

COUNCIL OF EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

DIVISION OF VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

POSITION PAPER

**Expansion of the Role of the Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments:
Providing for Students Who Also Have Severe/Multiple Disabilities**

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All students with multiple disabilities including visual impairments are entitled to the services of a trained teacher of students with visual impairments. Students with multiple disabilities can be found in a variety of service delivery systems including residential school programs and special day classes in both public and private schools. In many cases, these students are served in a program with other children and youth with severe disabilities and are taught by a teacher who has generic training and certification. Therefore, it is essential for an itinerant teacher of students with visual impairments to provide consultant services to the classroom teacher and other transdisciplinary staff at the school as well as to provide direct services to the student with a visual impairment. Due to the increasing numbers of these students, educators of students with visual impairments should expand their roles, functions, and competencies. Many teachers are currently expected to serve children who have visual impairments in addition to a broad range of other disabilities including cerebral palsy, hearing impairment, mental retardation, and various neurological syndromes. Meeting the complex educational needs of these children and youth with visual impairments who also have severe/multiple disabilities in a wide variety of settings offers a unique challenge, which is the focus of this position paper.

It is the position of DVI that all teachers of students with visual impairments have the competencies outlined in Spungin and Ferrell (in progress). These competencies include the areas of:

1. Assessment and Evaluation
2. Educational and Instructional Strategies: Learning Environment
3. Educational and Instructional Strategies: Adapting the Curriculum
4. Guidance and Counseling
5. Administration and Supervision
6. School Community Relations

Moreover, additional specific competencies now should be added to take into account the needs of students with visual impairments who also have severe/multiple disabilities.

In the first two competency areas identified above, Assessment and Evaluation and Educational and Instructional Strategies, it is the primary responsibility of the professionals in the field of education of students with visual impairments, especially teachers, to assess and enhance functional vision skills in all students with multiple disabilities regardless of the severity or multiplicity of impairments. Specifically, it is important that teachers of students with visual impairments demonstrate competence in Assessment and Instructional Strategies that include:

1. Knowledge of the common types of visual functioning difficulties in various populations with disabilities.
2. Knowledge of the effects of visual loss on the performance of functional vision tasks, e.g., feeding activities, vocational tasks, manual communication skills, and scanning of communication boards.
3. Ability to perform and interpret functional vision assessments for students with

visual and multiple impairments.

4. Ability to design visual enhancement training in functional contexts, e.g., feeding, play time, vocational tasks, mobility.
5. Ability to communicate specific visual needs of students with visual and other multiple disabilities to other professionals serving this population.
6. Knowledge of effects of visual loss on movement patterns.
7. Knowledge of appropriate positioning and handling techniques for students with multiple disabilities that enhance efficient use of vision.
8. Knowledge of the effects of visual loss on language, social, and cognitive development.

While certain subject areas in which teachers of students with visual impairments should be trained are enumerated in the DVI position paper developed by Spungin and Ferrell (in progress), the emphasis of these competencies is dramatically different when the focus is on education of students with visual and other multiple disabilities. These differences are particularly evident in the following areas:

1. Educational Assessment and Diagnosis
2. Leisure and Recreation
3. Human Sexuality
4. Motor Development
5. Cognitive Development
6. Social Adjustment Skills
7. Career and Vocational Education

Areas of additional knowledge that all teachers need who serve students with visual impairments and other multiple disabilities include:

1. Early childhood development with specific emphasis on normal and abnormal motor, language, social, and cognitive development.
2. Informal assessment techniques: Ecological inventories, task analysis, discrepancy analysis, functional daily routines.
3. Augmentative communication systems.
4. Principles of behavior management.
5. Community-referenced curriculum.
6. Systematic instruction utilizing domain format: Self-management/home living, general community functioning, recreation/leisure, vocational.
7. Supported work models.
8. Transition programming to enhance adult living, employment and recreation/leisure options.

Students with visual impairments and other multiple disabilities are participating more frequently in diverse educational service delivery models and living successfully in various types of community facilities including their home, group homes, and residential schools. Therefore, additional relevant competencies needed by all teachers who serve students with visual impairments and other multiple disabilities are:

1. Types, advantages, and disadvantages of alternate service delivery models.
2. Organizational skills
 - a. Time management
 - b. Scheduling

- c. Use of space
- 3. Appropriate utilization of support personnel, e.g., teacher assistants, child care or residence workers.
- 4. Understanding and implementation of transdisciplinary team functioning.

Teachers of students with visual impairments should be able to function as an integral part of a transdisciplinary team in meeting the complex needs of students with visual impairments who also have severe/multiple disabilities. They will need to know and understand the roles and functions of the various disciplines including, but not limited to, medicine; education; social work; psychology; occupational, physical and speech therapies; and vocational rehabilitation. They must be knowledgeable in the terminologies utilized by each. Operating as part of such a team and offering direct and/or consultative services affords the teacher of students with visual impairments the opportunity to be both a teacher and learner as he/she demonstrates his/her expertise and, in turn benefits from the knowledge and skills of the other team members from various fields, all on behalf of students with visual and other severe/multiple disabilities. The teacher of students with visual impairments and other team members need to acquire an understanding of the unique needs of this population which are directly attributable to their visual impairment. It also affords the teacher of students with visual impairments the opportunity to be an advocate for the student who also has multiple impairments and his/her family.

Also critical for a teacher is an understanding of the needs of families of students with visual impairments who have severe/multiple disabilities, as well as strategies for helping them to meet those needs. The ability to provide resources and information to families, to serve as an advocate for and with them, to establish counseling and support mechanisms, and to train them to assist in the development and implementation of their child's program are all facets of the teacher's role in a comprehensive family participation program.

Although not all qualified teachers of students with visual impairments will work with

students with visual and other multiple impairments, those who do will need to have the additional competencies as described in this paper which would enable them to appropriately serve this population. Teacher preparation programs and inservice training options exist. These options could include the following:

1. Specialized graduate level training programs for teachers of students who are deaf-blind and/or teachers of children and youth with severe/multiple disabilities.
2. Courses designed to provide information and techniques for working with students with visual impairments and other severe/multiple disabilities.
3. Summer inservice workshops on various topics related to the student with visual and other severe/multiple disabilities, e.g., assessment, behavior management, alternative communication systems.
4. Utilization of consultants from the field of education of students with visual impairments and from other disciplines on a regular basis.
5. Provision of ongoing after-school topical workshops in areas such as vision assessment and enhancement, feeding, motor development, language development.
6. Opportunities for visitations to exemplary programs serving children and youth with visual impairments and other severe/multiple disabilities.
7. Utilization of available inservice training packages developed to train staff working with students with severe disabilities.
8. Training modules specifically designed to train teachers of students with visual impairments and other severe/multiple disabilities.
9. Encouragement for teachers of students with visual impairments to take additional courses in other disciplines.

Planning for the future offers exciting challenges and presents us with the need to change. The expansion of the roles, function, and competencies of the teacher of students with visual impairments will enable us to provide the best possible services to students with visual impairments who also have severe/multiple disabilities, and it will guarantee that our field will remain in the forefront of special education in the years to come.

Reference

Spungin, S. J. & Ferrell, K. A. *The role and function of the teacher of students with visual impairments*. Reston, VA: Division on Visual Impairment/Council for Exceptional Children.