

# Deafblind Focus

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## Project News and Notes ...

### *2001 Early Childhood State Conference*

The Indiana Deafblind Services Project is proud to be a conference partner for the 2001 Early Childhood State Conference. This year's conference is certain to be great and we would like to encourage all of our readers to consider attending. The following information is a brief description of the conference events.

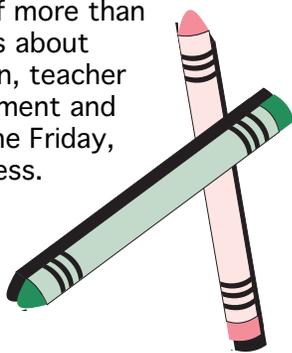
The Indiana Early Childhood Conference, co-sponsored and coordinated by the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children (IAEYC) and a diversified group of conference partners will be held March 8-10, 2001 at the Indiana Convention Center & RCA Dome and Hyatt Regency Hotel in Indianapolis, IN. The conference will attract an estimated 3000 parents, educators, providers and administrators to share best practice ideas and techniques and discuss current research.

Dr. Lillian Katz, author of more than one hundred publications about early childhood education, teacher education, child development and parenting, will present the Friday, March 9th keynote address.

Dr. Katz is Professor Emerita of Early Childhood Education at the University of Illinois where she is also Director of ERIC

Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. Her latest book, *Talks with Teachers of Young Children*, is a collection of her best known early essays and several recent

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## Under the Magnifying Glass: Curriculum

### *What is Curriculum?*

The Oxford English Dictionary definition of curriculum is "a course, specifically a regular course of study or training, as at a school or university." Curriculum is an outline consisting of the scope and sequence of what is taught at each grade level and across different grades. It is the total range of formal studies and education offered to students. By defining a "course of study," the curriculum becomes an instrument of social efficiency, bringing order to the process of schooling. This allows students to benefit from a well-planned variety of subjects and activities. In addition, curriculum not only specifies "what" to teach students, but "how" to teach them.

The curriculum for every child is important as it ensures that each teacher teaches the same things at each grade, and that teaching and learning builds from year to year. Curriculum is especially important in this day of state testing, because a school's curriculum must incorporate the state requirements for testing as a graduation requirement.

A good curriculum should:

- Involve parents and teachers in the process.
- Address how skills and concepts are taught.
- Reflect the best instructional strategies, based upon current research.
- Provide instructional guidance to the student during his or her educational experience.
- Incorporate and integrate major areas of development.
- Anticipate changes in growing and learning.
- Be adaptable to a wide range of disabilities and cultural diversity.
- Be adaptable to the individual child and to groups of children.
- Provide a specific answer to the question, "What is an appropriate action for this child now?"
- Be accountable.
- Be beneficial.
- Have precise and simply written instructions.

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# Under the Magnifying Glass: Curriculum

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## ***Types of Curricula***

There are two widely used curricula models: developmental curriculum and functional curriculum. The benefits and limitations of each are briefly discussed below.

### ***Developmental Curriculum***

The developmental curriculum model is based on the milestones of growth and development of non-disabled children. A child is assessed against a standardized norm-referenced scale that suggests the approximate age at which normally developing children acquire specific skills. The progression of a developmental curriculum is based on the acquisition of skills in a sequence and typically includes skills across the following areas: communication, motor, cognition, sensory, social/emotional, academic, self-help, and vocational. For persons using a developmental curriculum, the instructional skills and materials used are based on a developmental age.

The benefits of a developmental curriculum are that it:

- covers a large number of skills in a systematic manner.
- helps target areas for additional assessment.
- divides skills into component parts.
- is used to compare development commensurate with age.

The limitations of a developmental curriculum are that it:

- follows the developmental sequences of a non-disabled child.
- focuses on form rather than the function of the skill.
- uses materials and skills that often are not meaningful for a child with disabilities.
- is not sensitive to cultural differences.

### ***Functional Curriculum***

The functional curriculum model is based on the current and future needs of the student. Students are not taught skills to progress through developmental milestones; rather, the focus is on skills that will best prepare the student to function throughout life. The student is assessed (usually by criterion-referenced instruments) performing a variety of skills and the curriculum is developed from this assessment. The skills are taught across life areas, including: independent living, work, recreation/leisure, regular education, and community life. When using a functional curriculum, the instructional skills and materials are based on the

chronological age of the student, and adaptations and modifications are developed to increase the participation of the student in various activities.

The benefits of a functional curriculum are that it:

- uses extensive parental and student input.
- uses highly individualized content.
- uses skill sequences that are relevant and meaningful to a student with disabilities.

The limitations of a functional curriculum are that it:

- may include skills that are beyond the student's abilities.
- is time consuming and requires complex scheduling.
- has no specific guidelines as to what to teach first.

Because individuals with deafblindness have both vision and hearing difficulties, and may have other disabilities as well, they often have complex problems in learning new skills. They may:

- lack the ability to communicate meaningfully.
- be frustrated in attempting to have their needs met.
- have difficulty developing a learning style.
- have difficulty establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships.

