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QUALITY SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH WHO ARE DEAFBLIND

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Abstract

Many deafblind students in the United States are not serviced appropriately in the educational system because there is a lack of qualified teachers available. New York State does not have certification for teaching deafblind students. The Canisius College teacher preparation program in conjunction with the New York State Technical Assistance Project Serving Children and Youth Who Are Deafblind (NYSTAP) task force is trying to alleviate some of this lack of knowledge by providing graduate students in the deaf education teacher preparation program with four workshops on deafblind issues. This paper describes the method used to introduce deafblind curriculum as a supplement to the established curriculum of the deaf education graduate teacher preparation program at Canisius College in Buffalo, New York.

Children and youth who are deafblind compose a low-incidence disability. Deafblind children and youth are those individuals who have a dual impairment of the auditory and visual senses. The term deafblind can apply to a wide range of individuals; those who have a mild hearing and vision loss to those who have no useable hearing or vision. Some persons are born deafblind while others are not. It is more common to be born with one sensory impairment and acquire the other as one ages (Olsen, 2005). According to the National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who are Deafblind (NTAC), the 2001 national census for this population, age birth to 21, in the United States was 10,627 (NTAC, 2005). These children are recognized as an underserved population partially due to a lack of knowledgeable teachers prepared to educate them (Janssen, Riksen-Walraven, & VanDijk, 2003).

In the early 1990s a federal grant to serve children and youth in New York State was awarded to the current project director. This grant, housed at Teachers College Columbia University, provides technical assistance to families, teachers and related service personnel to help them address the needs of and serve this population more effectively. The project, known as the New York State Technical Assistance Project Serving Children and Youth Who Are Deafblind (NYSTAP), has identified 1200 children in the state with this disability.

Also, in the early 1990s another federally funded project, the Technical Assistance Center (TAC) located at Helen Keller National Center for the Deafblind in Sands Point, New York, issued a Request for Proposal to each state for improving transition services to youth who are deafblind. New York State was awarded a grant to develop an interagency, collaborative model to provide these services to youth. The model evolved over a three-year time span to include a state team and four regional teams. Three additional teams have been added over the past four years bringing the total to seven. The model, known as the NYS Transition Partnership, was designed to bring key players from children and adult services together to plan activities that will allow youth to transition more smoothly from one service system to another and from school to the adult world. The regional as well as state-level teams all include the parent of a child or youth who is deafblind, an individual who is deafblind, representatives from the educational and vocational rehabilitation communities and representatives from agencies that provide services to children and youth who are deafblind.

NYSTAP is an integral part of the Transition Partnership, providing leadership and financial support. Building collaborative partnerships across the state on behalf of children and families is a major goal of NYSTAP. For example, an Academic Task Force was developed four years ago to address the personnel shortage across all fields to work with deafblind infants, children and youth in the state. This task force consists of all higher education program directors who prepare teachers of the deaf, teachers of the visually impaired and blind, and the director of a program that addresses the adaptive physical education needs of this population in New York State, along with members of the NYS Education Department (NYSED) certification office. The outcome was the suggestion that existing deaf education teacher preparation programs infuse a deafblind curriculum into the existing deaf education program and award participants a certificate of attendance.

Over the last two years, Canisius College in Buffalo, New York, with funding from the NYSTAP has provided graduate students in deaf education with content in deafblindness. The existing deaf education curriculum in the Canisius College graduate teacher education program is supplemented with four workshops covering deafblind issues (See Appendix A). The four workshops about deafblind children and youth offered at Canisius College are entitled: Characteristics of Students Who are Deafblind; Braille, Orientation and Mobility; Technology/ Insights and Interview of a Deafblind Person; and

Futures Planning. The workshops are offered on four consecutive Saturdays and each lasts eight hours of class time. Specifically, the content includes an overview of visual impairments, the impact of deafblindness on individuals, families and schools, the characteristics of students with deafblindness, the communication techniques used by those who are deafblind, the technology considerations necessary for equal access to information for the deafblind individual, and the personal futures planning discussed with the deafblind individual, the family and the school (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2004). Presently, each graduate student signs a contract to complete the requirements of the deafblind study and when all requirements are completed the graduate student receives a tuition reimbursement for one credit hour at Canisius College (See Appendix B). With a view toward a future annotation to state certification, Canisius College has included a proposal to the New York State Department of Education to teach nine credit hours on deafblindness for graduate students to take along with their deaf education curriculum. In the meanwhile, the NYSTAP and NYSED are pursuing a federal grant to support the proposed program at Canisius College and at five other higher education institutions across New York State.

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Appendix A

Canisius College Deaf Education Teacher Preparation Program Deaf Education Curriculum

Course List	Credits
EDD 551 Sign Communication I	1
EDD 553 Sign Communication II	1
EDD 600 American Sign Language I	3
EDD 601 American Sign Language II	3
EDD 536 Language Theories and Strategies I	3
EDD 537 Language Theories and Strategies II	3
EDD545 Methods of Teaching Literacy for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons	3
EDD 533 Introduction to Speech and Hearing Science	3
EDD 535 Introduction to Audiology and Assistive Devices	3
EDD 542 Oral/Aural Developmental Skills and Methods Of Teaching Speech with Practicum	3
EDD 534 Introduction to Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons	3
EDD 550 Theory, Research and Assessment of Deaf Learners	3
EDD 555 Psychology/Counseling of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons	3
EDD 548 The Deaf or Hard of Hearing Child-0-8 Years Methods and Partnerships	3
EDD 532 Curriculum/Methods of Teaching Subject Areas To Deaf and Hard of Hearing Learners	3
EDD 539 Instructional Practicum	3
EDD 556 Student Teaching I	6
EDD 557 Student Teaching II	6
EDD 603 Professional Seminar/Portfolio	3

2/05

Appendix B

Canisius College Graduate Deaf Education Tuition Paid Course Initiative 3/2005

The New York State Technical Assistance Project has contributed funds that will enable you to receive tuition monies at the end of the fall semester. The amount of tuition money received will equal approximately one credit hour, depending on the number of Interns completing the contract. In order to participate in this initiative, you must fulfill the requirements listed below. The workshops must be taken in Fall 2005 and the activities must be completed by May 2006. Should you agree to participate, you will receive a certificate indicating that you have acquired expertise regarding the instruction of deafblind children and you will be able to indicate your attendance on your resume.

This initiative is being offered to full time Interns who begin studies in fall 2005. Full time Interns are those who are taking at least 9 credit hours in Graduate Deaf Education. Please complete one copy of this form and submit it to the Graduate Deaf Education Office no later than September 9, 2005. Please keep the second copy for your records.

Requirements

You must complete the following requirements within the academic year 2005-2006.

- Attend four workshops to learn the characteristics of deafblind children and youth. The dates of the workshops are October 15, October 22, October 29 and November 5. The workshops are held at St. Mary's School for the Deaf and run from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Topics:

1. Characteristics of Students Who are Deafblind
 2. Braille, Orientation and Mobility
 3. Technology/ Insights and Interview of a Deafblind Person
 4. Futures Planning
- Attend a local, state or national conference on deafness, blindness and/or deafblindness during the fall or spring semesters of your first year in the program.

I request that I receive tuition monies at the end of Fall semester, 2005 and that I will complete the requirements as outlined above by May 2006.

Name: _____

ID Number: _____

Date: _____

After completing, make a copy of this contract for your personal file.

Contact Information:

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