

The Intervener: Big Idea, Substantial Results

by Debra D'Luna, parent of a child who is deaf-blind

My daughter, Alexis, is deaf-blind due to CHARGE Syndrome. At age 18, she's very witty, warm and social; she is a determined worker with a curious nature and she is also enthusiastic about her many interests, which include: music (she takes piano lessons and plays with pride!), dancing, cheerleading (she's a varsity cheerleader at her high school), snowmen, skeletons, and beauty treatments (hair styling, lipstick and manicures). Her challenges include binaural hearing impairment that is severe to profound, large optic nerve pits plus colobomas that create visual field holes. And she is near-sighted to the extent that she is legally blind. Alexis has diminished taste, a very poor vestibular system resulting in poor balance, and no sense of smell.

In the Beginning...

Thinking about Alexis's need for an intervener takes me back to when Alexis was two years old and had transitioned from an early-intervention home program to attending a center-based program four days a week. Focused on the special needs of children with cerebral palsy, the program was classroom based with daily pullouts for occupational, speech, and physical therapies. Every day, numerous staff members wrote detailed notes in a spiral bound notebook about their interactions with Alexis that served as a communication conduit to and from home. In this way we could be informed as to how her day had progressed. It was through this notebook that I came to understand the absolute need for an intervener, though I did not yet know the term or that such a position existed.



According to the documentation provided by the individuals who worked with her, each day, as the day wore on, Alexis was by turns happy, irritable, playful, sleepy, smiley, somewhat ill, eager to work, obstinate, lively, comic, dreamy, focused, or agitated.

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At home, we had certainly never observed this kind of mercurial nature in her. How might we explain the abrupt emotional and attitude shifts the staff reported?

We had begun pairing sign language with speech when Alexis was six months old and had provided the staff with a dictionary of her receptive sign vocabulary. Since no one at the school signed or understood much about hearing impairment, this wasn't particularly useful. Alexis's ability to self-generate or expressively sign was significantly delayed and barely emerging.

It also turned out that staff members knew virtually nothing about the impact of visual impairment either. Even though the environment was visually and tactilely stimulating for the benefit of all the children, nothing was understood about how these aspects might be organized to provide Alexis with cues about her day or the environment around her.

My visits with the staff highlighted other gaps. Alexis's widely varying reactions might have been better understood if some basic knowledge of our family context, her previous experiences, fears, interests/motivators, habits, communication skills, or auditory/visual positioning needs were known, but these factors were not consistently taken into account. Without expressive communication, Alexis could only react to her experiences.

Therapy and classroom schedules were organized around staffing needs and availability, without apparent regard for what else Alexis had just experienced (or missed experiencing). Therapists sent assistants to fetch and return Alexis in order to maximize their own clinical time. This meant more individuals moving, carrying and wheeling her—sometimes in a wagon facing forward, sometimes backward, sometimes in a stroller; some individuals preferred to carry her while others encouraged her to walk using a walker. There wasn't consistency in the way she was greeted by teaching and therapy staff or even any recognition of how her sensory deficits might impair or delay her ability to recognize individuals.

Therapy time was consistently painful, scary and challenging even though evident effort was made to liven up the therapy space with seasonal decorations and bright toys. Alexis struggled to make sense out of the rapid-fire experiences that were a part of this visually, auditorily, and tactilely rich environment. I doubt that she ever knew what was going to happen next, who might take her where, and for what purpose. This situation must have been extremely stressful for Alexis.

Somewhere, Over the Rainbow...

After nearly two years in this setting, I read an article in our local newspaper about a pre-school classroom developed for a small pod of exceptionally rare deaf-blind students. A teacher of the deaf-blind worked with a cadre of 'interveners' who had been trained to individually support the unique needs of each deaf-blind student.

When I visited, I learned about tactile cues and saw them in use everywhere. For the first time, I saw students wearing auditory trainers so that each received his teacher's voice directly into hearing aids or ear-level receivers. I noted high-contrast, uncluttered pictures and enlarged text in use. The classroom was thoughtfully arranged to aid mobility and to minimize glare from the windows.

Interveners—each assigned to a specific individual student—signed for, redirected, ambulated and positioned the students, and provided each with whatever magnification or assistive device, manipulative, or individual copy of material that was needed. The teacher taught. Therapists provided therapy. The intervener provided support across a gamut of needs including receptive and expressive interpretation at an appropriate level and modality for the student. Because the intervener worked exclusively with one individual, she interacted with the parents extensively and could therefore provide a medical, family and personal context to explain/interpret the student's preferences or prohibitions to others, making the intervener a valued team member. She also supported the student's personal needs including food, hygiene, toileting, hearing aids, glasses, shoes and chapped skin while consistently promoting independence. Interveners transitioned the students to and from scheduled therapy, interfaced on the students' behalf with a variety of staff, facilitated social interactions, and understood students' IEP goals.

