Deafblindness
and the
Role of the Intervener
in Educational Settings

Purpose:

- To define deafblindness and discuss its impact
- To describe the role of interveners
- To address systems issues
What is Deafblindness?

We all must have information about the world.

With typical vision and hearing, this information comes through our eyes and ears automatically without much effort.

What happens when there is a loss of both vision and hearing?

- Natural flow of visual and auditory information doesn’t occur.
- Pieces of information may be:
  - Incomplete
  - Distorted
  - Unreliable
- Complete information cannot be accessed in a clear and consistent way.
Hearing loss or vision loss alone has great impact

- A child with a vision loss . . . must rely more upon hearing to compensate for the lack of visual information.

- Hearing must compensate

- A child with a hearing loss . . . must rely more upon vision to compensate for the lack of auditory information.

- Vision must compensate
For children with a combined vision and hearing loss:

- Neither sense can adequately compensate for the lack of the other
- Access to the clear and consistent flow of visual and auditory information is not available

Deafblindness is a disability of access - access to visual and auditory information about people and things in the environment
Deafblindness
- Does not usually refer to total deafness and total blindness
- Degrees of loss vary greatly

Example: *A moderate visual acuity loss and a severe hearing loss*

The combined effects of both the vision and the hearing loss are significant

Example: *Light perception only and a moderate hearing loss*
Many have other disabling conditions:

- Physical disabilities
- Health problems
- Cognitive challenges

Children who are deafblind are diverse with unique needs

All share:

- Similar learning and communication challenges
- Isolating effects of combined vision and hearing loss
Learning

- Learning through independent observation and exploration is difficult.
- Children:
  - Cannot learn what they do not detect.
  - Are unaware of what information is missed.
- Essential information is missed and incidental learning is greatly limited.

**Typical Learning**

- **Incidental**: Occurs automatically without much effort. The way most information is learned.
- **Secondary**: Listening to a person teach or present information.
- **Direct**: Hands-on experiences.
Incidental learning usually does not occur and is not effective.

Secondary learning is difficult.

Direct learning and hands-on experiences are essential and the best way to learn.

---

Communication

- Development of formal language is difficult
- Ability to connect to others and be a part of the world is difficult
Communication

Children who are deafblind miss opportunities to:

- Observe the communication of others
- Participate in communication themselves

Communication attempts may be missed or misunderstood

---

Communication

Children who are deafblind:

- May try to express their wants through behaviors that seem inappropriate
- May be unaware of what their actions are communicating to others
- May have behavioral problems
- Cannot develop formal communication and interaction skills on their own
Social and Emotional Development

Lack of access to complete visual and auditory information results in varying degrees of isolation and disconnection from the world that are incomprehensible.

Social and Emotional Development

Children who are deafblind may:

- Live lives of chaos
- Find social interactions to be confusing, purposeless, and even fearful
- Detach from others and avoid interactions
Social and Emotional Development

- Emotional bonding and trusting relationships may be difficult
- Self-identity and self-determination are difficult to achieve
- Educational environments may not be emotionally manageable

What is effective intervention for children who are deafblind?
**Deafblind Intervention**

**Intervention for children who are deafblind must:**

- Connect them to the world
- Provide access to clear and consistent visual and auditory information
- Provide support for the development and use of communication
- Provide support for social and emotional well-being

---

**Intervener**

A person who:

- Works consistently one-to-one with a child who is deafblind
- Has training and specialized skills in deafblindness
Role of the Intervener

- To facilitate access to environmental information usually gained through vision and hearing
- To facilitate the development and/or use of receptive and expressive communication skills
- To develop and maintain a trusting, interactive relationship that can promote social and emotional well-being

Access to Environmental Information

The intervener:

- Increases and clarifies information
- Facilitates access to incidental information
- Facilitates the learning of concepts
- Provides consistency and constancy

Three. Good. Two for Trinity. One for Anne. Thank you.

### Development and Use of Communication Skills

**The intervener:**

- Facilitates both receptive and expressive communication development
- Is a motivating and trusted partner who consistently responds to a child’s communication
- Provides opportunities for conversations and interactions with others

**Examples:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good morning. What? Oh yes. Did you see Craig? Craig and Tom are here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We’re going to make 48 two-ounce herb rolls for our banquet today to serve with chef’s salad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Social and Emotional Well-Being

**The intervener:**

- Develops a bond of trust with the child that decreases anxiety
- Helps the child know where he is and who is around him
- Encourages interactions with others
- Supports self determination by helping the child make choices, solve problems, and develop self esteem

**Examples:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feel the car. There. What is that? Is that a car?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretty. On? Can I put it on?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Process of Intervention

- Access to information
- Communication
- Social and emotional well-being

- Academic work
- Self-care routines
- Specialized therapies
- Social activities

Interveners are trained to promote independence rather than dependence.

Interveners are not a barrier between the child and the world … but a vital link to people and things.
Brenda Willets  
Parent

I have a 6-year-old son with cerebral palsy. He is also deafblind due to cortical and neurological issues that he has.

I've seen the importance of having a well-trained skilled intervener with Brady in the classroom. He has had a one-on-one aide, and he just hasn't made the progress with that. As he's had his intervener, he's making progress in communicating, in making choices, in social interactions with his peers, and in access to all the environment that's going on around him. And he's happy.

His intervener is bringing information to him; helping him learn about his environment, concept development, and the things that he just doesn't learn incidentally like other children do.