The functional approach to curriculum development has been recognized as a good model to use in response to these special learning issues.

In addition, individuals with deafblindness and/or severe disabilities, often have difficulty learning skills quickly, knowing where and when to use skills, and generalizing acquired skills to numerous settings. Using a functional curriculum approach can assist in determining the current and future needs of the individual with deafblindness and selecting appropriate functional skills. Then, through repeated practice that is embedded in relevant skill sequencing taught in a variety of settings, with age appropriate materials and natural cues, the individual can learn to use functional skills in appropriate settings.

## ***Components of a Functional Curriculum***

### **Select Functional Skills and Materials**

Functional skills should be chronologically age appropriate, should make the student more independent and should prepare the student to function in community environments. In addition, the materials and activities needed to perform the skills should be present in the environment in which the student lives, participates, or will frequent in the future.

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# Consumer Corner: Accessibility for Special Needs Students

## *Machine Invented by Local Teachers Improves Kids' Lives*

(One of the students in the following article is deafblind and is using the equipment discussed to be able to participate more fully in school physical education and recreational activities. The article was reprinted with permission from the Terre Haute Tribune-Star. It was published Thursday, March 16, 2000 and written by Sue Loughlin.)

Woodrow Wilson Middle School students Josh and Amanda know the importance of an odd-looking contraption called the Equalizer. On Wednesday, it enabled the two special needs students, who use wheelchairs, to participate in a rowdy game of whiffleball in the school gym. It also allows them to play, rather than simply observe, such gym activities as floor hockey, putt-putt golf and basketball.

Now, special needs students across the country, and even the world, can benefit from the adapted physical education equipment invented by Woodrow Wilson educators Dan Raubuck and Bruce Lautenschlager. Raubuck and Lautenschlager have the patents for the Equalizer and a contract with Sportime International, an Atlanta-based company that develops and distributes physical education equipment.

The Equalizer is a free-standing or wheelchair mounted aluminum frame, upon which can be mounted various pieces of sports equipment. An elastic band attached to the piece of equipment works like a sling to help students propel putters, swing bats and launch basketballs. The device can be used by physically-challenged students who have limited upper body strength or mobility.

The Equalizer went on the market in January and is featured on a full page of the company's most recent catalog. The catalogue says the Equalizer "was born of the dreams and unselfish dedication of two adapted physical education teachers from Terre Haute, Indiana. We consider ourselves privileged that they elected to put their dreams into our hands." The cost of the Equalizer basic unit is \$700 and an option package costs another \$250.

"People too often look at kids with disabilities and think they don't want to participate, and that is so far from the truth," Raubuck said. When Raubuck and Lautenschlager began working with severely disabled youths several years ago, they recognized they didn't have the equipment to



**Able to Participate:** Thanks to a recently developed device Joshua (right) is able to participate in games like whiffleball. Another student looks on as Josh strikes the ball.

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## Consumer Corner: Accessibility for Special Needs Students

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### ***Machine Invented by Local Teachers Improves Kids' Lives***

enable those youths to fully participate. "We really wanted to provide the same experiences for those kids," Pitts said. What began was a labor of love, with the two physical education teachers working in Raubuck's garage to come up with a prototype.

Raubuck got his inspiration at an ice hockey game in Indianapolis. During breaks in the game, people skated out on the ice and launched T-shirts up into the crowd from giant slings.

Developing the Equalizer took time and patience, but the primary motivation was "seeing the opportunity for these kids to be involved in our classes as they never had before and to see the smiles on their faces," Lautenschlager said.

In developing the Equalizer, they wanted a device that was user-friendly: lightweight, easy to assemble, quickly changed from one activity to another and fun for the student. Different attachments are used for different activities. The Equalizer can also be used for resistance training.

During a recent class, eight-grader Joshua, who has physical, visual and hearing disabilities, used the Equalizer to play whiffleball. He pulled a strap attached to a bat, which was attached to a Bungee cord. When he let go, it propelled the bat forward - allowing him to hit a ball off of a tee.

His special education assistant, Janet Lash, then ran him around the bases, as his classmates cheered him on. "The kids have a good time," Lash said. Josh is competitive, and he likes the power the Equalizer gives him.

Amanda, another student, also used the Equalizer during the adapted physical education class. She, too, was enthusiastic about what the equipment provides.

Raubuck and Lautenschlager worked with Thomas Coverstone, a patent attorney and Woodrow Wilson graduate, who guided the patent process. "It's a pioneering product," said Coverstone, an attorney in California. It's really beneficial for disabled kids, which is why I wanted to get involved. It makes the kids feel like they are part of the physical education activity, instead of sitting on the sidelines or bleachers."

## Under the Magnifying Glass: Curriculum

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### **Teach in Functional Settings Using Natural Cues**

Make the teaching environment as similar as possible to the environment where the student is expected to perform the skill. This is best accomplished by teaching in natural settings and using cues that are similar to those used by nondisabled peers.