Interveners were closely directed and mentored by the teaching and administrative staff. Frequent planning meetings between interveners and teaching staff kept everyone abreast of the week's strategies and goals. Significantly, the critical contributions of interveners to student success were recognized and appreciated by the principal, staff and families alike.

Alexis attended this school for the next two years; then after our move to California she spent a difficult year without an intervener or even an appropriate placement. She was assisted in this struggle by a young woman who

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did not sign, did not have children, or any experience in special education. Even though the assistant could see that more was needed and expressed this opinion to us, she was merely an aide employed to monitor, move, toilet and feed Alexis.

The Lone Ranger...

Then, Alexis started first grade in a non-residential, special needs facility where she was assigned a young, one-on-one, signing aide named Amy, who had previously worked with another deaf-blind child. From the beginning, Amy combined spoken and sign language, gestures and pictures to communicate with Alexis. Amy learned what each of Alexis's utterances and non-standard signs meant (and began shaping both to intelligible, commonly understood forms) and eagerly made connections from what we told her of Alexis's home and non-school experiences. Amy understood that what happened at home and what happened at school were all part of a continuum for Alexis. As Alexis began to speak and sign expressively, Amy used that information to provide a context for her communication attempts—critical to meaningful dialogue.



Amy gained and sustained Alexis's trust, which is an essential part of the intervener's role. To make progress, Alexis must necessarily attempt many tasks that are risky and taxing: walking without a walker or peering at scribbles on paper to discern meaning, for example.

Intervention made it possible for Alexis to access settings and situations seamlessly. This was integration. Amy supported Alexis across all the environments and activities presented at school: classroom, playground, therapy, orientation and mobility, field trips, assessments, and persistently sought a way to make each opportunity accessible and meaningful to Alexis.

Amy also extended, expanded and generalized Alexis's educational and therapeutic experiences. If a teacher or therapist stated that Alexis ought to be encouraged to reach further with her left arm, for example, then Amy incorporated opportunities for Alexis to reach with her left arm as often as she could. Expanding upon anything Alexis expresses interest in is also a tactic that Amy employed constantly with excellent results.

Amy functioned as the hardware wrangler, becoming the in-house expert on Alexis's hearing aids, batteries, FM system, CCTV, monocular, magnifiers, zoomtext, cane, and AFOs. Whatever went to school came home intact.

Amy front-loaded Alexis with information that she would need to cope with an upcoming event and planned ahead in order to avoid predictable troublesome situations such as the loud, chaotic lunch line. Even with good pre-planning, unexpected calamities arose; Alexis trusted Amy and depended upon her to support her through these difficult times. Amy did not disappoint even when things got difficult.

As a very social individual herself, Amy greeted dozens of staff members by name and yearly learned the names of hundreds of students as part of a very successful strategy to connect Alexis to the school social network. "Look, here comes Cassie. Doesn't she look cute today? You have your hair in a ponytail too. Say, 'See you at lunch, Cassie!'" In this way, Amy modeled appropriate social interactions, drew other students and staff into Alexis's circle, and also encouraged Alexis to participate in the interchange. As a result, many students greeted Alexis spontaneously.

For some individuals, becoming an intervener creates an overwhelming desire to protect the deaf-blind student that can sometimes lead to reluctance to allow the child to risk the thousands of things they must do to achieve even moderate independence. Over-protectiveness has never been a problem for Amy; she has always encouraged and advocated for greater independence for Alexis.



Amy and Alexis have been a successful team for twelve years now. They have progressed through four schools, fourteen teachers, numerous psychologists and therapists. Unfortunately, throughout these years, Amy

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has not always had the benefit of supportive mentors or administrators. Often her role as intervener has been misunderstood and she has had to fend off attempts to encroach upon her commitment to Alexis. This has been awkward at times. Some teachers haven't known how to direct Amy's efforts or how to use her expertise to develop appropriate instruction strategies for Alexis. Some underestimate the value of an intervener's role and resent the input of a non-credentialed employee, no matter how well reasoned or accurate. Some have abandoned their responsibility to Alexis and left her to Amy's care and instruction. This lack of support has sometimes left Amy fatigued and disillusioned. Through the years, despite her own professional woes, Amy has never betrayed Alexis's trust or stopped advocating for her needs.



