

Disability Summary Assignment
EPSE 575: Seminar in Instructional Methods for Person with Significant Learning
Challenges
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Congenital Deaf-blindness

1. Cause/etiology and prevalence

Congenital deafblindness is caused by a variety of complications. It may have prenatal, perinatal or postnatal causes. The most common cause is CHARGE syndrome, which is a complicated genetic syndrome that involves extensive medical and physical difficulties that differ from child to child. The letters in CHARGE represent Coloboma of the eye, Heart defects, Atresia of the choanae, Retardation of growth and development and Ear abnormalities and deafness.

The prevalence of congenital deafblindness is uncommon in that 1/8500-10000 individuals have the disability. It is a very specific condition in that everyone is individualized with its own unique features. Depending on the ramifications of each etiology, there are varying degrees of vision and hearing loss. It often occurs in people with no history of the disorder in their family.

2. Distinctive physical characteristics associated with the disorder

Having both a visual and auditory impairments from birth are the main characteristics associated with congenital deafblindness. This dual-sensory impairment is present from birth and imposes challenges for the individual. People with deafblindness can be classified as varying degrees of visual and hearing loss, from low, moderate, severe and total loss of either sense.

3. Physical health abilities/challenges and the educational implications

Due to the cause or etiology of their deafblindness the individual is most likely facing other challenges that come with different syndromes such as CHARGE or Down syndrome. These include a slower overall development in the body and often cause internal issues.

Educational Implications:

- Consult professionals that may be needed for varying issues such as speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist, physician etc.
- Establish an inclusive practice that ensures that every child is participating to the best of their ability and feels valued within the school and classroom community.

4. Cognitive abilities/challenges and educational implications

Although there are not specific intellectual disabilities connected with congenital deafblindness, depending on the etiology the individual once again can be facing some other challenges cognitively. The loss of vision and hearing can also have an impact on their ability to develop cognitively as they have a more difficult time gaining access to the information. Attention, conceptualization, language and social understanding are all affected by the sensory deficits and may cause the child to fall behind academically.

Educational Implications:

- Establish a universal design for learning (UDL) program that allows for the individuals specific needs to be met.

- Prior to the beginning of school carry out a full evaluation and IEP meeting with all professionals necessary (speech-language pathologist, physical therapist, family etc). Determine short and long term goals for the student and develop an ideology of strengths and weaknesses. Continue to meet throughout the year to maintain progress.
- Utilize a variety of programming that engages different sense in multiple different ways so that the student is able to learn the information in some form.
- Extra support or time when needed to ensure that the child has the processing time to be successful.

5. Language/communication abilities/challenges and educational implications.

Individuals with congenital deafblindness face major challenges as they develop early communication skills and lack access to the natural occurring cues in their environment. They are also limited in their ability to imitate as their vision is limited or lost completely. Majority of children with deafblindness utilize prelinguistic communication skills such as vocalizations, body language and gestures to convey their feelings. Sometimes these remain as the peak of their communicative abilities, other individuals are able to develop more so and speak in multi-word sentences or utterances or actively use sign language to communicate. The ability to develop language and communicative skills all depends on the individual and their level of deafblindness and the support they have to overcome the communicative challenges. In order to learn language, children who are deafblind need to rely on others to make language accessible to them. They often have slow response times and conversation turn taking and shared attention is difficult to grasp.

