Summer 2022 Back to School Issue

Visual Impairment and Deafblind Education Quarterly

Volume 67, Issue 3

The Voice and Vision of Special Education

Council for Exceptional Children
The voice and vision of special education

Cover photo description: The cover photo shows a female student typing an assignment on her braillewriter. Photo submitted by Kim Humrichouser.

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Message from the Editor

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Welcome to the Summer Back to School Issue of the *Visual Impairment and Deafblind Education Quarterly* (*VIDBE-Q*) journal. This is always an exciting time as we prepare for the start of a new academic year and working with students, teachers, and districts. This issue is intended to share new resources, ideas, content, and inspiration for the 2022-2023 school year.

The issue begins with information about the National Research Agenda in STEM education for students with visual impairments by Xinyue Lu and Tiffany

Wild. Lu and Wild explain all of the amazing ways that educators and researchers can utilize the website to support STEM education for students with visual impairments. The next two articles share information from DVIDB webinars. In case you missed the webinar in April, don't worry, the second article shares valuable information about the Described and Captioned Media Program. Beth A. Jones, Cindy Camp, and Mary Ann Siller provide examples and information for enhancing learning experiences through accessible media. The next article provides a preview of DVIDB's upcoming webinar on September 14, 2022 at 1 PM EST. Amie Davenport and Kelly Bevis share information about dyslexia and visual impairments that is sure to inspire you to sign up to attend the upcoming virtual webinar and learn more. Please go to the DVIDB website to register for the upcoming webinar (https://dvidb.exceptionalchildren.org). Members can also access webinars as a DVIDB member benefit.

The next article explicates how to assess the executive functioning (EF) skills of students with visual impairments. Kim T. Zebehazy and Rachel C. Weber provide important content and resources on EF. The following article describes summer camp experiences for children with low incidence sensory disabilities. Karen Koehler and Doug Sturgeon include information about a variety of interactive summer camp experiences, suggestions for collaborating with community partners, and tips for designing your own summer camp experiences

for students with low incidence disabilities. The summer issue concludes with an article by Kim Humrichouser, an educator sharing her path to becoming a teacher of students with visual impairments and the student that inspired her.

I hope this issue motivates you for the new school year, as much as it motivated me. Thank you to all of our authors for their work in the field of visual impairments and deafblindness. If you are interested in submitting an article for an upcoming issue, please email me at Kathleen.Farrand@asu.edu. Happy reading!

The Future Belongs to Everyone

APH is committed to building a future that belongs to everyone by offering a wide selection of inclusive and accessible products, and valuable resources, to support those who are blind and visually impaired, are deafblind, have CVI, or multiple disabilities.

From products that support braille literacy and low vision, to physical education, fine arts, math, health and science, and more: begin building your toolkits for inclusive learning by reading our Toolkit blogs.

APH ConnectCenter

The APH ConnectCenter offers curated advice and resources to assist children, parents, adults, and job seekers who are blind and visually impaired, and their associated professionals. It includes:

- VisionAware: for adults and seniors
- FamilyConnect: for families and parents
- CareerConnect: for job seekers
- Transition Hub: for school-age youth planning for graduation and life after college
- ConnectCalendar: for people and organizations to find and share info about upcoming events in the field of blindness and visual impairment
- **Information & Referral Hotline (800-232-5463)**: for answers to questions related to visual impairment and blindness

APH Hive

The APH Hive is a virtual platform bringing free eLearning and professional development opportunities right into the comfort of your home or office and is perfect for busy educators and families! Teachers, parents, and students can buzz over to aphhive.org and browse through a variety of bite-size courses related to visual impairment, relevant to serving students from birth through graduation.

APH Press

APH Press is a scholarly press which publishes informative, well-researched, and innovative texts which enable people who are blind and visually impaired, their families, and the professionals who support them, to maximize their potential in society. Learn more about APH Press, visit the APH Press resource page, and download the Press Catalog.

APH's mission is empowering people who are blind or visually impaired by providing accessible and innovative products, materials, and services for lifelong success. To learn more about APH and our products and services, visit APH.org today.

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President's Message

Kathleen Stanfa, Ph.D.

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I am excited to share the back-to-school edition of the *Visual Impairments and Deafblind Education Quarterly* with you. Thank you to all you submitted articles and to Kathleen Farrand, our fearless editor, for putting together this wonderful issue. Also, I want to thank our committee members and board members for all that they do during the year on behalf of DVIDB.

The DVIDB webinar committee has been busy coordinating with terrific speakers to share information and strategies with our membership. DVIDB has had two dynamic webinars so far this year. On April 27th, Mary Ann Siller, Dr. Beth

Jones, and Cindy Camp presented “Described and Captioned Media Program: Important Resources for the Classroom.” And just last month, on June 14th, Drs. Susan Bruce and Christopher Brum presented “Supporting Shared Reading for Learners Who are Deafblind: Materials, Strategies, and Environmental Supports.” Members can access webinar recordings on the DVIDB website. Our next webinar is scheduled for September 14th at 1 pm EST. Join us for “Dyslexia & Visual Impairments” to learn what TVIs can do to support students with unique reading difficulties. Watch for registration information in your member email, on our website, and in our social media channels.

Adam Graves, President-Elect of DVIDB, attended the CEC Leadership Institute in July. This annual meeting brings together leaders from across all divisions and chapters of CEC. Here these leaders receive updates from the larger CEC organization, professional development to enrich their leadership skills, and time to network and plan for next year’s CEC Convention.

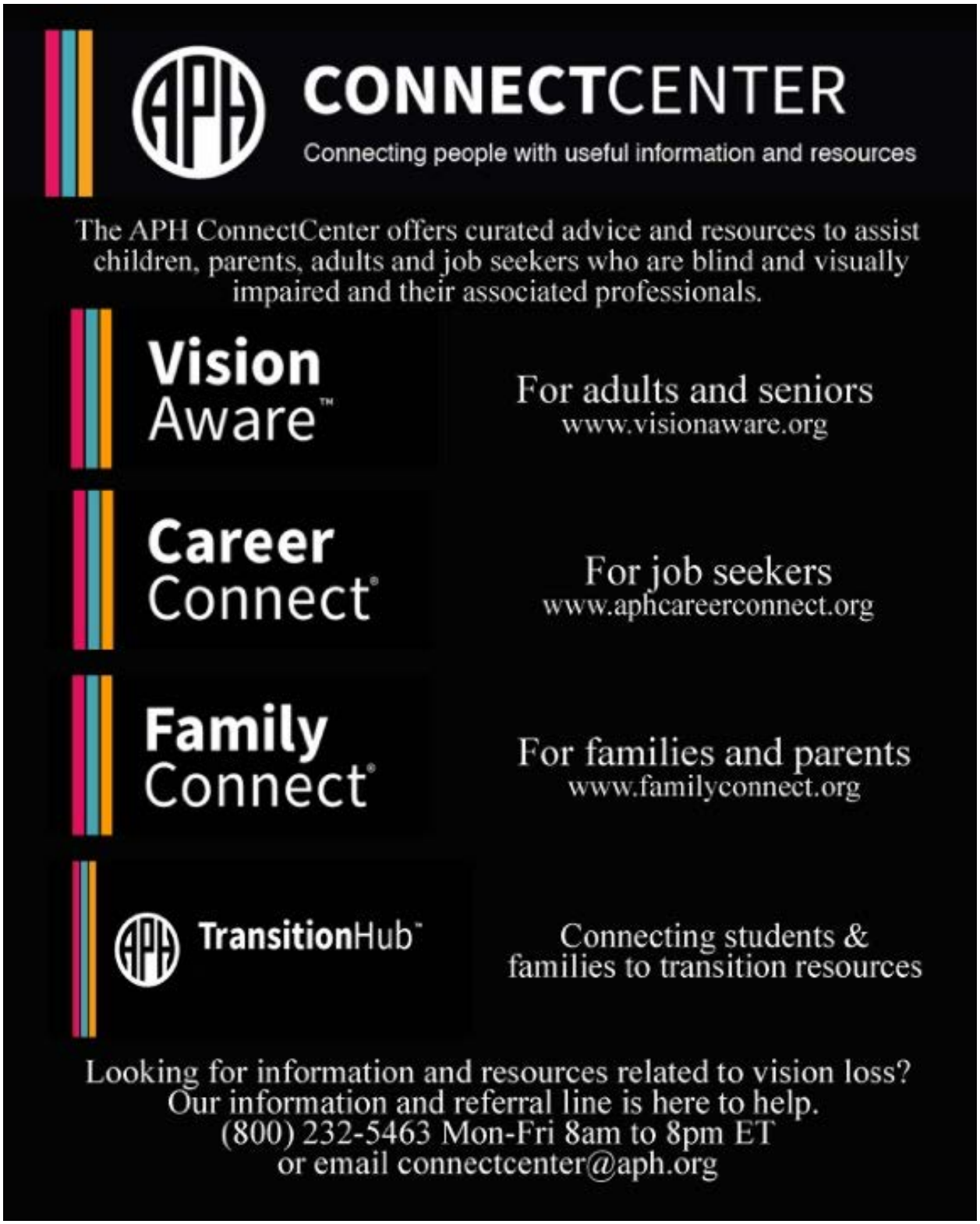
We hope to see you at the 2023 CEC Convention March 1-4 in Louisville, KY. DVIDB’s Pre-Convention Committee is in the preliminary planning phase for the 2023 DVIDB Pre-Convention event. We expect our annual Pre-Con to be virtual again this year and to be held in late February. Please watch for more information to come.