When I think back to those early days, I have no doubt that the supportive consistency of an intervener who provides physical and communicative access across and throughout the educational environment has made a tremendous difference for Alexis. Much of her progress is largely attributable to the dedication and daily efforts of her intervener of twelve years, Amy Beier Hernandez. In addition to her own determined, enthusiastic and warm nature, Alexis is also a very lucky girl.



Interveners Sharing Their Strategies

My name is Amy Hernandez and I work as an intervener with a student who is deaf-blind. She is 18 years old and is quite precocious when wanting to ingest academic, social, or other topics SHE feels have relevance to her life.

First Strategy: One of my favorite strategies is to take a simple task, and then mold, tweak and bend the task into four or five short activities that the student can then choose—within my parameters—to cover for that day. The high school she attends has block scheduling, which means that each class period lasts one and a half hours. Using this strategy, her instruction of math and reading (alternating every other day) is broken up into three to five individual tasks per class time.

Second Strategy: Alexis is integrated into a weight training class and there are no other peers from her special day class with her. This could be seen as a negative situation, and lead to isolation (i.e., minimal interaction with others). However, I use the first fifteen minutes of class time, after we warm-up and stretch, to have her greet her fellow classmates and watch them perform the proper weight lifting techniques. She enjoys counting repetitions for her fellow students while asking about upcoming football games, dances or other school socials. We then set out to perform lifting on approximately 4 or 5 weight machines (three sets of 10 to 12 reps). With this new technique of peer observation, Alexis has begun to attempt to lift weights (or just sit on machines that scared her in the past). Her most recent accomplishment, which she has worked on with much patience for almost a year, is walking (as a warm-up), running and walking again (as a warm down) on a treadmill for a total of ten minutes.

Third Strategy: Since I am Alexis' "liaison" to her surroundings I take extra pride in stimulating the social process so that it doesn't pass her by. During the course of a day, I will greet her friends and try to point out key elements about them that Alexis can then use as topics of a quick conversations (e.g., "Hi, Katie. I like your cute shirt today"). Alexis then has the opportunity to greet this peer and connect for a brief, positive moment without missing a beat since most high school students barely have time to chat between classes but may stop for a few seconds to be "taken in" by this unique individual.

It's Only Natural: Interveners & Natural Supports for Learners with Deaf-blindness

by Liz Hartmann, Special Consultant to CDBS

What does it mean to be natural? When I think of the word, my mind conjures up things that are simple, free of constraints and alteration. I think about looking out at the Grand Canyon and feeling one with nature. I also think about my best friend and how uninhibited and free of pretense I am when I'm around her. Being natural implies that you are in accord with your environment and free from artificial limitations. What does it mean to be natural for a child with deaf-blindness? Do they have the same opportunities to be natural? Can children with deaf-blindness be appropriately supported but at the same time be given the opportunities to be natural in their learning? This article discusses two educational practices, the use of natural supports and interveners, and how these practices can unite to provide opportunities for children with deaf-blindness to be naturally supported in their learning.

Natural supports

Natural supports are defined as “those components of an educational program—philosophy, policies, people, materials and technology and curricula—which are used to enable all students to be fully participating members of a regular classroom school and community life.” (Jorgensen, 1992, p. 183). Using natural supports requires educators to find the resources that already exist in learning environments (e.g., peer support) and identify how these supports can be utilized instead of traditional, artificial supports (e.g., instructional assistants) (Grigal, 1998). It also challenges educators to look at how traditional models of educational programming may be creating barriers for the child and how these barriers can then be reduced or eliminated by substituting them with natural aspects of the environment. The use of natural supports is an important part of every child's education. For the child with deaf-blindness, the use of natural supports allows the child to experience his or her environment and learn from it in an authentic way.

To provide an example of natural supports I will share a story about Keith, a student with deaf-blindness who I worked with when I was an instructional assistant. Keith worked each week in an animal shelter as part of

his vocational training. He helped the staff by cleaning and preparing the cages for the cats and dogs. When Keith and I entered the shelter, the staff would tell me the work they need completed and then I communicated this information to Keith. I enjoyed my role as Keith's “interpreter” and took great pride in how my work helped him to do his job in the community. Then, during one of Keith's IEPs, it was decided to systematically increase the use of natural supports in his vocational setting. I would train the shelter staff on how to directly communicate with Keith using a low-tech communication board. Within a few weeks, Keith started his work at the shelter by greeting the staff and getting direction from them while I stood back. At first I felt a little bit silly just standing there observing, but over time I found that it was a valuable experience that taught me a lot about how Keith communicates. This small change caused Keith's presence and interaction at the shelter to increase in very natural and meaningful ways.