Educational Implications:

- Continuously monitor and analyze the communicative competencies of the person in context to give them more opportunities to develop.
- As stated previously, carrying out an IEP meeting and a functional assessment where all professionals involved in the students' life are present. Continue to have meetings throughout year to maintain progress.
- Appropriate Short-term objectives for the child should focus on making gains in communication skills such as practicing fine motor skills necessary for sign language and the ability to manipulate objects using tactile senses as main form of communication. By breaking down the concept of sign language into smaller short-term objectives the child has a better chance at being successful.
- Use of forms of communication must comply with individual characteristics so that the child can receive information from the environment through senses available and thus be guaranteed access to the world.
- Require programs that meet their specific needs, focusing not only on vision or hearing loss, but on the two aspects in combination and other sense as a means of acquiring access to information.
- Allow opportunities for the child to respond by pausing during interactions and face the class/student when talking.
- Use larger print in the classroom and a voice-amplifying device if necessary for that child.
- Provide immense amount of opportunities for language stimulation by engaging with the student and being flexible in the ways you present and engage the student in

language. E.g. Use sign language, verbal language, gestures, in combination with fine motor and touch to establish meaningful connections between words and things for which they stand.

- Utilize communication systems that the student is familiar with. Most common for deafblind are: touch cues, gestures, object symbols, picture symbols, sign language, finger spelling, braille writing and reading, large print writing and reading, lip-reading speech.

6. Sensory abilities/challenges and the educational implications

Individuals with congenital deafblindness are lacking access their visual and auditory senses to their full extent. Therefore it is important that they learn to access the rest of their sense to their full extent in order to make meaningful connections with the world around them. Utilizing touch and tactile senses is very important to students who are deafblind.

Educational Implications:

- Utilizing a variety of strategies that engage all of the senses in different ways to make the content accessible to the student.
- Consult with professionals such as a teacher of the visually or auditory impaired to learn of different strategies to engage the students and meet their needs.
- Place the student close to the teacher at all times to be better able to see and hear.
- Enlarged visuals, voice-amplifying device, sign language or other strategy that will meet the students' diverse needs.

7. Motor abilities/challenges and educational implications

Due to their dual-sensory impairment, individuals with congenital deafblindness often have difficulty in mobility, as it is a great challenge to learn to navigate the world with limited or no vision or hearing. Therefore they may have some motor deficits such as a lack of coordination and stamina as they would have limited opportunities to practice these skills.

Educational Implications:

- Consulting with physical therapist (if they have one) to ensure that all needs for the child are being met.
- Offering a variety of physical activities that they are both familiar with and can easily participate in with their low vision and hearing loss.
- Opportunities for group games that allow for both physical and social interaction.
- Ensure classroom environment is easily accessible to navigate so student can have some opportunities for independence.
- Depending on other disabilities that may have manifested due to different etiologies, include options for both fine and gross motor practice throughout the curriculum.
- In fine motor programming engage other senses such as touch.

8. Social emotional/behavioral abilities/challenges and educational implications.

As it is difficult for people with deafblindness to develop language and the ability

to communicate, it makes it difficult for them to form social relations. This is because if they utilize braille or sign language, they need to also communicate with someone who is knowledgeable on that form of communication.

Behaviours may manifest because of frustrations and attempts to communicate with others. Establishing a positive teacher-student relationship is key to allowing that student to feel autonomous and supported within the classroom.

Educational Implications:

- Provide many opportunities for social interaction with other students. Prepare them for communicating in different ways such as sign language, touch, larger visuals etc.
- Teach the entire class basic sign language and use when talking to all students so that they view it as a form of communication for all.
- Establish a positive classroom climate that is inclusive and respectful of all students and their unique and diverse needs.
- Provide breaks when student is feeling overwhelmed. Implement a behaviour plan if necessary and determine with the student affective coping strategies.
- Provide clear structure, expectations for student, feedback, and opportunities to be involved in the classroom have been proven to increase a student's engagement.

9. Other abilities/challenges and educational implications.

In regards to long-term planning, it is important that this child lives a meaningful life. Due to the many challenges that they can face in regards to health, communication and physical/emotional, it is crucial that the child finds a place in their community and a meaning in their life. When establishing an IEP for the child, as well as continually monitoring that IEP it is important to keep in mind what is wanted for that child and what they are capable of. By keeping an "end-goal" in mind in terms of living a meaningful life, the support team of that child can ensure they are learning all of the skills necessary and have the support to live a fulfilled and meaningful life.

10. References

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