



Fact Sheet

Out of the Corner and into the Class: The Role of the Intervener with Deafblind Children

By Beth Fox

Editors Note: Beth attended the 2001 Summer Institute on Deafblindness and this is the paper she turned in for university credit. Beth captured many key points that were made by Linda Alsop during the two-day training. Thank you, Beth, for putting your notes in such an easy to read format about the role of interveners.

Who is that child sitting alone in the corner of the room? It may be a child who is deafblind. Deafblindness is a complex disability, which is characterized by a combined loss of vision and hearing. The vision and hearing loss is compounded exponentially when there are additional disabilities to create extreme challenges in the areas of communication, development of interpersonal relationships, behavior, sensory integration, and motor and cognitive development.

Why does this child need extra help beyond conventional special education? Due to the child's dual sensory loss, she lacks access to information. This challenge may prevent the child from interacting with her environment and encourages isolation and internalization with focus upon self-stimulation. The less a child interacts within her environment the fewer chances she has to learn.

What will it take to help move the child forward and closer to his or her classmates? A person who can consistently bridge the gap of sensory deprivation so that the child can receive information and become linked to the world around her is needed. This person is called intervener. The intervener can provide information to child so that she may better understand her environment and act appropriately within it. The intervener serves to interpret information from the child and also acts as a conduit for communication between the child and others. An intervener could be described as a consistent filter, communication cable, facilitator, or bridge. An intervener does not control, create dependency, make decisions for the child, or stand as a barrier between the child and others.

Is the intervener presented with many challenges in assisting the child along the path toward his classmates? The intervener must learn all about the child who is deafblind and appreciate her uniqueness. This person should have a secure understanding of the child's vision and hearing and how information is received. Much time will be spent learning about the child's personal system for information exchange. These things will be the basis for building a communication system that will eventually link the child to her environment and the people who are active within it.

Why is this interface between the child and intervener so important? A monitor and keyboard are cabled to a CPU of a computer so that information can be entered and returned. These pieces are not unlike the relationship between an intervener and the child with combined vision and hearing loss. The child, like the CPU, is a full of power but can only make an impact with the proper access pieces, otherwise, it will be left in the corner and the potential to positively impact the environment will be left undiscovered.

How will the intervener guide the deafblind child to the middle of the room? The child will gravitate toward her peers through learning. Curiosity equals learning and the intervener can fuel the child's motivation for curiosity. The intervener will help the child understand concepts and facilitate this transfer from the home environment so that concepts may be generalized to a variety of situations. The intervener ensures that the child has access to the results her trial and error learning so that education can occur. The constancy of the intervener will discourage stress in the child and allow her to learn more easily.

Can this child exhibit behavior that is suitable for a classroom setting? An intervener can chart behavior so that it can be understood as a means of communicating why the child is frustrated, hurt, etc. "Inappropriate" behavior is generally due to lack of information. Once the behavior is understood and communication systems are established then the proper information can be conveyed to the child.

How will an intervener significantly improve the life of a deafblind child with regard to their peers and classroom experiences? An intervener can include a child with combined vision and hearing loss in class activities and limit problems of isolation by providing information to child and allowing her to interact with classmates. The intervener plays an important role in facilitating introductions of new people to the deafblind child and, over time, can release child to the new person. An overwhelming portion of learning is tertiary (comes from simple observation) and this incidental learning does not occur in individuals with sensory deprivation unless an intervener is constantly present to inform the child about who or what is around her and what is occurring with these people, situations, or objects.

Is the intervener a classroom teacher? The intervener is not the classroom teacher but provides no less a vital service than his or her counterpart. The intervener is under the direction of the teacher and the relationship between the two must be emotionally strong. It may take much effort for each person to be able to discuss, explore, and work together to create the best possible learning situation for the child. The teacher and intervener must respect each other and all people who work in various roles with the deafblind child. When this occurs teachers, interveners, and all students will meet at the center of the room and will benefit greatly.

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Fact Sheets from the Colorado Services to Children with Deafblindness are to be used by both families and professionals serving individuals with vision and hearing loss. The information applies to children, birth through 21 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 personalized technical assistance available from the Colorado Deafblindness Project. For more information call (303) 866-6681 or (303) 866-6605.