Instructional assistants ~ naturally help or naturally hinder?

Ever since my work with Keith, I have continued to be interested in the challenges of being an instructional assistant. Over the years, the use of instructional assistants (also referred to as one-to-ones, aides, paraprofessionals, and facilitators) has developed into a common but controversial educational practice used to support children with multiple disabilities. When used appropriately, this type of instructional support can positively impact a child's ability to learn; when used inappropriately or left unsupervised, this type of instructional support can have a negative impact. In research of the education of children with multiple disabilities, the use of instructional assistants is often identified as a traditional and artificial support that can have inadvertent detrimental effects on a child's education (Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron, & Fialka, 2005). For example, a study of the use of instructional assistants in general education to support children with deaf-blindness found that these assistants were almost always in close proximity to the

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students, even when it wasn't necessary. This proximity was often seen as a barrier to children's participation in their education, negatively impacting the children's relationships with peers, teachers and assistants. In addition, the close proximity of the teaching assistants also negatively impacted children's independence, control and identities (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland, 1997).

So, what does this mean for the education of the child with deaf-blindness? Few would argue against the need for a child with deaf-blindness to have a dedicated person to support their educational program, but does this practice of using instructional assistants clash with those who think that children with multiple disabilities need to be supported more naturally? Considering my previous experience working with Keith, I still feel at odds with these questions. I remember the time I spent in this job as one of the most challenging and rewarding times of my life. It was rewarding in that I was able to make a difference for the student I worked closely with, helping him to learn and access various environments. It was challenging in that I made many mistakes by hovering when I should have taken a step back. Although I learned from my mistakes, I realized too late that there were times when I could have supported him better by doing nothing. There was a fine line between helping and hindering, and figuring out where that line was for that day, or that task, or that environment was one of the hardest and most anxiety-producing parts of my job.

For more information on the use of instructional assistants to support students with disabilities, visit the website of Michael Giangreco, Research Professor at the University of Vermont:

www.uvm.edu/~mgiangre/

Interveners ~ the natural choice

In order to improve services for children with deaf-blindness and the work environments for their instructional assistants, it is important to closely look at the challenges of using a dedicated person as educational support. Many people have recognized the increasingly complex and diverse roles and responsibilities of those supporting students who are deaf-blind, acknowledging this unique position with the term intervener. The use of this term reflects the person's understanding of deaf-blindness and the individual needs of the deaf-blind child with whom they work. It also reflects the person's specific training in competencies directly related to the education and intervention of children with deaf-blindness.

These competencies have been carefully developed and documented and are now being used in trainings throughout the U.S. For example, CDBS will be hosting a 3-day intervener training institute this summer to provide skills and knowledge to interveners around California.

As intervener trainings and competencies develop over time, it will be important that the discussion of what it means to be an intervener and a natural support is addressed. In my own experience I found that my natural tendency didn't always turn into a natural support for the child. It took me time to realize that my own active involvement in the class, supporting the student, often required me to do absolutely nothing but observe what was going on. In addition, it required me to broaden my scope and work with all people in Keith's environment. Instead of facilitating a communication exchange and acting as an interpreter, there were certain instances where I was better used as an ambassador for Keith, teaching others the skills I had developed so that he could directly interact with his peers and teachers. If it wasn't for the support and training of people who valued my unique relationship with Keith and his need for natural experiences, I would have never been comfortable or willing to support him in this way.

For more information on the roles and responsibilities of interveners, please visit the following online resources:

www.tsbvi.edu/programs/paradb-a.htm

www.sfsu.edu/~cadbs/Winter02.pdf

www.dbproject.mn.org/interveners.html

www.dblink.org/lib/topics/single_topic.cfm?topic=Interveners&d_topic=Interveners

In conclusion, it is crucial that intervener training and competencies incorporate education and training on natural supports and how to implement

them in the education of children with deaf-blindness. Equally important, training will need to include on-going support so that interveners continue to feel comfortable in their role, which requires both skill and continual, thoughtful observation. The burden on the intervener to make the day-to-day decisions that dictate how much support the child receives can be partially relieved if the entire IEP team of the child recognizes the complexity of the relationship between the child and the intervener and then takes the time to collaboratively address the use of natural supports. Creating systematic plans for when and where it is appropriate for intervener supports to be faded and replaced with natural supports may be one way in which this can be encouraged. All in all, it is through

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natural supports, implemented through the support of an intervener, that a child with deaf-blindness will be able to feel and be natural in their learning environment. And all children should have the opportunity to feel this way.