### **Use Varied Materials**

A variety of materials should be used in teaching a skill. In this way, the student learns to generalize, discriminate among objects, and respond to natural cues. This helps to relieve boredom and provides students the opportunity to make choices. Students tend to learn more quickly and remain motivated when they are allowed to make choices.

### **Incorporate Communication into Daily Routines**

Communication is one of the most important skills an individual can acquire. However, students with deafblindness and severe disabilities often lack communication skills. They may have a fairly good receptive vocabulary, but have difficulty in learning to use words, signs, or symbols expressively and spontaneously. A functional curriculum promotes communication throughout the day, in a variety of settings. Communication is best learned in a social context by making needs known, asking questions and interacting with peers, family, and community members.

### **Incorporate Motor Programs into Daily Routines**

Motor skills training is an integral part of the educational program for individuals with deafblindness. Motor skills allow the individual to explore and interact with the environment, to be mobile, and to have control over actions in his or her life. The functional curriculum incorporates motor programs into the daily routine, focusing on practical and functional activities. For example, the student might look towards peers, the teacher, or materials; reach for different items; or wheel to and from activities in wheelchairs.

### **Incorporate Skills in a Logical and Sequential Manner**

Skills should be listed in a logical and sequential fashion. They should follow a natural sequence, which outlines each routine activity. For example, a morning activity could follow the sequence: Wheel to the group, greet other students, take available items and pass it to another peer.

## **Incorporate Behavior Programs into the Daily Routine**

Most classrooms, at one time or another, experience difficulties with disruptive and inappropriate behaviors, including screaming, tearing up materials, and self-injurious behaviors. Behavior programs should focus on rewarding and reinforcing appropriate behavior consistently throughout the day across staff and classroom activities through positive behavioral supports.

## **Incorporate Learning in Groups**

The benefits of group instruction include: controlling motivation variables, providing opportunities to respond to and learn from peers, and learning group skills, such as conversation, interaction, and cooperation. Instruction may be provided to students in a group either simultaneously or sequentially.

## ***Determining Curriculum Priorities***

Regardless of the curriculum model used, determining what to teach in the broad skill areas of motor, self-help, language, etc. is rather simple. However, it becomes more difficult to determine exactly what skills all learners need. There is no magical formula for establishing educational priorities, but the educator, parent, and student team can begin to determine priority goals by considering educational relevance, caregiver concerns, and student preferences. Some questions to ask are:

### ***Skill Selection***

- Is the skill necessary for movement to a more inclusive environment?
- In how many environments will the skill be used?
- Does the skill promote interactions with nondisabled peers?
- Would the student choose to learn the skill?
- Is the skill functional and chronologically age-appropriate?
- Will performance of the skill result in less dependence on caregivers?

### ***Caregiver Preferences***

- Are there places that the child is already taken in which he/she needs instruction?
- What are the ways the child can participate at home?
- In what activities do neighborhood children who are the child's age participate?
- What are some of the activities in which the child shows interest by smiling, laughing, etc.?
- Are there times when it is noticeable that the child has particular difficulty?
- Does the child have household responsibilities?

- When the child gets home from school, what does he or she do until dinner?

## ***Learner Preferences***

Students have preferences and should be given choices in what they do, whenever possible. An inventory could be used to identify what he/she particularly enjoys.

## **Curriculum Resources**

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ones. She also has published the second edition of *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach* (with S.C. Chard).

Al Russo, lovingly known as "Mr. Al" to thousands of children, educators and parents across the country will entertain, educate and delight conference participants at the Friday, March 9th Evening Concert and Saturday, March 10th Keynote Address. Mr. Al is a musician turned educator, turned entertainer with a message. He holds degrees in both elementary and early childhood education and has taught at every level from infants through primary. He not only performs, but also writes, produces, and records his pop-styled educational music. He has produced 12 releases which includes his two most recent cd's "Mr Al a carte," and "Rocking/The Alphabet."

Poetess, Rebecca Kai Dotlich will be the guest of honor at an Author's Luncheon, Saturday, March 10th. Ms. Dotlich's work has appeared in numerous children's magazines and several anthologies. Her poetry books include, *Sweet Dreams of the Wilds: Poems for Bedtime*, and *Lemonade Sun and Other Summer Poems*.

Conference highlights include: Highlight Workshops by Professional Storyteller, Bob Kann, and Singer/Songwriter, James Coffey; over 60 workshops each day; a variety of hot-topic round table discussions; commercial exhibits and non-profit displays.

A Professional Development Fair will be held on Saturday, March 10th, and will provide a forum for both employers and educators to share job information and career

opportunities for those in the early care and education professions. In addition, college and university representatives and early care and education career counselors will provide information about college scholarships, resources and career planning. This event will be open to the community.

The host hotel is the Hyatt Regency, located directly across from the Convention Center at One South Capitol Ave., Indianapolis. Make reservations early by calling (317) 632-1234 and requesting the "Early Childhood State Conference" rate of \$125 single-quad occupancy.

Conference registration materials were mailed the first of January. For more information, please contact Mary Dickerson, IAIEYC Conference Coordinator, (317) 466-0255, IAIEYConfer@aol, (317) 466-0256 fax.

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