I hope you've had a restful summer, with time for family and friends and perhaps even time to make it through your summer reading list. I believe that one of the many perks of being a teacher is the opportunity to begin anew at the start of each school year. The new school year opens with such possibilities! Expectations are high on the first day of school—and sometimes anxieties are too—for teachers, students, and families.

The start of the 2022-2023 school year represents one more year removed from the height of the COVID pandemic. Many of us persevered through months of remote or hybrid learning and then a welcome return to the classroom, only to discover that a lot had changed. When schools re-opened their doors to students in the fall of 2021, we saw learning loss, behavior issues, and mental health challenges as a result of the pandemic. Lingering uncertainty about the future remains. As we go back to school this fall, districts in many places are likely to continue to face staffing shortages and potential disruptions. No doubt many of us had highs and lows last year and perhaps feel some trepidation for the new school year. If the summer-is-ending-and-school-is-starting realization has you feeling anxious, then turn the page and learn about some of the exciting things happening in the field and know that DVIDB is here to offer a network of professional support. Be sure to visit the DVIDB website where you can access members-only resources to help you get ready for that first day. Also, remember to check out our

social media channels to see the most up-to-date information on upcoming DVIDB events.

As we begin a new school year, may you feel hope and excitement!


CONNECTCENTER
Connecting people with useful information and resources
The APH ConnectCenter offers curated advice and resources to assist children, parents, adults and job seekers who are blind and visually impaired and their associated professionals.
Vision Aware™
For adults and seniors
www.visionaware.org
Career Connect®
For job seekers
www.aphcareerconnect.org
Family Connect®
For families and parents
www.familyconnect.org
TransitionHub™
Connecting students & families to transition resources
Looking for information and resources related to vision loss?
Our information and referral line is here to help.
(800) 232-5463 Mon-Fri 8am to 8pm ET
or email connectcenter@aph.org

Introducing the National Research Agenda in STEM Education for Students with Visual Impairments

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In November 2021, a team of 28 professionals, guided by a steering committee of four researchers, held a conference to create the first guiding document on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education for students with visual impairments and blindness. The agenda document contains twelve goals identified as the most immediate and pressing for the field. Each goal is supported with recommended strategies for meeting the goal, research recommendations and development recommendations. The agenda document is intended for guidance for future research and development to create a more inclusive and accessible STEM education for students with visual impairments for years to come.

As a direct result of the conference, a website: *Developing a National Research Agenda for STEM Education for Students with Visual Impairments* (https://u.osu.edu/nationalresearchstemvisualimpairment/), was created to capture what is going on in the field and present the identified needs of the field. This website is hosted by The Ohio State University which ensures the longevity of the site and the content. The website gives access to Collaborative Partners, Subject Matter Professional Partners, News and Events, Materials, Research Highlights, and Contact information pages.

The ***Welcome*** page introduces visitors to the project, the conference log (A clipart picture of a chemistry test tube with symbols inside the test tube representative of science, technology, engineering, and math. Written below the clipart image is STEM in both regular print and simbraille), and the funding information. ***Collaborative Partners*** presents photos and bios of the conference committee members: Dr. Danene Fast, Dr. Stacy Kelly, Dr. Derrick Smith, and Dr. Tiffany Wild. ***Subject Matter Professional Partners*** introduces the 28 professionals (with photos and short bios) who have participated and contributed to the discussion and creation of the national research agenda. The ***News and Events*** page posts the latest updates about the conference as well as information regarding the research activities that grow out of the national research agenda. Visitors have access to interact with the posts by leaving comments. This page is meant to keep

our community informed on what is happening with our conference and to nurture relationships. ***Materials*** provides free access to the content developed from the conference, including a comprehensive annotated bibliography of research conducted in STEM education for students with visual impairments which notes the subject, research methodologies, number of participants and review of findings, a summary report of the literature review, the methodology record, and the PowerPoint slides from the pre-conference meeting. The ***News and Events*** tab, brings together information about the projects and collaborations that are direct results of the conference and the national research agenda. Updates are posted on this page as we work on the goals of the agenda. It is our hope that by posting information on this tab, our field can work to reduce replication of projects while innovating for the needs of students with visual impairments. The **Contact Us** lists the contact information of the conference planning committee.

Use of the Website by Teachers and Researchers

This website was built in order to help teachers and researchers to promote continued work toward fully inclusive and accessible STEM education for students with visual impairments. The following pages were developed specifically with teachers and researchers in mind. We have included a brief description of how to use the information in each page for benefits of both teachers and researchers.

- *Materials Page* – The methods page includes a comprehensive list of research articles in STEM education. The *summary report* provides an overview of all the articles found through a comprehensive literature review. The *literature outline spreadsheet* provides a listing of articles by topical areas within STEM education. Each tab can help you to locate the article listed by author, date of publication, title, topics covered, inclusion of students or assistive technology devices and journal title. This spreadsheet allows for a quick reference for any teacher or researcher wanting additional information in sub topical areas of STEM.
- *Resources Page* **–** The resources page has a listing of resources that any teacher or researcher may need in order to improve STEM accessibility for students with visual impairments. As you scroll down the page, there are resources listed under the following category headers: classroom resources/courses, researcher resources, conferences and organizations. Hyperlinks for more information for each resource is included.
- *The National Research Agenda Document Page* – The larger national research agenda document is available for full download on this page. Researchers can use this document as a reference for the need of future research or products to be produced to address the identified needs of students with visual impairments in the area of STEM education. For

teachers, this document serves as an advocacy piece to show administration reasoning behind the pedagogies and methods teachers use in the classroom as they specifically address the educational needs of students with visual impairments.

- *Collaborative Partners and Subject Matter Professionals Page* – Both of these pages can work together to provide a list of persons working in the STEM areas as researchers, teachers and advocates of persons with visual impairments. Both researchers and teachers can use this page to reach out to the persons listed on these pages that can answer any questions or possibly collaborate on future projects based upon their bios and interest levels.

Amongst the features, the site contains widgets for Recent Posts and Categories to help visitors to navigate the content. With the integrated subscribe button, visitors can also choose to stay informed of the latest news, updates to the website resources, or projects created from this document. Information is sent by email. Before introducing the website to the public, we worked to improve its accessibility by providing text explanations for visual assets. Through this website, we hope to provide teachers, researchers, parents, students, and developers up-to-date research information and share our knowledge and expertise to expand and

enhance STEM learning and participation in STEM careers by persons with visual impairment.

Acknowledgement: This project was funded as project 232669 by the National Science Foundation. Materials contained within this article and on the website do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the National Science Foundation.


DVIDB ON FACEBOOK
Join Our Facebook Family
If you are passionate about the education of children and youth with visual impairments and deafblindness, including those with additional disabilities, please become part of our social network on Facebook. If you have a Facebook account, you can find our page and become a fan by searching for Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness.
For those who do not have a Facebook account, you can view our page by going to the following URL: https://www.facebook/pages/Division-on-Visual-Impairments-and-Deafblindness/248244976215

Described and Captioned Media Program: Enhancing Learning Through Accessible Media

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The Described and Captioned Media Mission

The mission of the Described and Captioned Media Program (DCMP) is to promote and provide equal access to communication and learning through described and captioned educational media (DCMP, 2022). DCMP makes media accessible by adding captions for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing and descriptions for individuals who are blind and have low vision. The goal is for accessible media to be an integral tool in the teaching and learning process for all stakeholders in the educational community, including students, educators and other school personnel, parents, service providers, businesses, and agencies.

Why use Educational Media?

Educational videos can bring great literature, plays, music, or important scenes from history into the classroom. This media can also take students around the globe to meet new people and hear their ideas, take students on otherwise impossible field trips, and show experiments that can't be done in class--i.e., exploring inside the human body or jetting off to Jupiter. DCMP also provides the opportunity for teachers to clip media and join several videos together for a lesson, which gives them the freedom to explore multiple ideas for a lesson. The resulting lessons, thus, engage all the students in the classroom to learn in new ways. In short, educational videos can inspire and engage students, as well as provide authentic learning opportunities.

Specifically, the educational media provided through DCMP allows teachers to engage students in problem-solving and investigative activities. The educational media can also help students practice media literacy and critical viewing skills and provide a common experience for students to discuss. Finally, described and captioned media can also help to dismantle social stereotypes. Please see Figure 1 for an example of the accessible media DCMP provides.

Figure 1

Example of Described and Captioned Media

Image description: The image illustrates how a video of a bald eagle flying over a fish is both described and captioned.

Available Multimedia Content

DCMP has media which teaches a wide array of academic skills. Content in the library covers all academic topics for preschool through high school. Approximately 300-500 hours of new video is added each year, thus content is always refreshed and current. DCMP also provides a functional curriculum which fosters self-advocacy skills, job skills, and life skills. Figure 2 gives examples of available content areas.