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Interveners Sharing Their Strategies

My name is Bryan Oey and I work as an intervener for a student who is deaf-blind. My student has had difficulty attending for extended periods of time. We have prolonged his attention span to 30-45 minutes by utilizing his folder of desired activities with a clock timer. We started at 3 minutes and then gradually increased the time. This is what we do:

Setting up the materials and equipment:

We took photographs of activities he enjoys (e.g., playdoh, swinging, movement on big therapy ball, drawing) and used Velcro to attach these photos to a folder.

We bought a clock-timer that visually tells how much time is left for a session. When the timer is set, there is a red color for the set amount of time. As the time approaches zero, the red disappears.

We placed Velcro on the upper corner of the clock where the student places the picture of a desired activity before working on a task(s).

Just before starting a classroom task(s):

The student chooses an activity from the folder of activities he enjoys.

He places the picture on the clock timer.

I set up the time he will be working on a task(s).

During the task(s):

During the activity, there are times when the student becomes distracted from the task, but he is easily redirected to the task after I point to the clock timer. The clock timer clearly indicates how much time is left until he receives his desired activity.

Just after the task(s)

The student gets to enjoy his chosen desired activity.

Interveners Sharing Their Strategies

My name is Casey Muehlig and I am a one-on-one intervener. I work with my good friend Norman Medina, a young man in the fourth grade who is challenged by deaf-blindness. Please understand that my idea of deafness, with Norman, is not a total loss of sound as in turning off a radio. I don't know how well Norman hears, but I do know Norman tracks voices with his eyes and smiles when spoken to. Norman shows extreme gratification by smiling or giggling when meeting new friends.

The flood of voices in the cafeteria or on the playground is very confusing for a deaf-blind individual. I like to break the noise down into fragments for Norman so he realizes that the noise is actually individual voices. Around the lunch table I listen to the two hundred or so students eating lunch and I can't distinguish one conversation from the next, but I use my vision to see what I am hearing. Norman is not afforded this luxury and at first he showed signs of stress at the lunch table. Outside at recess is the same roar. This is the time I break the noise into fragments by introducing Norman to the noise—one student at a time. Now, I feel Norman recognizes the flood of voices in the cafeteria and has accepted this sound as friendly.

Socializing and being accepted are two very important points in a person's life. The intervener needs to introduce his or her student to as many classmates as possible on the playground who aren't (or are) deaf-blind. This way your student becomes a valued part of the social group. Be a brave intervener! General education kids are challenged when introduced to a deaf-blind person and can actually be scared. Introduce your student, talk about his or her challenges and take the fear away! Before you know it your student who is deaf-blind will have many new friends who will be happy to see and play with your student on a one-to-one basis."

Are you a professional who has used the *School Inventory of Problem Solving Skills* (authors Charity Rowland, Ph.D. and Philip Schweigert, M.Ed.)

to assess young children who are deaf-blind?



Would you be willing to complete a brief survey to rate this instrument for research purposes?



Contact Maurice Belote for more information: mbelote@sfsu.edu or 800-822-7884 extension 1. Thanks.





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Fact Sheet

Things to Remember When Requesting an Intervener for Your Child

by David Brown, CDBS Educational Specialist

Although the use of interveners for children with deaf-blindness has a long history and there is a growing body of research and literature supporting the idea (for example see the DB-LINK website, and Alsop, Blaha, and Kloos, 2000), there can be considerable confusion when parents request that an intervener be provided for their child. Parents might not be clear about the precise reasons that an intervener is necessary, and few educational professionals will be familiar with the idea since deaf-blindness is a very low incidence disability. Experience shows that confusion is minimized if parents have a clear idea why an intervener is necessary for their child, some concept of what the intervener is meant to be doing and why, and an understanding of the most common misconceptions that arise when the idea of an intervener is first brought up.

Why does your child need an intervener? The concept of the intervener is specifically related to the nature of deaf-blindness as a disability that limits access to essential information for development. The decision to request an intervener should be based on discussion of three things:

1. General information about deaf-blindness including implications for development, teaching strategies, communication approaches, and the concept of the intervener.
2. An up-to-date, appropriate and comprehensive assessment of the individual student's current abilities, learning styles, and educational needs, preferably involving several different professionals and family members.
3. Consideration of the existing or proposed program for the student, including such aspects as the ratio of adults to students, curriculum, communication systems used, and the physical environment.

What are the common misconceptions when an intervener is requested for a student?