At school, it's fun too, because his peers can communicate with him, and they love it. They love to come up, and his intervener will help them communicate with him, and then he can communicate back to them. And it's opened up a whole new world for him.

Andrew Prouty  
Young Man with Deafblindness

I had an intervener in school to help me access communication and know what was going on around me. If I didn't have an intervener, I wouldn't have all that.

I think an intervener helped me when I was growing up become more independent because now I live in my own apartment, I pay my own bills, I do my own shopping, and I travel independently to work.

I think it is important for deafblind children to have interveners for a variety of reasons. So they have access to the world and communication, fewer behavior problems, and independence.
I think having interveners in my classroom makes it more possible for me to reach more children. Before interveners, to reach our children who were deaf and blind, I needed to be with them and right close or I couldn’t reach them. Unless there was a staff with that child then there was no way to reach that child.

National Perspectives

Using one-to-one supports with children who are deafblind in educational settings is not new

Relatively new:

- Use of the term “intervener”
- Recognition that interveners need specialized training and skills in deafblindness
Systemic Issues and National Efforts

National Intervener Task Force formed to:

- Provide an open forum for discussion about the use of interveners
- Increase awareness of the role of the intervener with children who are deafblind
- Establish the intervener practice as a credible option of support

Focus of National Intervener Task Force

Establish interveners as a credible service delivery option for children who are deafblind
Resources

“Interveners in the Classroom Guidelines for Teams Working With Students Who Are Deafblind”

Interveners and Paraprofessionals
Similar:
- Abide by district or agency policies
- Work under direction of classroom teacher

Different:
- Training
- Providing deafblind-specific intervention

Incidence of Deafblindness

- Children who are deafblind:
  - Are a low incidence population with high and intense needs
  - Many are counted in the multiple disabilities category

- Discrepancies exist between SEA count and national deafblind child count

- SEA deafblind child count doesn’t represent actual numbers
State Improvement Activities (reported under SPP Indicators)

- Show efforts to ensure Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for every child with disabilities
- Should reflect efforts to ensure FAPE for children who are deafblind

State Improvement Activities

Including interveners can:

- Be a part of activities that target performance, behaviors, and outcomes for children with deafblindness
- Demonstrate the district's inclusion of children with deafblindness
- Demonstrate a state's efforts to ensure FAPE
Improvement Activities Related to Interveners

- The training of intereners
- The recognition of intereners in state educational policies
- Awareness training or administrators and staff at state, district, and local levels

Interveners and Part B SPP Indicator Alignment

Indicator 3: Participation and Performance in Statewide Assessments

Interveners can provide:

- Access to the general education environment
- Access to all activities and programs to improve the performance of children who are deafblind
Interveners and Part B SPP Indicator Alignment

**Indicator 7: Preschool Outcomes**

Interveners can facilitate improvement for preschool children who are deafblind in:

- Acquisition of knowledge
- Early language, communication, and literacy skills
- Social-emotional skills
- Appropriate behavior

---

Interveners and Part B SPP Indicator Alignment

**Indicator 14: Secondary Transition**

Interveners can be the bridge to postsecondary services and positive outcomes by providing access to services and programs that meet postsecondary goals.
Interveners and the Provision of FAPE and LRE

- Interveners can play a critical role

FAPE mandates
- Access to general education, the general curriculum, and activities
- Access to specialized educational services

LRE is based upon “Access”
- Not a place
- Supports and services that provide access, participation, and progress in the general education curriculum

Access:
- A key term in IDEA
- A critical issue for children who are deafblind
- Without it educational environments are restrictive

The intervener can:
- Be the individualized support that facilitates access to information, participation, and progress
- Facilitate LRE
- Support the provision of FAPE
Interveners and the IEP

Interveners can:
- Be designated as related services or as supplementary aids and services
- Help children who are deafblind:
  - Advance appropriately to obtain goals
  - Be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum
  - Be educated and participate with other children with and without disabilities

Determining the Need for an Intervener

- How will the access of visual and auditory information be provided?
- What support will be provided for communication and interaction?
- How will the Least Restrictive Environment be provided?
- How will FAPE be ensured?
Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) requires State Deafblind Projects to address training for interveners.

National Intervener Competencies specify the knowledge and skills needed by interveners.

The Council for Exceptional Children established an Intervener SPA in 2009 setting standards for university and college intervener training programs.

Intervener Training

Administrative Support
Steve Kukic
Former Utah Special Education Director

Let me just talk for a minute about the value of interveners and the essential nature of interveners for these students. When I even say that, it is sort of incredible to me even today to say it. My view up from front was that it was better not to have an external person with any individual. The reason is that I want that individual to be as independent as possible.

What I learned through my exposure to this amazing and wonderful and awful disability, is that these young people have to have someone with them who will not only translate what is going on in the world to them, with their budding intelligence, but will also get a relationship with them that that child can trust.
Grateful acknowledgement goes to The Gibney Family Foundation whose generous funding contributed to the development and dissemination of these materials.

Developed by:
Linda Alsop
Lyn Ayer
Maurice Belote
Jon Harding
Diane Kelly
Fran Payne
Cindi Robinson

With input from:
Annette Carey & Tracy Evans-Luiselli

This PowerPoint presentation and script are copyrighted and intended for use as is. Videos and other parts may not be taken out or altered for use in other formats or presentations.

Copyright 2010
SKI-HI Institute
Utah State University
Logan, Utah