Figure 2

Available Content

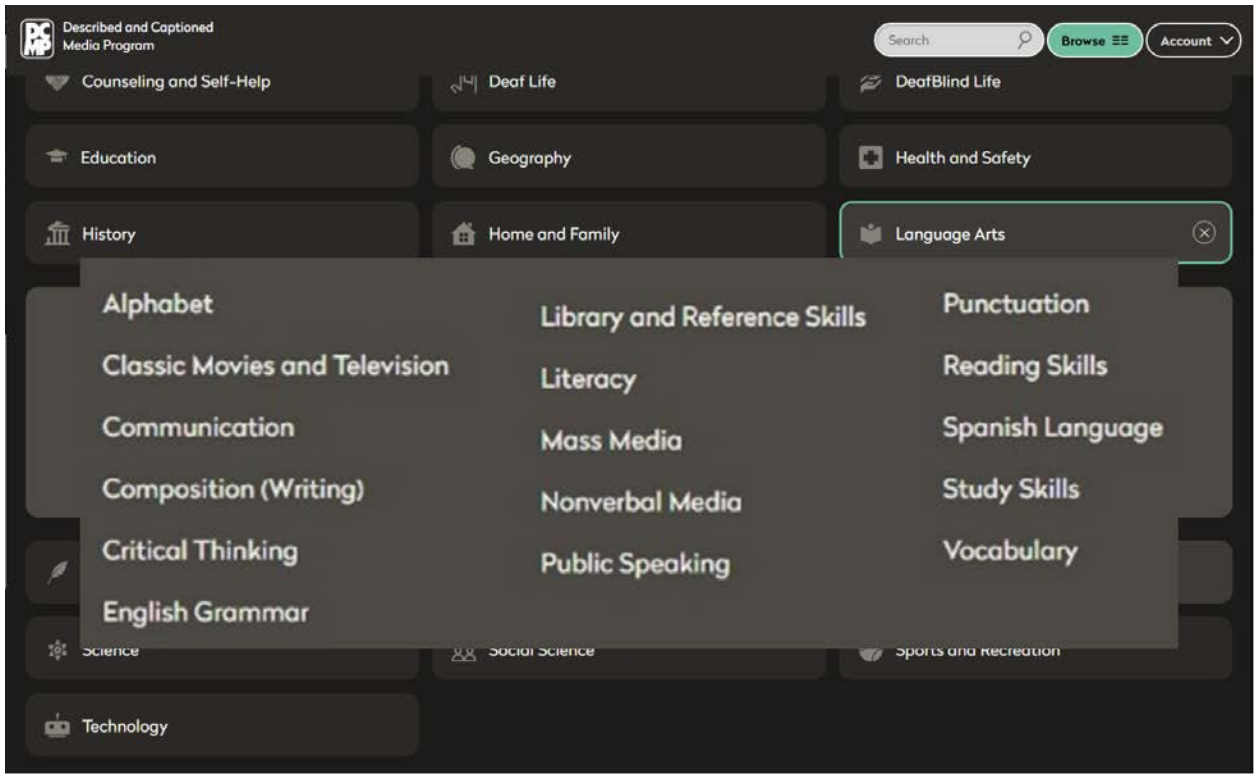

Image description: The screen shot in this image lists the academic areas of content that users can select from.

Key Features

Common Core and State Standards Alignment

DCMP has partnered with an outside company to match all our educational content with Common Core and state standards. This feature can be seen on each educational video screen under "Standards." Users can click on the link to filter standards and search for additional videos which meet these standards.

Figure 3

Transcript Features

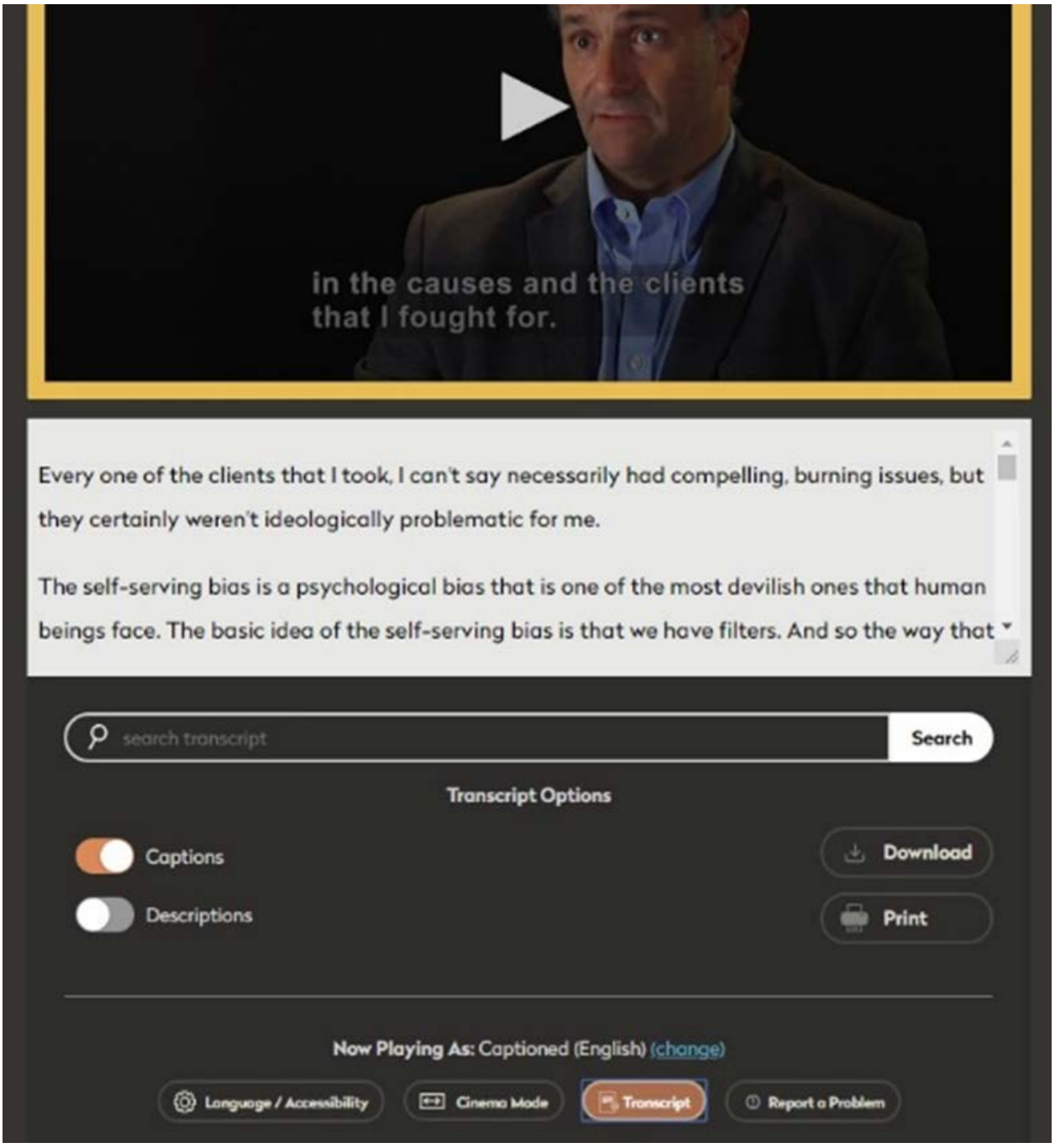

Image description: The screen shot in this image shows the text of a video transcript.

Related Resources

In addition to correlating the content to standards, DCMP offers a variety of related resources to assist teachers in making the most of these accessible videos. Some videos come with lesson plans developed by master teachers. Many videos have links to resources created by the film's producers, such as activity guides, idea books for teachers, lesson guides, and much more.

Transcript Features

The transcript feature allows users to view the transcript of the caption file and/or the description file. When both are included, the video becomes accessible to students who are deaf-blind through refreshable braille. The transcript is a valuable teaching tool for pre-teaching vocabulary from the video and can be given to students in electronic or print format as a study guide. Students can highlight important segments as a note taking technique. The transcript feature also allows users to search through the video for specific words or phrases and jump to those points. Refer to Figure 3 for an example of the transcript features.

Searching and Browsing

As DCMP has over 11,000 videos in the library, there are a couple of different ways to make it easier to locate the desired content. Users can type in keywords, phrases, or titles to search for videos. Alternatively, DCMP videos can be browsed according to topic area. The videos are divided into 21 main topic

areas, and users can choose a topic then a subtopic from that main topic category. Users can also limit results by setting their browsing preferences. They can choose: grade level, accessibility feature, content format, and runtime. Narrowing the search results can help users find what they are looking for more quickly. Please see Figure 4 and 5 for examples of DCMP browsing and searching features.