- a. People may think that the student is not yet ready—cognitively, developmentally, linguistically, or emotionally—for this level of support because they are thinking of the intervener as a sign language interpreter (see Morgan, 2001). If the case for providing an intervener is made well, then it should be obvious that there can be no such thing as a student with deaf-blindness who '...is not yet ready...' for this kind of support, although there may be students within the population of children with deaf-blindness who do not need it, or do not need it any more.
- b. Sometimes there is a feeling that what the parents are asking for is something that would actually help every student in the class, and it is not fair for one child to have it if the others cannot. This suggests that the case for an intervener for the child with deaf-blindness has not been made clearly and precisely enough following the guidelines in Points 1 to 3 above. The request for support from an intervener should be made because, for that particular child, it represents the best—and in many cases the only—way to implement the child's IEP.

Fact sheets from California Deaf-Blind Services are to be used by both families and professionals serving individuals with dual sensory impairments. The information applies to students 0–22 years of age. The purpose of the fact sheet is to give general information on a specific topic. More specific information for an individual student can be provided through individualized technical assistance available from CDBS. The fact sheet is a starting point for further information.

- c. A frequent challenge is the absence of anyone in the district/county who could train and support an intervener to work with the student. There is now a body of useful literature on this topic, as on other aspects of deaf-blind education (see Belote, 2002). The state deaf-blind project will be able to make this information available, and may also offer other support such as contributing to the assessment process and providing training.
- d. Everyone wants the student to learn to relate to peers and to adults within the class and throughout the school, and sometimes it is thought that an intervener will block this development and keep the student isolated (see Hartmann It's Only Natural in this edition of reSources). In fact, the intervener is not intended to act as a barrier between the student and other people except where these social contacts would be inappropriate, distracting, or counter-productive. For many students with deaf-blindness, the intervener is likely to be the key figure in facilitating social interactions with others, a process that might need to be planned and structured with great care over a considerable period of time.
- e. When people want a student with deaf-blindness to experience full or partial inclusion in general education settings, they sometimes oppose the idea of an intervener as they think that it will be counter-productive and stigmatizing in some way. Yet for many students with deaf-blindness there is no possibility of effective functioning in mainstream settings without this support as an essential prerequisite.
- f. Another common objection is that the student may become dependent upon the intervener, and that this will be a bad thing. In fact, the student will almost certainly need to become dependent upon the intervener as part of the process of developing trust and building a positive relationship, so that together they will then be in a position to work on whatever is necessary. Encouraging this dependence is a deliberate strategy, but it is a means to an end and not a goal in itself.

For any school district, providing an intervener to support a student with deaf-blindness undoubtedly represents a significant expense, and also a leap into the unknown which carries the likelihood of ongoing complications and challenges. However, there is growing evidence that an intervener, when used effectively and successfully, can be a powerful tool for implementing the IEP for a wide range of students with deaf-blindness. We owe it to the district administrators, and to the students themselves, to prepare the case for intervention with care and clarity, and to be ready and able to explain and educate when we meet with understandable concern and hesitancy.

Useful Reading

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Hoja de Datos

Cosas para recordar cuando Ud. solicita un interventor para su hijo

por David Brown, Especialista en Educación de CDBS

Aunque el uso de los interventores para los niños sordo-ciegos tiene una larga historia, y hay un crecimiento constante de las investigaciones y la literatura que apoyan esta idea (por ejemplo, vean el sitio en el Internet DB-LINK; y Alsop, Blaha y Kloos, 2000), puede haber una confusión considerable cuando los padres solicitan que se le proporcione un interventor a su hijo(a). Posiblemente los padres no tengan una idea clara sobre la razón de precisamente por qué su hijo(a) necesita un interventor, y pocos profesionistas educativos van a estar familiarizados con la idea, ya que la sordo-ceguera es una discapacidad de muy baja incidencia. La experiencia nos ha mostrado que la confusión se minimiza si los padres tienen una idea clara de por qué su hijo necesita un interventor, algún concepto de lo que el interventor debe de hacer y por qué, y una comprensión de los conceptos erróneos más comunes que surgen cuando por primera vez se menciona la idea del servicio de un interventor.

