

The Role of the TVI in Literacy Instruction for Students who are Deafblind

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Students who are deafblind have unique learning needs. The combination of hearing and vision loss pose challenges to all areas of learning, especially in the development of communication (Prickett & Welch, 1995). Deafblindness also presents unique implications for the development of literacy skills. Because of its close relationship to communication, it is important that literacy be addressed for students of all ages and abilities having combined hearing and vision loss.

The teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) is a critical member of the educational team for students who are deafblind in partnership with the deafblind specialist, when available, and the teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing. The TVI brings to the team knowledge about the impact of a visual impairment on the student's development, as well as the unique needs of the student with dual sensory impairment. Additionally, the TVI possesses knowledge in the areas of literacy skills development for individuals with visual impairments. The field of visual impairments has defined the role of the TVI for working with all students with visual impairments (Spungin & Ferrell, 1999). This article presents the four major roles of the TVI in the literacy skills instruction of students who are deafblind, including 1) Assessment, 2) IEP Development, 3) Direct Instruction, and 4) Consultation to Team Members.

Role 1: Assessment

TVIs perform three critical assessments for all students with visual impairments, including those with combined hearing and vision loss. These assessments include a Functional Vision Assessment (FVA), Learning Media Assessment (LMA), and assessment in the areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). Each assessment provides vital data to the educational team including information about the student's visual impairment, use of functional vision, communication modes, use of sensory channels, learning media, literacy media, and current skill level in each of the ECC areas. The FVA, LMA, and assessment of communication and compensatory skills provide critical information for team members to consider when designing and planning communication and literacy programs for students with deafblindness.

A survey conducted by McKenzie (2007) found that only 23% of TVIs working with students who are deafblind conducted LMAs. Similarly, in a review of cumulative IEP folders, McKenzie (in press-a) found LMA reports for only 13.8% of students who are deafblind or visually impaired with multiple impairments. Considering the requirements of IDEA 2004 and the requirements of many states for an assessment of current and future literacy media needs of students with visual impairments, these numbers are very low. Guidelines for conducting LMAs for students who are deafblind can be found in McKenzie (in press-b). It is suggested that for many students who are deafblind, a comprehensive communication assessment should be conducted in tandem to the LMA.

Role 2: IEP Development

Based on the above assessment findings and recommendations, TVIs provide team members critical information during the IEP development process. TVIs write goals and objectives for students who are deafblind regarding instruction in literacy media and the areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC), as outlined below in Direct Instruction.

TVIs also provide information to other team members during the IEP development process in the area of accommodations for the classroom and for state-wide assessment. During a review of cumulative

folders, McKenzie (in press - a) found that many students who are deafblind did not have in place the accommodations and adaptations listed on their IEPs. In the study, zero of the IEPs for the students who were deafblind stated supplementary aids or services. Seventy-one percent of the students IEPs specified less than 15 accommodations, with some containing zero.

Listing all accommodations, such as adaptations to teaching methods, materials adaptations, specialized teaching materials, environmental accommodations, and assistive technology is essential for performance and success in the core curriculum. Teaching strategies, environmental accommodations, and organization are important for the literacy environment of students who are deafblind at the emergent literacy stage of development (McKenzie & Davidson, 2007).

Role 3: Direct Instruction

The role of providing direct instruction should be the same for students who are deafblind as it is for students who are visually impaired. Students who are deafblind often require direct instruction in the ECC with regards to literacy skills in areas such as concept development, braille, slate and stylus, signature writing, use of functional vision, use of low vision devices, use of communication devices, keyboarding, and assistive technology. Only a certified TVI is qualified to provide direct instruction in many of these skill areas, especially those related to braille.

Role 4: Consultation to Team Members

TVIs provide the educational team with information unique to the impact of visual impairments and dual sensory impairments. While each team member brings information regarding their area of expertise, sensory impairments impact all areas of development thus affecting assessment and instruction by others for students with deafblindness. TVIs work closely with other team members from the beginning of the assessment process, conducting the FVA and LMA before all other assessments due to the impact of their outcomes and recommendations. For example, a student's functional use of vision and hearing must first be determined before communication assessment can occur. Educational teams should carefully plan assessment, IEP development, and direct instruction for students who are deafblind due to the unique implications of a dual sensory impairment.

References

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RETURN TO TOC ***Deaf-Blind or Deafblind?***

What's in a name? You will notice that articles in this edition of DVIQ move between two different spellings of the term used to describe persons having a combination of hearing and vision loss. In the early 1990's, Slavatore Lagati of the Servizio di Consulenza Pedagogica in Italy, proposed international acceptance of the single word -deafblind" in place of the hyphenated -deaf-blind." At that time, the word -deafblind" was already prominently in use in many European countries and Lagati argued that the single word more accurately indicated the uniqueness of the condition. In the United States, practitioners and service providers still choose to use either of the terms. Both of the national consumer organizations, the American Association of the Deaf-Blind (AADB) and the National Family Association of Deaf-Blind (NFADB) still employ the hyphenated term.

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