Figure 4

Browsing Preferences

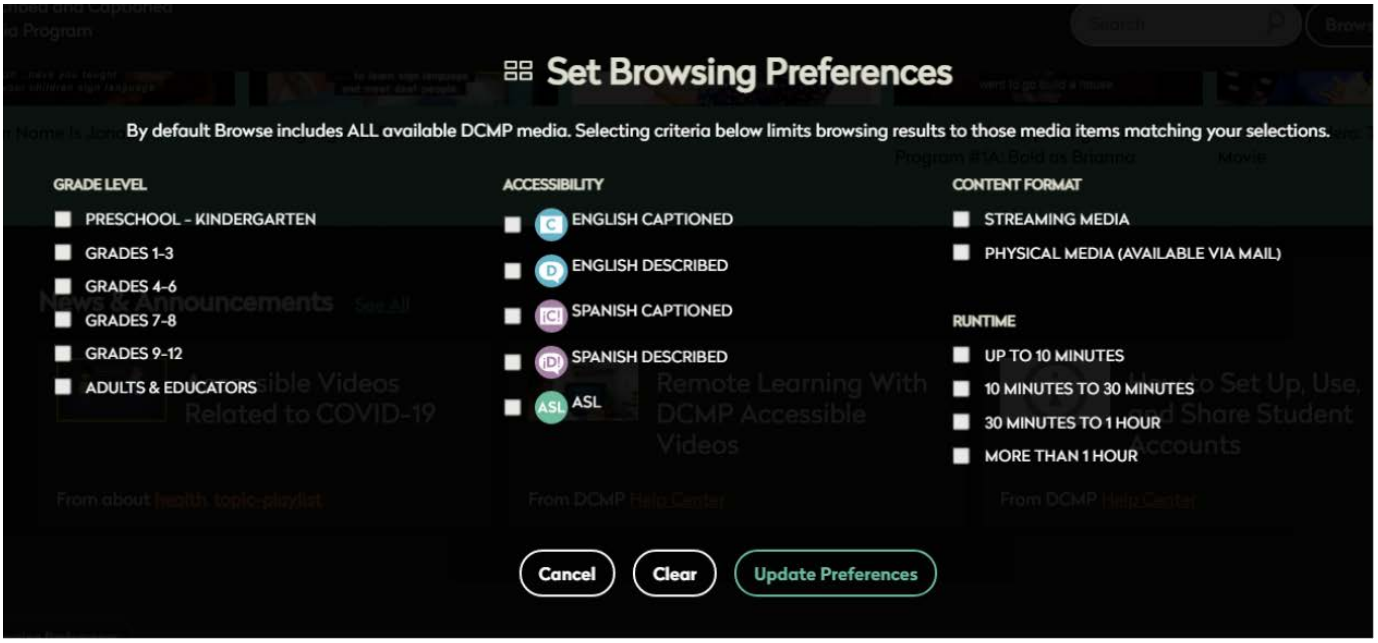

Image description: The screen shot in this image is to illustrate the different options from which users can target content including by grade, language, and length.

Figure 5

Sample Search Results

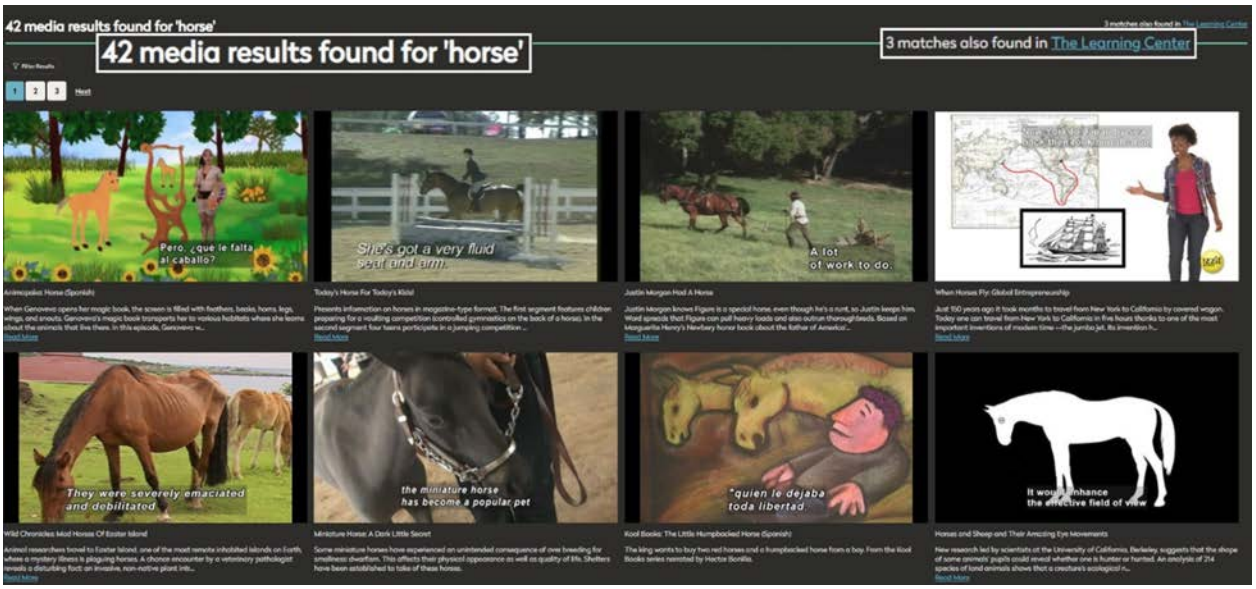

Image description: The screen shot in this image shows the resulting items yielded when searching for content on horses.

Additional Resources

Accessible Television Network

As a result of the U.S. Department of Education's commitment to ensure that broadcast content is made accessible for children who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, and deaf-blind, some of the nation's top children's educational television programs are also available through DCMP. Examples of available titles include *Bill Nye the Science Guy, MythBusters, The*

Magic School Bus, Timeblazers, America the Story of Us, Cyberchase, Curiosity Quest, and Lucky Dog.

e-Learning Resources

DCMP has additional resources for students, families, and professionals to facilitate their understanding of the required support systems for children who are blind or have low vision, deafblind, deaf, or hard of hearing. DCMP's continuing education resources include: Self-paced Modules, Online Workshops, and Facilitated Quick Classes. All of these eLearning resources are free of charge for members. Membership is as easy as registering with your email and a password.

Getting a Job for Students who are Blind and Visually Impaired

One of the newer resources DCMP has in the eLearning feature is a transition curriculum module for students who are visually impaired. It is called *Getting a Job for Students who are Blind and Visually Impaired*. The module is designed to help the job seeker prepare for the world of work. The module can be completed in multiple sessions or all at once, as desired by the individual student. Students may document their thoughts and resources and *s*ave **t**o their Career Planning Log in the module. Upon completion, students will earn a certificate.

The eLearning resources of the transition curriculum with *Getting A Job* embeds elements of the expanded core curriculum (ECC; Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, 2022) and is a perfect start to the career and job fact finding process. The module series looks at the knowledge and skills a student would need to explore various careers, search for available positions, complete an interview, and request accommodations from an employer. To accomplish this, the module gives an organized process to guide young people in areas of the ECC and moves students through their career planning to an action plan. Specifically, *Getting a Job* offers lessons, complete with role model tips and quizzes, geared at career education, social skills, compensatory skills, organizational skills, and self-determination skills.

Monthly Newsletter

Each month, DCMP also sends out an email newsletter. The goal is to highlight current events, holidays, and historical events, and we suggest accessible media to use with each of these. The newsletter announces new titles that have been added to the collection. It also keeps members up to date on new features and trainings that DCMP offers.

Membership Qualifications and Accessing the Resources

Full membership is available to those who work with, or are the family members of, at least one child with a disability (birth through twenty-one). This

includes general education teachers, teachers of the visually impaired, orientation and mobility specialists, paraprofessionals, teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and anyone who works with these children and their adult family members. In addition, preservice teachers are eligible to sign up for membership while still in college so that they can learn how to incorporate the resources DCMP provides in order to facilitate the provision of a free and appropriate education for students with hearing or vision loss.

DCMP allows teachers or parents to easily set up student accounts and assign those students individual videos or entire categories. Students can also be grouped into different classes and videos can be assigned to the entire class. Detailed information about creating an account can be found at: https://dcmp.org/learn/394

Continuing Education Credits

DCMP offers several opportunities for professionals to earn continuing education credit (CEUs). Training sessions are pre-approved for the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) and Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals (ACVREP). All participants who successfully complete a training will earn a certificate which can be used with other credentialing organizations.

Conclusion

We often think the goal of captions and descriptions is to provide equal access for individuals with disabilities. However, the accessible features embedded in DCMP benefit all students and support the goal of universal design. Namely, making media accessible increases the learning potential for all students. What is more, the educational media and additional resources provided through DCMP can save general education teachers, itinerant teachers, and parents time while simultaneously exposing students to experiences they may not otherwise have had.

Funding Acknowledgment: The DCMP is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and administered by the National Association of the Deaf.

References

Described and Captioned Media Program. (2022). https://dcmp.org/

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. (2022). Expanded core curriculum. https://www.tsbvi.edu/programs/ecc#:~:text=a%20new%20window-,The%20term%20expanded%20core%20curriculum%20(ECC)%20is%20used%20to%20define,learn%20incidentally%20by%20observing%20others.

Join us September 14th, 12pm Central/1pm Eastern

Dyslexia & Visual Impairments

1 hour of ACVREP Credit will be offered & webinar is free to DVIDB members
Cost is $11 for non-members

Sign up here:
Dyslexia & Visual Impairments Tickets, Wed, Sep 14, 2022 at 1:00 PM | Eventbrite

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin and not a problem of "seeing." Often students struggle to read after interventions for the visual impairment are implemented.

So ... what can a TVI do to support a student when concerns with reading arise?

Join us to discuss this exciting topic!

