.edu

Rachel Simpson

simpsonr@tsbvi.edu

Effective Practices Editors

Ann Adkins
adkinsa@tsbvi.edu

News and Views Editor

Gay Speake
gay.speake@hhsc.state.tx.us

Published Bi-Annually: March and November

Available in English, Spanish and audio on TSBVI's website: www.tsbvi.edu

The audio version of TX SenseAbilities is provided by Learning Ally, Austin, TX.

To request an email alert when a new issue is posted on the web, or to discontinue a mailed subscription, contact Melanie Schacht at schachtm@tsbvi.edu.

Items to be considered for publication should be submitted by email to the section editors at the email address listed or mailed to:

TSBVI Outreach
1100 West 45th Street
Austin, TX 78756

**Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

Outreach Programs

www.tsbvi.edu | 512-454-8631 | 1100 W. 45th St. | Austin, TX 78756

**Texas Health and Human Services Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program**

<https://hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/blind-visually-impaired/blind-childrens-vocational-discovery-development-program>

1-877-787-8999



This project is supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Special Education Program (OSEP). Opinions expressed here are the authors and do not necessarily represent the position of the Department of Education.