Inclusion of Deaf-Blind in the Classroom

Questions may be raised by teachers and maybe even parents of children who are Deaf-Blind as to how inclusion can be successful for their students/children. Here is an article that provides some insight into how this can be done successfully with the right people involved. Cloninger and Giangreco, (1995) discuss a model that was developed in order to create collaboration between general education and special education teachers as well as parents. To ensure that Deaf-Blind students have a successful education, "The successful education of students with deaf-blindness in inclusive educational settings requires the implementation of a constellation of exemplary practices, including involvement of the family, team-work collaboration, curricular planning and adaptation, and transition planning, used in combination" (p. 262). This means that one approach is not enough to ensure that Deaf-Blind students are able to learn in a general education setting. This also means that responsibility cannot be left up to the special education or general education teacher alone. One must also realize that it is critical to focus on the abilities, not the disabilities of Deaf-Blind students. By focusing on the abilities and similarities of each student, disabled, and non-disabled, everyone can learn.

Research done by Cloninger and Giangreco show that educational teams included a variety of adults, the most important being the parents and their life values. Choosing Options and Accommodations for Children (COACH) is an educational planning tool that is congruent with many exemplary practices for all children (p. 263). "COACH consists of three parts: Part 1 (Family Prioritization Interview) is used to identify family-selected priority learning outcomes for the student. Part 2 (Defining the Educational Program Components) is used to translate these outcomes into goals and objectives for the student's IEP. Part 3 (Addressing the Educational Program Components in Inclusive Settings) is used to determine options for addressing the components of a student's IEP in general education classes and other settings with people who are not disabled through the use of a scheduling matrix and guidelines for adapting lessons" (p. 263). Teachers and parents alike described how this educational tool helped them in the long run in including Deaf-Blind students. They felt that COACH helped them design IEPs appropriate for inclusion, practical ways to do collaborative team work, improved/established positive relationships between parents and professionals, provided the parents with opportunities to be involved with IEP development, established shared framework and common goals, educational team members were able to see new perspectives of what it takes to include Deaf-Blind students, and positive educational and valued outcomes (p. 264).

In order to assure that COACH was successful for all involved, the Vermont Interdependent Services Team Approach (VISTA) oversaw the educational team while they prepared I.E.P.s for Deaf-Blind students. "VISTA provides a sequence and format for exploring the interrelationships among recommended services to ensure that support services are educationally relevant and required for the student to gain access to and participate in his or her educational program" (p. 264). VISTA has ten guidelines that must be followed. VISTA must make sure that agreement among team members is present, that information matches the IEP, that support function need to be served by the same support personnel, that support services is coordinated, and that the student is able to see, hear, and participate in the classroom. VISTA must also make sure that educational teams reduce overlaps, gaps, and contradictions in the provision of support services, reduce conflicts among team members by focusing communication solely on the student and context-specific information, making sure that the mode and frequency of services matches that of the service providers, to guide the implementation of support services in non intrusive ways, and have the team members evaluate support services based on the impact they will have on learning and valued life outcomes (p. 264). Clearly, collaborative team work as well as numerous approaches to educating Deaf-Blind students with their non-disabled peers is crucial. Considering that this type of system does not exist at every mainstream school, VISTA has an important role to play in making sure that educational teams are successful in order for the Deaf-Blind student to be successful. It seems imperative that everyone involved on the educational team has an open mind. There is no such thing as a cookie cutter student, but with the right mindset, children can be successful.

It is important to ensure the best possible classroom conditions for the Deaf-Blind student. This could mean a rearrangement of the classroom to ensure that the instructor is not standing in front of windows, the inclusion of more lights in the classroom, ensuring that the student is made aware of who the next speaker is before they start speaking and ensuring solid walls. It is imperative that the teacher and school administrators work with the student to provide all necessary equipment, potentially including; enlarged handouts, assisted listening devices, a smaller movement space for the presenter/teacher. It is imperative that the Deaf-Blind student is included as much as possible, to ensure inclusion in every sense of the word.

The Use of an Interpreter in the classroom

According to the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf's Standard Practice Paper, entitled Interpreting for Individuals who are Deaf-Blind, there are many forms of communication that an individual that is both deaf and blind may use. These include; sign language within a limited visual space, sign language with the use of tracking, tactile sign language, printing' on palm, sign supported speech and more. An individual who is Deaf-Blind using a tracking zone may have various levels of interpreting, depending on their hearing and sight. An individual who's sight is severely diminished might need to have a Sign Language Interpreter using tactile Sign Language, so that they an feel the language, whereas a Deaf-Blind individual whose sight diminished in a sense such as reduced peripheral vision may be able to watch the Sign Language Interpreter within a certain distance.

Inclusion of Deaf-Blind Students in a Deaf School Social Studies Classroom

Based on personal experience as a student teacher at the New Jersey School for the Deaf (Marie Katzenbach Campus) working with a Deaf-Blind student, the following are several tips that may be useful for newer teachers on how to go about making sure the Deaf-Blind students are included in this type of classroom. This particular student was Deaf with Low Vision, he struggled to read important information written on the white board; something that proved to be useful was sticking to only blue or black dry erase markers and writing bigger than usual on the board. Considering that the class was small (five students) and students sat near the front, there was no need for the student to be moved closer to the board, however, if there are more students and the classroom itself is bigger, it is crucial to make sure that the Deaf-Blind student is seated closest to the board while the desks remain in a circle, so they may be able to see everything; the board and what everyone is signing. This will also be beneficial to all the students whether Deaf-Blind or not because it is crucial that each student has access to information to learn, but also because this may be the one place the student will be able to pick up on informal learning and is not as restricted as they may be at home, if they have parents who are not fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) or tactile signing. It really does depend on what type of vision loss the child
has. Another tip is that Deaf-Blind students tend to benefit from more hands on activities. This ensures that the student is as involved as the others. Pictures are also great, especially if the child has Low Vision. The child may enjoy a vocabulary game where definitions are written in blue or blank ink, large print, and have pictures to match. This activity helped the student retain important information and assisted the student in adding vocabulary to their prior knowledge to be used in related future class activities. A fun class activity that took place in the Social Studies class was paper making as a requirement of learning the accomplishments and contributions of Ancient Chinese Dynasties. It is important to note that the students at this particular school did have teaching and one-on-one aids. Time was designated for students and their one-on-one aids in order to have extra time to learn materials.

Works Cited:
List of schools obtained from http://www.deafed.net/PageText.asp?hdnPageId=105