Learning Objectives

Learners will:

- Look at the characteristics of dyslexia and related reading disorders
- Discover the early signs of a struggling reader
- Explore the power and benefit of collaborative partnerships when conducting evaluations to identify specific needs of a student
- Identify interventions that address the visual impairment and reading challenges

featuring

Kelly Bevis **Amie Davenport**

Region 10 Education Service Center, Richardson, Texas

Dyslexia and Visual Impairments

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Region 10, Education Service Center

Target Audience: Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVI), Reading Specialists, Educational Diagnosticians, Licensed Specialists in School Psychology (LSSP)

What is reading? And how does the brain do it? If you look up the term in the dictionary, you learn that reading is the ability to "look at and comprehend the meaning of written or printed matter by mentally interpreting the characters or symbols of which it is composed (Lexico Dictionaries, 2022)." Before discussing dyslexia, we need to understand what efficient reading looks like and how it develops in typical learners. Skilled reading is twofold, decoding text which is figuring out words through phonemic awareness and phonics, and comprehension

of language which includes vocabulary and reading comprehension. Fluency connects it all together.

Reading is not an innate skill. It must be explicitly taught. With appropriate instruction, the brain develops the neural pathways for reading. As a student becomes more experienced, the brain becomes more sophisticated in its reading abilities. It is important to remember, beginning readers' brains process information very differently than a skilled reader. As such, teaching foundational reading skills requires the learner to develop complex skills, such as phonological processing, background knowledge, working memory, processing speed, orthographic processing, retrieval of information, etc., for literacy acquisition. Students who have intact language comprehension, but decode text poorly, may be at-risk for or may have dyslexia.

Dyslexia is the most common learning disability. Of the students identified with a learning disability, approximately 80% demonstrate significant reading disabilities (Shaywitx, 2020, p. 29). According to the American Institutes for Research (AIR), 1 in 10 school children have dyslexia (2019 ix). The AIR study also cites the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHHD) who estimated the rate at approximately 10%. Of the students identified with a visual impairment, it is estimated 14-45% have an undiagnosed learning disability most frequently that of reading difficulties. These difficulties are

rarely diagnosed as either dyslexia or a specific learning disability (SLD) according to Marnee Loftin, retired psychologist from the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI).

So, what are the characteristics of dyslexia? It is the struggle with accuracy and fluency of language base skills including:

- Acquiring age-appropriate vocabulary
- Pronouncing words
- Letter/Word retrieval
- Phonological processing
- Poor decoding at the isolated word level
- Automaticity of phonological skills
- Poor spelling
- Confusion when using grammar and syntax orally

These characteristics may lead to:

- Reduced reading experiences
- Impeded vocabulary growth
- Lack of background knowledge
- Disrupted reading comprehension

Deficits in the phonological component of language are often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experiences that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. Students with visual impairments acquire reading skills much in the same manner as their peers without visual impairments by demonstrating interest in reading by listening to stories and rhymes, experiencing environmental symbols, letters, and words, and exploring various types of reading materials. Students with visual impairments, including low vision and braille readers, use the same areas of their brains similarly to their typically developing peers. Braille readers show activation in the brain typically associated with tactual perception (Loftin, 2022). As a result, dyslexia is neurological in origin. It is not a problem of seeing.

So, when a student with a visual impairment struggles to read, why is it such a challenge to identify and address their needs? According to Marnee Loftin (2022), students with visual impairments

> [represent] less than .5% of the population in special education programs throughout the nation, [and] these small numbers present several different variables that contribute to the complexity. These variables include differences in etiology that can be neurological or ocular. Age of onset of the

> visual impairment as well as degree and type of vision loss is another significant variable. Most discussions focus on a single variable, reading medium. This focus is divided into braille readers and large print readers. However, even this is an oversimplification. Most students who are visually impaired will use multiple media, such as a variety of magnification devices, auditory materials, etc., for different tasks. Students will often change media as they progress through the grades and demands become different. The students who use only braille are few but are often at the center of discussion regarding the possibility of dyslexia as a coexisting condition. (para 2).

Educational diagnosticians, licensed specialists in school psychology, and reading interventionists often struggle to identify dyslexia due to limited training and experience in working with students who have visual impairments, understanding how the visual impairment impacts learning and reading acquisition, especially braille readers, selecting the appropriate evaluation tools, and understanding the accommodations needed to evaluate the student. Criteria under 34 CFR 300.309(a)(3) state findings for determining a student with a SLD, are not primarily the result of:

- A visual impairment, or motor disability;
- Mental retardation [intellectual disability];

- Emotional disturbance;
- Cultural factors;
- Environmental or economic disadvantage; or
- Limited English proficiency.

The key phrase in CFR 300.309(a)(3) is PRIMARY RESULT. The SLD cannot be a primary result of a visual impairment which counters practices that use the language of "exclusionary factors" or "rule out". When evaluating students with visual impairments for dyslexia, it is important the multidisciplinary team, including parents and the TSVI, closely collaborate when answering evaluation questions and considering all areas of the suspected disability while formulating an evaluation plan. To make informed decisions, information from multiple data sources must be considered by the team to avoid making decisions based on a single data source, such as cognitive or achievement assessments results.

If a student with a visual impairment is struggling with reading acquisition, additional screening or evaluation is needed. Some factors for consideration include:

- Does the student lack understanding of sounds and symbols?
- Are they unable to decode familiar words using phonics or patterns?
- Does the student have difficulty with rhyming words?

- Does the student show little interest in attempting to read or is hesitant to read aloud?
- Is reading slow and labored with multiple starts and stops?
- When reading, does the student omit words and/or add additional sounds or words?
- Does the student exert maximum effort and experience decreased comprehension of meaning?
- Is there a family history of reading challenges or disabilities, including dyslexia, dysgraphia, or dyscalculia?
- Has the family requested an evaluation? If so, follow your State's Child-Find process.

To learn more about dyslexia and vision impairments, please join our webinar September 14th, 12 PM Central/1 PM Eastern by clicking on the link. Together, we will discuss the following topics:

- Characteristics of dyslexia and related reading disorders
- The early signs of a struggling reader
- The power and benefit of collaborative partnerships when conducting evaluations to identify specific needs of a student
- Interventions that address the visual impairment and reading challenges

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VIDBE-Q 2023 Convention Issue

The intended purpose of the Spring 2023 convention issue is to provide manuscripts aimed at practitioners about presenter contributions to the CEC 2023 program and work related to the field of visual impairments and deafblindness. This issue will allow those who were unable to attend your session to know more about your work.

Guidelines:

-3-5 pages
-Tables, images and/or figures should have a text description
-References (APA 7th Edition)
-APA formatting (7th Edition)
-12 point, Times New Roman font
-Author information for title: Name, affiliation, highest degree earned, and email address
-Please identify target audience
-Provide tips or strategies

Email your manuscript submission to Kathleen.Farrand@asu.edu.

Deadline for submission: April 1, 2023

Assessing the Executive Functioning (EF) Skills of Students with Visual Impairments

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Executive functioning (EF) skills are the abilities that allow students to monitor and regulate their thoughts, emotions, and behavior (Diamond, 2013). They underlie the development of academic and social skills and allow for lifelong success in terms of adaptation and goal attainment (Best et al., 2011; Blair & Razza, 2007; Blair & Raver, 2012). These cognitive skills contribute to academic success, well-being, and employment outcomes (Barkley & Murphy, 2010; Best et al., 2011; Blair & Razza, 2007; Denham et al., 2015). They are also highly correlated with an ability to problem solve and be creative (Beaty et al., 2014). Within educational contexts, EF is required for students to function well in the classroom, such as when following class rules, working cooperatively with peers, and attending to instruction (Brock et al., 2009; Ciairano et al., 2007). EF is also required in academic work outside of the classroom, such as when students are

studying, planning for larger projects, and keeping track of their materials (Jefferson et al., 2006).

Supporting EF skill development is an important consideration for teachers when designing their instruction. Many students struggle with EF development, particularly if they have identified special needs (Anderson, 2002). Students with visual impairments (VI) may be especially at risk, due to differences in how they learn and adults' reactions to these differences (Cavézian et al., 2013). It is also possible that the development of EF in sighted children is connected to their visual processing (Colombo, 2001; Kravtiz et al., 2011; Richards et al., 2010), meaning the developmental trajectory for EF in students with VI may yet be even more unique. However, little is currently known about the EF skills of students with VI. Few studies have been conducted with this population, with differences between sighted students and students with VI emerging on few of the direct EF tasks (Bathelt et al., 2018; Greenaway et al., 2017; Tadic, et al., 2009). More frequently, differences emerge between these two groups on parent ratings of daily executive functioning, with greater concerns identified by parents of students with VI (Bathelt et al., 2018; Greenaway et al., 2017; Heyl & Hintermair, 2015). Unfortunately, the measurement of EF is limited in students with VI, due to most EF tasks relying heavily on visual stimuli. In addition, even those tasks and rating forms that can be completed about students with VI do not account for possible

differences in the development of these skills but rather compare students with VI to sighted student normative expectations. This can cause the information produced by these tasks and forms to be irrelevant or even useless for those who wish to support students with VI.

At the instructional level, assessment is the first step in understanding an individual student's needs. This article introduces the EF skills and EF assessment tools available, discusses their limitations for students with VI, and poses a process by which teachers can create functional tasks to informally assess the EF of their students with VI as a basis for planning instruction and support.

Understanding EF Skills

EF is an umbrella term, meaning it includes many skills. Table 1 lists typical skills, their definitions, and examples, that are referred to under the term EF and assessed on the BRIEF- 2 (Gioia et al., 2015), a commonly used rating scale of EF.