¿Por qué su hijo(a) necesita un interventor? El concepto de un interventor está específicamente relacionado a las características de la sordo-ceguera como una discapacidad que limita el acceso a información esencial para el desarrollo de la persona. La decisión de solicitar un interventor debe de estar basada en la consideración de tres puntos:

1. La información general sobre la sordo-ceguera, incluyendo las implicaciones para el desarrollo, las estrategias de enseñanza, los métodos de comunicación y el concepto del interventor;
2. Una evaluación actualizada, apropiada e íntegra de las habilidades, estilos de aprendizaje y necesidades educativas actuales del estudiante como individuo, de preferencia con la participación de varios profesionistas y miembros de la familia;
3. Una evaluación del programa educativo existente del estudiante o el programa propuesto, incluyendo aspectos tales como la proporción de adultos a estudiantes, el plan de estudios, los sistemas de comunicación usados y el ambiente físico.

¿Cuáles son los conceptos erróneos cuando se solicita un interventor para un estudiante?

- a. Posiblemente las personas piensen que el estudiante no esté listo(a) en los aspectos cognoscitivos, lingüísticos, emocionales o del desarrollo para aprovechar de este nivel de apoyo, ya que piensan en el interventor como si fuera un interprete del lenguaje se señas (vea Morgan, 2001). Si el caso para proporcionar un interventor está bien presentado, debe de ser obvio que no es posible que haya un estudiante sordociego que ‘...no esté listo...’ para este tipo de apoyo, aunque posiblemente haya estudiantes dentro de la población de niños sordociegos que no lo necesiten, o que lo han tenido y ya no lo necesitan.

Las hojas de información de California Deaf-Blind Services están disponibles para que las usen tanto las familias como los profesionistas que dan servicio a los individuos con impedimentos sensoriales duales. La información corresponde a estudiantes de 0 a 22 años de edad. El propósito de las Hojas de Información es ofrecer información general en un tema específico. Se puede proporcionar más información específica para un estudiante en particular a través del apoyo técnico individualizado disponible en CDBS. La Hoja de Información es un punto de inicio para empezar a reunir más información.

- b. Algunas veces existe la idea de que los padres están pidiendo algo que realmente podría ayudar a todos los estudiantes de la clase, y que no es justo que un niño(a) lo tenga si los otros no lo van a tener. Esto sugiere que el caso para solicitar un interventor para el niño sordociego no ha sido hecho con claridad y precisión suficiente, siguiendo la guía arriba indicada en los Puntos 1 a 3. La solicitud para recibir el apoyo de un interventor se debe de hacer porque, para ese niño en particular, representa la mejor forma—y en muchos casos la única—de implementar el IEP del niño.
- c. Un problema que se presenta con frecuencia es la ausencia de alguien del distrito o condado que pueda entrenar y apoyar a un interventor para que trabaje con el estudiante. Ahora hay literatura útil sobre este tema, al igual que literatura sobre otros aspectos de la educación del niño sordo-ciego (vea Belote, 2002). El proyecto del estado para sordociegos va a tener esta información disponible, y posiblemente también ofrezca otros tipos de apoyo, tales como contribuir al proceso de la evaluación y proporcionar entrenamiento a los interventores.
- d. Todos quieren que el estudiante aprenda a relacionarse con sus compañeros y con los adultos dentro de la clase y de la escuela, y algunas veces se piensa que un interventor va a bloquear este desarrollo y que va a mantener al estudiante aislado (vea Hartmann, *Es lo Natural*, en esta edición de reSources). De hecho, el papel del interventor no es actuar como una barrera entre el estudiante y las otras personas, excepto cuando haya contactos sociales que pudieran ser inapropiados, contra productivos o una distracción. Para muchos estudiantes sordociegos, es probable que el interventor sea la figura clave para facilitar las interacciones sociales con los demás, el cual es un proceso que posiblemente deba ser planeado y estructurado con mucho cuidado durante un período de tiempo considerable.
- e. Cuando las personas quieren que un estudiante sordociego tenga una experiencia de participación completa o parcial en situaciones de educación general, estas personas algunas veces están en contra de la idea de un interventor, ya que piensan que va a ser contra productivo y que va a estigmatizar al estudiante de alguna manera. Sin embargo, para muchos estudiantes sordociegos, no hay la posibilidad de funcionar efectivamente en un programa integrado sin este apoyo como un pre-requisito esencial.
- f. Otra objeción común es que posiblemente el estudiante llegue a depender del interventor, y que eso sería malo para el estudiante. De hecho, es casi seguro que el estudiante va a necesitar depender del interventor como parte del proceso de desarrollar confianza y aprender a establecer una relación positiva, para que juntos puedan estar en una posición para trabajar en lo que sea necesario. Desarrollar esta dependencia es una estrategia deliberada, pero ésta sólo es una manera de lograr el objetivo, no es una meta en sí.