Table 1

Common EF Skills

Skill	Definition	Common Examples
Inhibition	Controlling impulses or automatic responses	Staying seated even though you want something across the room; raising your hand and waiting to talk when called upon
Self-monitoring	Recognizing the effects of your behavior on others or the environment	Noticing that you are bothering someone near you by humming; identifying the marks you left on the wall when you kicked it
Shifting/flexibility	Being flexible in your thoughts and actions	Considering others' points of view; reframing an even with a more positive outlook; choosing to approach a problem in a different way
Emotional Control	Regulating your emotional responses	Cooling down your anger before responding to someone who cut in line; increasing your motivation to complete a boring task by thinking about your end goal
Working Memory	Holding information in mind for the purpose of staying focused/on-task; mental multi-tasking; mental manipulation	Reminding yourself what you are supposed to be working on when you get distracted; remembering your to-do list while also working on an item from it; adding up sums in your head
Planning and organizing	Thinking about how to break down a complex task into small, ordered steps; preparing a list or outline for a task	Making to-do lists; completing a planner with weekly goals for a large project; preparing a study guide
Task initiation	Getting started on a task	Brainstorming; laying out the materials; writing a first

		sentence
Task monitoring	Observing yourself while you work on a task to ensure you are doing it correctly and efficiently	Checking in on the rubric or expectations midway through an assignment or project; editing; checking time allotted and spent
Organization of materials	Organizing physical items so that they are easy to find and use for a task or tasks	Putting your files in folders and in a logical order; cleaning a desk drawer; placing all books on their proper shelves; straightening a school locker
Task completion	Monitoring your work on a task to determine if it is finished	Turning in your assignment; submitting a paper; serving or delivering a meal

Traditional Assessment Tasks and Their Limitations

To understand what a suitable EF assessment approach for students with VI might entail, it is important to discuss the broader context of EF measurement. EF is commonly assessed in three main ways:

- Tasks that elicit EF;
- Rating scales by which informants endorse EF problems or behaviors;
- Interviews.

Tasks represent the most direct way of measuring EF, as they allow the evaluator to observe first hand whether an individual can solve a problem or

quickly complete an activity. However, formal direct tasks that exist today are not analogous to the more complex utilization of EF skills in everyday life (Barkley, 2012; Barkley & Murphy, 2010) and may be a reason why differences or needs of students with VI are not as evident in the tasks as they are on the rating scales as compared to sighted peers.

Rating scales and interviews provide secondhand information and responses can be influenced by the perceptions of the informant. These methods, however, allow for an evaluator to access information about how well a student uses their EF skills within the context of everyday life, in more complicated situations with many more contributing factors. Unfortunately, they do not necessarily correlate well with direct tasks, causing some to question what they are truly measuring; as mentioned, they also assume that EF skills develop the same way and are used similarly across all children. A multi-method approach that integrates information from several sources may very well be best.

Considerations for Functional Assessment and Observation of EF Skills

While not a formal assessment measure, teachers can design functional tasks within their instruction that will provide them insight into their student's ability to engage EF skills. A formal score or normative comparison will not be elicited, but as mentioned earlier, these are often not very useful, and not necessarily crucial for

designing instruction that provides practice in EF areas. Assessment in areas of the expanded core curriculum (ECC) could lend themselves well to also assessing EF skills at the same time, and a repeated assessment after instruction may help in monitoring progress. The first phase of our current research study is investigating the correlation between accessible EF tasks and novel tasks that mimic real-life tasks (i.e., organizing a backpack) and more traditionally used parent ratings on the BRIEF-2. In the future, we hope to be able to recommend specific tasks that can be replicated within the classroom that also show rigor in terms of their measurement qualities. In the meantime, we share a planning process to create informal EF assessment tasks linked to ECC assessment.

The first step in creating a functional task for assessment is to understand what EF skills need to be engaged to complete the task. Most tasks will allow you to observe several EF skills at once. Figure 1 shows a planning form for breaking down an assessment task into its component parts. Each step of the task is analyzed for the ECC and EF areas that are being assessed. A basic rubric is used to indicate the student's current level. The purpose of this planning is to help the teacher not only identify areas of the ECC that need direct instruction, but also to note patterns in the use of EF skills at the same time. This form is a work in progress, and is shared here as an example of the thought process behind the assessment planning.

Teachers may wish to design a form that is more like a checklist or organized in a way that makes the most sense to them.

Figure 1

ECC and EF Assessment Planning Form

Task: Provide a written recipe or link to a recipe and ask the student to follow the recipe to completion.

I = Independent. The student is able to complete the step with no more than an initial question
E = Emerging. The student is able to partially do the step and/or accomplish the step with prompting and scaffolded questions.
N = Not Yet. The student is not able to perform the step even with scaffolded questions and prompting.

Skill Breakdown	ECC Skill Needed	EF Skills Needed	Level	Observation Notes
Uses technology needed to access recipe	Access Tech Compensatory Skills	Task Initiation	ECC: I E N EF: I E N	
Verbalizes when asked the steps to getting ready	Compensatory Skills	Planning and Organizing	ECC: I E N EF: I E N	
Remembers ingredients to gather		Working Memory	ECC: I E N EF: I E N	
Gathers tools and ingredients	O&M Independent Living Skills Sensory Efficiency Skills	Planning and Organizing Working Memory	ECC: I E N EF: I E N	
Organizes work space	Independent Living Skills Compensatory Skills Sensory Efficiency Skills	Organization of Materials	ECC: I E N EF: I E N	

Follows Steps of Recipe	Access Tech Independent Living Skills (adaptive cooking methods) Sensory Efficiency Skills	Task Monitoring Task Completion	ECC: I E N EF: I E N	

Pre-planned Prompting Questions (if needed):
How can you best read and follow the recipe?
What do you remember about the ingredients?
What are the steps you need to take?
What comes next?
How can you arrange your space for efficiency in following the recipe?
What can you do differently?
How well did that work?

If situations arose during the task (e.g., spilled ingredient, tool unable to be found, etc.) was the student able to demonstrate:

Shifting/Flexibility: I E N Not Observed
Inhibition: I E N Not Observed
Self-Monitoring: I E N Not Observed
Emotional Control: I E N Not Observed

In the example, a student is asked to read and follow a recipe. The main ECC area targeted is independent living skills. However, within that task, compensatory skills, O&M skills, access/assistive technology skills, and sensory efficiency skills can also be assessed. Organization of materials, planning, working memory, initiation, task monitoring and task completion are all EF skills that are involved in being successful with the task. However, depending on how the task is going, other EF skills may also be observed such as emotional control. These areas

have been added at the bottom of the form. Also at the bottom of the form are some pre-planned questions for prompting purposes. In order to get a sense of how much prompting a student really needs, it is helpful to start with a more open-ended and higher order question and then prompt more specifically from there if needed. Pre-planning these can help remind us not to give the answer too quickly!

Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to share information about the importance of considering the EF skill level of our students with visual impairments and to share a means to informally assess those skills through tasks that also assess areas of the ECC. Our focus on brainstorming real-life EF tasks that are accessible to students with visual impairments comes from the known limitations of using current formal EF tasks and assessments and the limited research that suggests that students with visual impairments may struggle with EF based on rating scale measures filled out by parents. Teachers can play an important role in designing instructional opportunities that provide practice and guidance in developing EF skills.

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CEC: Call for Editors

The Publications Committee of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) has opened nominations for the editorships of Exceptional Children (EC) and for Teaching Exceptional Children (TEC). CEC values equity, diversity, and inclusion and encourages the application of members of all groups, including women, people of color, LGBTQ+, and those with disabilities, as well as candidates across all stages of their careers. Self-nominations and nominations from the field are encouraged. Nominations can be for a solo editor, co-editors, editor and associate editor(s), or other configurations. Initial nominations are due August 31st, with final materials due January 15, 2023.

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ESY²: Summer Camp Experiences for Children with Low Incidence Sensory Disabilities

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Going to summer camp is one of the many experiences we all remember from childhood and can be an integral part of a child's social, emotional, and educational development. Thousands of children of all ages attend summer camps each year, but these camps are rarely designed for or accessible to children with low incidence sensory disabilities (blind/low vision, Deaf/hard of hearing, deafblind). The specialized camps that do exist may be inaccessible to children who live outside of the large metropolitan areas of the state due to the inability of parents to transport the child to and from camp. Having limited access to these specialized camps leaves children at a disadvantage to maintaining and building necessary skills in the areas of orientation and mobility, recreation and leisure, academic support, self-determination, social skills, compensatory access, and other areas of the expanded core curriculum (ECC).

In 2019, an opportunity presented itself to tackle the challenge of limited summer opportunities for children with low incidence sensory disabilities (LISD). The authors (both university faculty and CoPIs) were awarded grant funding from the Ohio Deans Compact on Exceptional Children to design and implement two 1-week summer camp experiences for children with LISD. The Ohio Deans Compact ESY^2 grant provided the opportunity for university faculty, personnel from partnering education agencies, and school districts to collaborate, plan, and implement new summer experiences in more rural areas of the state. An additional goal of the project was to utilize the summer camps as a practicum option for future teachers of the visually impaired (TVI), teachers of the Deaf (TOD), and Orientation and Mobility instructors in the TVI and TOD Consortium programs led by Shawnee State University and partner Institutions for Higher Education. Identifying summer practicum placements for future professionals in the areas of sensory impairment education can be a significant challenge to several factors including lack of qualified personnel in the sensory impairment areas, and limited summer education options for P-12 children with sensory impairments. By developing additional summer practicum options, this would create a win-win for both future professionals in sensory impairments as well as children and families who lack summer educational programming options.

The camp development work began in the winter of 2019 and brought together teachers of the visually impaired, teachers of the Deaf/Hard of hearing, orientation and mobility specialists, district administrators, and community partners. Planning for the intended summer camp experiences took place at two weekend retreats at a local state park lodge. The diverse experiences of the grant team allowed for very collaborative and productive planning sessions. During the first retreat in early December, the University faculty and Co-PIs for the grant, familiarized the ESY^2 grant team with the project goals and deliverables. The grant team spent time getting to know each other and brainstorming ideas for the overall framework of the camp and camp focus and developed a parent survey to gather preliminary information from parents regarding their needs and expectations for camp. Survey data would be used at the 2nd retreat to help design the camp to meet parent and student needs. The team decided to focus on the ECC with a theme of the Olympics because the camp was planned for the summer of 2020, coinciding with the Summer Olympics. The team was excited to be able to design a camp focused on the expanded core curriculum for children with low incidence sensory disabilities.

The ECC includes important areas of instruction that go above and beyond the core curricular areas and is an essential part of a well-rounded education for these students. Children who are blind/visually impaired, Deaf/hard of hearing or

deafblind often require explicit instruction in areas such as recreation and leisure, self-determination, social skills, compensatory access, assistive technology, independent living, orientation & mobility, career education, etc., due to their difficulty accessing information because of a sensory or dual sensory loss (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010). The other non-negotiable for the grant team was that the camp include a family component. They wanted to involve families on the final day of camp to provide opportunities for families to engage with each other and camp instructors.

At the second retreat in early February, the grant team utilized the parent survey data to determine the age group of potential camp participants and activities for the camp. They developed an agenda and created a budget for staff, transportation, supplies, materials and equipment. They developed a detailed schedule of activities, events and field trips. They also developed a camp application and a plan for distribution of the camp flyer. Finally, they created and assigned final tasks to complete before camp.

Figure 1

Grant planning team at retreat at North Bend State Park

Image description: Individuals standing in front of a building with the name North Bend displayed on the side of the building.

The grant team left the 2nd retreat in February, 2020 with plans to hold the 1st ESY^2 summer camp in July, 2020. Then COVID 19 hit the world and everything shut down. The grant team made the difficult decision to postpone the camp to the summer of 2021. The original grant project called for the development of a single camp in one location in southeastern Ohio with expansion to a 2nd camp in southwestern Ohio. Additional grant funding allowed the CoPIs to pull together a 2nd camp team to replicate the work of the original grant team in the 2nd location in southwestern Ohio. The Co-PIs met virtually with each camp team throughout the fall and winter of 2020 and spring of 2021 to assist with camp planning activities for the summer of 2021. The initial ESY^2 grant team was able to help guide the

work of both camp teams throughout the virtual meetings. This helped to ensure some consistency between both camps and to ensure a focus on the expanded core curriculum and a family component for the camps.

While each camp shared certain things in common, the camp instructors had flexibility to design a camp that would best serve the needs of their camp participants. Both summer camps were designed and staffed by teachers of the Deaf, teachers of the visually impaired and a certified orientation and mobility specialist. Each camp served as a practicum site for future teachers of the visually impaired, teachers of the deaf and future orientation and mobility specialists. Both camps were 1 week long, day programs that required families to pick up and drop off their campers each day. Grant funding was used to purchase gift cards for parents/guardians to cover the cost of the transportation. To recruit students, the instructors of both camps distributed camp flyers and applications to the students who they serve during the school year. Each camp had a theme and a focus for the week, however, the camp activities were quite different and engaged students in diverse ways.

Each camp incorporated technology activities, adaptive recreation activities, compensatory skills such as learning ASL or braille activities, board games or card games, making snacks, tie dying t-shirts and a family event during the last day of

camp. The Summer Olympics camp in Ross County took advantage of activities available near the local community and transportation was provided by the Pioneer Center, a school for children with developmental disabilities. The campers enjoyed a trip to the local bowling alley and also to Canters Cave 4-H camp, where they had access to a variety of outdoor activities. The Canters Cave trip was such a hit with the campers and instructors, that this year, the 4-H camp served as the site for the entire week of camp, including a 1-night sleep over. The Summer Fun camp in Butler County had a camp theme of planning a party and the campers planned the menu, took the local bus to the grocery store to buy the food, created invitations and prepared the food to enjoy with families at a special lunch on the last day of camp. Each camp incorporated a variety of activities related to the ECC for children who are blind/visually impaired or Deaf/hard of hearing.

Figure 2

Camper constructing Olympic rings

Image description: A camper smiles and holds Olympic rings.

Figure 3

Information about Camp Themes and Participants

Camp Theme	Summer Olympics	Summer Fun
Date	July 12 – 16, 2021	June 14 – 18, 2021
Location	Pioneer School in Ross County	Berachah Church Butler County
Camp Team Members	3 TVI's 1 TOD 1 COMS 2 TVI interns 1 TOD intern 2 COMS interns Paraprofessionals Interpreters University faculty	1 TVI 1 TOD 1 TVI/O&M 2 TVI interns 2 TOD interns 2 COMS interns University faculty
Campers	15 students • 9 students with low vision • 4 students with hearing loss • 1 student with dual sensory loss 5 counties represented	4 students • 3 students with low vision or blindness • 1 student with hearing loss 2 counties represented
Some of the Camp Activities	Beep Baseball Tie dying t-shirts Braille Activities Code Jumper Board Games Water Games Fishing Boating Hiking Swimming Bowling Making snacks Family Event	Ice Breakers Intro to ASL Braille Games Tie dying t-shirts Beeper Kickball App Exploration Arts and Crafts Journal Writing Planning a Party activities Making snacks Grocery Shopping Family Event

Figure 4

O&M Instructor Explaining Directions to a Grocery Store During Local Bus Trip

Image description: An O&M instructor holds a map and leans over to a camper on a bus.

On the final day of each camp, the children shared snacks they had prepared throughout the week, with their families. Families joined in on some of the activities, viewed student projects and got a chance to interact with other families. One common perception from families was how much their children had enjoyed the week and how happy they were to be around other children who were similar to them and shared some of the same challenges. One father's commented how this was the first time his son had ever been to a camp where another child was Deaf.

This was a very powerful statement and showed all of us how much of an impact this grant work is making for children with low incidence sensory disabilities. Results from the parent, instructor and student surveys were overwhelmingly positive and everyone stated they were excited for camp the following year.

We had a wrap up Zoom meeting after both camps were over and instructors and student interns had a chance to share the highlights and lessons learned during the first ESY^2 camps. Both camp groups reported that, as a whole, the camp experience was extremely positive. Each group reported that transportation was an issue and that some parents were not able to facilitate transportation which limited access to camp. The grant was able to pay for $75 gift cards for each family that attended all week to help support the cost of transportation. Another challenge expressed by each group was getting parents to return the camp application and sign their child up for camp. During the Zoom meeting, the instructors for each camp discussed changes they would like to make for the following year. The Summer Olympics camp team decided to use the Canters Cave facility for the whole week and plan an overnight for one day of the camp. This was based on overwhelmingly positive comments from the students and their desire to have the opportunity to spend the night at camp. They also wanted to plan more whole group activities, which would provide opportunities for the children who were blind/low vision to interact with the students who were Deaf/hard of hearing. In

addition, they wanted to provide more opportunities for the children to repeat their favorite games, activities, and socialize with friends. The Summer Fun camp team wanted to improve the turnout for camp by sending out the camp flyer earlier and distributing more broadly. Furthermore, they wanted to increase the number of hours at camp and include more field trips. In addition, they expressed interest in focusing on STEM activities for next year's camp.

Creating summer camp opportunities through partnerships between universities and educational agencies, schools and low incidence professionals is an idea that can be replicated throughout the country. A great place to begin is to reach out to specialized schools for the blind and/or Deaf that may already have existing instructional staff interested in extending educational options in the summer. Another option is to connect with itinerant TVIs and TODs that work for educational service centers or local school districts. One of the keys to success is having a great team of professionals who are comfortable working together and have a real interest in providing new opportunities for children. An additional key to success is to have multiple planning meetings, especially as the camp is being developed the first year. This allows for the team to stay on track and ensure that all forms, documents, materials and plans are ready to go before camp begins. Depending upon the camp instructors' experience and qualifications, there are many options for the camp focus and camp themes. The ECC provides so many

potential interesting and important themes that could be explored. The camp instructors could focus on multiple areas of the ECC or hone in on individual areas such as technology, compensatory skills, like braille, or recreation and leisure. Other possible camp themes could center on core curricular areas such as math, history or STEM. The possibilities are endless and only constrained by the creativity of your camp team. It is also very important to factor in all of the needs of the students attending camp. Don't forget to budget in all personnel costs, including interpreters, paraprofessionals/aides and nursing care, if needed.

Overall, the grant project was a success and everyone felt very positive about the experience for the students and student interns. The camps were a great example of how a partnership between university faculty and school/agency partners can facilitate meaningful educational experiences for children with low incidence sensory disabilities. The camp instructors had the opportunity to work on areas of the ECC that are often left out of traditional school year services. The camp provided very meaningful practicum experiences for the student interns, allowing them to interact with a diversity of children and engage with experienced professional colleagues and families. And finally, the children had the opportunity to work on important ECC skills while having the time of their life!