Para cualquier distrito escolar, proporcionar un interventor para apoyar a un estudiante sordociego ciertamente representa un gasto significativo, y también es una entrada a un área desconocida que tiene la probabilidad de complicaciones y problemas recurrentes. Sin embargo, hay evidencia de que un interventor, cuando se usa efectiva y exitosamente, puede ser una poderosa herramienta para implementar el IEP en un amplio rango de estudiantes sordociegos. Es nuestra responsabilidad para con los administradores del distrito escolar y con los mismos estudiantes, preparar el caso con cuidado y claridad para solicitar un interventor, y estar listos y preparados para explicar y educar a las personas que tengan dudas y preocupaciones naturales.

Lecturas Útiles

Alsop, L. (Ed.) (2002). *Understanding deafblindness: Issues, perspectives, and strategies*. Logan, Utah: (Entender la Sordoceguera: Problemas, Perspectivas y Estrategias) SKI-HI Institute, Utah State University.

Alsop, L., Blaha, R., y Kloos, E. (2000). Resúmen: The intervener in early intervention and educational settings for children and youth with deafblindness. (El interventor en intervenciones tempranas y en situaciones educativas para niños y jóvenes sordociegos). Obtenido en www.edu/ntac/intervener.htm.

CDBS announces

The 2006 Statewide Summer Intervener Training Institute

August 2–4, 2006 • 9:00 am–4:00 pm

Los Angeles, California (specific location to be announced)

Comprehensive training for: 1) individuals currently serving as interveners (i.e., one-on-one paraprofessionals for children and youth who are deaf-blind), and 2) educational staff members and family members who are or will be in the position of supporting interveners or training future interveners.

Level I: August 2–4, 2006 (interveners and teams who did not participate in the 2004/2005 trainings)

Level II: August 4, 2006 (an intensive one-day training for interveners and teams who completed the 2004/2005 regional training initiative)

Training content will be based on the *Competencies for Training Intervenors to Work with Children/Students with Deafblindness* developed by the National Intervener Task Force. Core competencies and child-specific competencies within eight standards will be addressed:

Standard 1: Demonstrate knowledge of deafblindness and its impact on learning and development.

Standard 2: Demonstrate knowledge of the process of intervention and the role of the intervener, and have the ability to facilitate that process.

Standard 3: Demonstrate knowledge of communication including methods, adaptations, and the use of assistive technology, and have the ability to facilitate the development and use of communication skills.

Standard 4: Demonstrate knowledge of the impact of Deafblindness on psychological, social, and emotional development and have the ability to facilitate social and emotional well-being.

Standard 5: Demonstrate knowledge of sensory systems and issues, covering all five senses and the ability to facilitate the effective use of the senses.

Standard 6: Demonstrate knowledge of motor, movement, and orientation and mobility (O&M) strategies that are appropriate for children/students who are deafblind, and have the ability to facilitate orientation and mobility skills.

Standard 7: Demonstrate knowledge of the impact of additional disabilities on the child/student who is deafblind and have the ability to provide appropriate support.

Standard 8: Demonstrate professionalism and ethical practices.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to register in teams of 2-persons (e.g., intervener and one other school staff member) or 3-persons (e.g., intervener, school staff member, and family member). A limited number of stipends will be available to support attendance of teams from outside the Los Angeles area. Stipends will be used to cover the cost of airfare, mileage, and/or lodging. There is no registration fee for this training; however, participants will be required to attend the entire training and to notify CDBS at least six-weeks prior to the training in the event of a cancellation so that space may be given to those on the waiting list.

To order registration materials or for more information about this training, please contact CDBS Project Coordinator Maurice Belote at 415-405-7558 or by email at mbelote@sfsu.edu. Completed registration packets must be returned to CDBS by June 9, 2006. Space is limited so early registration is encouraged.

California Deaf-Blind Services is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (Award #H326C030017).

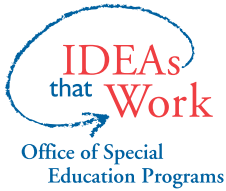


California Deaf-Blind Services *reSources*

Editor Maurice Belote
Design & Layout Rebecca Randall

CDBS *reSources* is published quarterly by California Deaf-Blind Services.

This newsletter is supported in whole or in part by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, (Cooperative Agreement No. H326C030017). However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, and no official endorsement by the Department should be inferred. Note: There are no copyright restrictions on this document; however, please credit the source and support of federal funds when copying all or part of this material.



Funding Source:
Public Law 105-17, Title I -
Amendments to the Individuals with
Disabilities Education Act, Part D,
Subpart 2, Sec. 661(i)(1)(A)

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