Figure 5

Campers Try Out a Paddleboat

Image description: Three campers sit in a paddleboat

Figure 6

Campers hiking at Canter Cave

Image description: Student campers and adults are shown hiking at Canters Cave

References

Sapp, W., & Hatlen, P. (2010). The Expanded core curriculum: Where we have been, where we are going, and how we can get there. *Journal of Visual Impairments and Blindness*, *104*(6), 338–348.

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An Unexpected Transition

Kim Humrichouser,

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My name is Kim Humrichouser. Chouser for short, which is what my previous classroom of wonderful students called me. Education has been my passion since I was younger, and after a few opportunities to work with students with special needs I finally found my place. I taught for 15 ½ years in a multiple disabilities classroom. I liked the job, but I loved the kids most of all. They became part of my school family. It has been my dream to always work with students with disabilities and this is where I knew I would finish out my teaching career. There couldn't possibly be anything better. But then I met someone that would forever change my life and career and I wasn't prepared!

In January of 2021 my special education director shared that a family recently moved into the district and their daughter, who is completely blind, would be joining my class. I was immediately excited for the challenge but equally nervous. I had so much experience working with a wide variety of students over the years with many different intellectual, physical, and emotional challenges, but in almost 16 years I had never worked with anyone with a significant visual

impairment, let alone someone with complete blindness. I immediately felt like a first-year teacher all over again and the panic set in.

Before she started school, two lovely ladies came to visit us from the vision department; a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVI) and a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS). Two new acronyms I had never heard before. These ladies were absolutely great! They did their best to give us basic beginner knowledge to know what to expect and how to better prepare for that first day. They also planned to be there on her first day to help transition her off the bus and into our classroom. Ahh, I was relieved, a little.

I had a fairly self-sufficient and easy going group of students. Since they were already settled in with the structure and routines of our classroom, I told my paraprofessional that I wanted her to take the lead with our class and I would work with our new student for the first week as she gets situated and we determine how to best support her. My nerves got the best of me that night and I of course could not sleep in anticipation of the first day with her. Then I met her, spent about 10 minutes with her and realized she is one of the coolest people I have ever met!

Her name is Brooklynn and she is the sole reason that I joined the TSVI program. I was immediately fascinated with her ability to read and type braille so efficiently. She would write sentences and hand her finished papers to me. I chuckled to myself as I looked at this foreign document that was presented to

me. Occasionally as we were working, she would say “it’s not working” as she was reading and I looked at her braille thinking, “ha, you think I have a clue what it says?” I was honest from day one and told her, I can’t read braille, but I want to learn! I worked with her current TSVI and COMS instructors as they came in each week. They taught me more and more and my fascination grew. At one point the COMS told me she also used to be an Intervention Specialist in a self-contained classroom and I thought, how cool that you changed jobs, but it’s not for me. I like my job and going back to school after working to earn my bachelors and masters wasn't for me. They frequently asked if I’d be interested and I gave them the generic “it sounds neat but I’m not sure it’s for me” answer. We kept chatting each week and I continued to become more intrigued with the concept of braille. I would look at Brooklynn’s work trying to understand it. I eventually figured out where the word and sentence breaks were and continued to enjoy watching her read and write her own sentences. Each day I found myself working more and more with her and I began to think, maybe I am ready for a change in my career. I told myself that I would consider it over the summer, talk with my family and look into the registration process next year. But a couple weeks later, the TSVI approached me and asked if I was still interested. “Yes, I think so.” And I’ll never forget our next exchange of words as she said “would you possibly want to sign up now?” “NOW?!” I said with a shocked face. She explained that they were

reviewing a second round of applications. I then thought to myself "lady, YOU ARE CRAZY!" This is too unplanned and I'm not even sure that I can commit to the 3-year post requirement of the program. I was so torn. She and I discussed the specifics of the 3-year commitment and I learned more about my long-term options. I felt better, but couldn't believe that I was truly considering this option.

Figure 1 and 2

Mrs. Humrichouser & Brooklynn

Image description: Student and teacher smiling with matching reindeer glasses (left). Student walking down the hallway with her cane and her teacher on the last day of school (right).

I went home that night and talked with my family and the response I got was simple. If you want to, go for it. Why not? It was then that I decided I've never taken such a leap, but I was truly intrigued in this field. If you're ready for a change: I highly recommend it! It was intense, but worth it! Here are some of the things I thought about when making the decision to go back to school to become a TSVI.

- It's only a 1 year program (You can do anything for a year)
- It's mostly online (The in-person sessions were so neat!)
- I already held the needed Intervention Specialist License
- It allowed for a change in direction but with the same students I enjoy working with
- Itinerant teaching - meeting and enriching so many lives; every. single. day!
- Education is important. However, any great teacher understands the burnout. It was a drastic change that I needed!

What I wish I would have known about becoming a TSVI:

- Braille is hard, brace yourself!
- The amount of work I'd put in (Anything great is worth the time and effort right?!)
- How complex our visual system is

    - There are so many different types of visual conditions that affect how we see and perceive information. It was and still remains overwhelming to me.
- The amount of communication skills needed to succeed in this job.
    - You must talk with students, families, teachers, directors, manufacturing companies, related service providers, eye doctors, the list goes on and on.
    - Learn to communicate - efficiently and effectively.

I took the leap and called the program coordinator and we chatted for almost 45 minutes discussing the program and requirements she would need from me. I stayed after school that Friday evening and drafted my application letter explaining why I wanted to join the program and rambled on about Brooklynn, who I barely knew but already thought so highly of! Within a very short time I got a notice that I was accepted into the Shawnee State TSVI Consortium! It was the craziest and best decision that I have made in a long time for myself and my career! Life has been go go go ever since, but I truly could not be happier. My absolute favorite part to this day is the braille. It was so overwhelmingly stressful learning it, but it's been beyond rewarding as I finally begin to understand it and help spread awareness to so many other people. I cannot thank my vision colleagues enough

for pushing me to initiate this change and to Dr. Koehler for making it such a great experience! We are a small rare group of educators that make such a huge impact on our students and their families. I finished out the school year and started classes that summer. Reality hit when a huge box of books and a Perkins Manual Braille Writer arrived on my front porch. Classes were an overload with my already busy life with 3 little kids at home. It was intense, but equally neat to learn. My kids were also fascinated with the braille, so we learned how to braille each of their names. As the work got harder my kids helped me make flashcards to practice. Their interest and fascination continues to help spread more awareness. As they grow up, it's my hope that they'll have a greater understanding and appreciation for individuals that are blind or visually impaired.

Fast forward to the start of the 2021-2022 school year. I completed my first braille class so hopefully I'll be able to read some of Brooklynn's work. Yay! The first week back I began to set up my classroom. I started contacting my related service staff to create schedules. I received a text from my TSVI to find out she TOOK ANOTHER JOB! Wait, what?! It's okay, they already have a new possible candidate! Guess what, she backed out. I know what you're thinking, it's not a big deal. They'll find and hire another person soon. Relax! Except, the TSVI world is such a small field. The reality of the situation hit when Dr. Koehler emailed me about an open TSVI position at the Stark County ESC. She wanted to make sure I

knew about the position. I laughed as I responded to her email. Of course I know about it, it's for Brooklynn. There is currently no one available to come to school and provide her services. I told my professor that I'd love to apply, but I simply cannot leave my classroom mid-year. Or can I? As the next month approached and I was solely in charge of trying to meet her IEP minutes as a classroom teacher that finished a whopping two classes, I realized that the remainder of the school year would be like this. I asked some of my colleagues what they thought about me applying for the job. After a week of debating, I finally asked my boss if there is a possibility for me to apply for this job? She told me to apply. I did and had an interview. The interview team would have to create a unique plan for me in this role as they didn't have a replacement teacher for my classroom. They asked if I would be willing to do both jobs for a bit. Again, I laughed to myself thinking, it's what I've already been doing and how the remainder of the school year would continue if I stayed as the classroom teacher, so of course, I said yes!

Figure 3

Practicing my Favorite Part of The Program

Image Description: Woman typing on a braillewriter

I gathered my students and paraprofessional to explain to them the situation and that I would eventually be leaving the classroom. It was a very difficult decision as I loved this group of students and didn't want to let them down. But at the same time, I knew that it was the only option that best served everyone. It would be easier to find a new Multiple Disabilities teacher than a new TSVI. There truly aren't enough of us! That being said, I did both jobs for two months while another teacher-to-be finished her student teaching. All the stars were slowly aligning. She took over my classroom and I became a full TSVI in training. It was hectic and chaotic and if it weren't for my 16 years of special education

background and experience working with a variety of staff, parents, and students I may have quit. But for me, it was an exciting and thrilling new change in my career. I am able to continue working with the students that I love so much, Brooklynn included, but my schedule is entirely different and it's amazing! I am able to be at home when needed in order to participate in activities with my own children. I couldn't have asked for a better opportunity. It's been a whirlwind of emotions, but a career and life change that I will forever be grateful to encounter.

Figure 4

Brooklyn and Mrs. Humrichouser

Image Description: A student with her cane standing next to her teacher (both are smiling).

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