



# IN FOCUS

## MISSOURI DEAFBLIND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECT

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### Choosing Object Cues

Students with deafblindness and multiple disabilities require a multi-sensory approach to learning. Due to the multiple disabilities that they possess, these students have limited responses to their interactions with others and their environments. Often

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expressive and receptive communication begins with the use of objects cues. Also object cues are used to learn daily routines of their schedules.

“Object cues are objects or parts of objects used in activities or associated with a particular person.” (Chen, et. al. 2001) If this is going to be a communication system for a student, then it is critical that the student knows what the object is, the object has meaning to the child and the object is relevant to the activity being communicated.

Initially, the child needs to learn what the object is. The object needs to be used repeatedly during an activity and used for multiple experiences to learn what the object is and to associate it with an activity. Examples that may be used: a spoon to mean eat, a cup to mean drink or piece of fur to mean their favorite stuffed animal.

Minatures of objects should not be used. If you have no visual memory of items in your environment, then how would you know that a “Hot Wheels” car means the family car to go for a ride. Also, miniatures often do not convey tactually to what the object means especially for students with combined vision and hearing losses as well as other disabilities. Rather consider using an item that the child encounters when they first enter the vehicle. Ideas to consider may be a piece of a seat belt, a piece of cloth similar to the seat of the car or a car handle.



Avoid objects that cannot be replaced. According to Maurice Belote (2005), avoid objects that cannot be replaced within one day. If an object is lost, broken, no longer usable, etc., ease of replacement is important to keep the communication open with the child. When selecting an object, consider having two of the same objects, so there will be no break in communication when one object is lost or broken.

Using objects to communicate expressively is important. Therefore, the student needs to have access to the objects throughout the day. As the student learns receptively to associate that the object means that they are going to experience a certain activity, in addition they also need to learn to use that same object to request an activity.

Remember the child with deafblindness needs more time to process information expressed to them whether orally, visually and most importantly tactily. You may need one or two minutes for the student to explore the object and respond.

When beginning to use object cues, first teach objects associated with the child's

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favorite activities. Successful learning is enhanced when the instructor chooses instruction related to the child's favorite activities. The child's motivation is heightened when favorite activities are chosen. Consider using objects from activities that pertain to higher frequencies of natural occurrences for the student throughout the day (i.e.: object to use for restroom). If the activity occurs several times a day, then the student will learn the concept quicker and have more exposure to generalizing the concept of the object.



Sometimes abstract textured materials may be used to teach the student about where they are going and/or the next sequenced event. These activities may be associated with various classrooms the child travels throughout the school day. Materials used may include bubble-wrap, sand paper, textured cloth, etc. Even though this concept may appear abstract for the student at first, continue the exposure to the object. Each child learns at a different rate, therefore it is important to be patient. Success will occur

when people are consistent with using the objects with the child.

Just as importantly as it is to use a multi-sensory approach to learning communication, it is important to remember to use a multi-model approach to the communication. Multi-model communication means that the student uses a variety of communication modes, such as body gestures, objects, sign language, etc. Always pair other forms of communication with the objects. Use words and/or sign language too.

**Resources:**

Belote, Maurice. "Getting Started with Object Communication." **California Deaf-Blind Services: resources Volume 11 Number 5**. Spring 2005.

Chen, Deborah; Downing, June and Rodriguez, Gloria. "Tactile Learning Strategies for Children who are Deaf-Blind: Concerns and Communication from Project SALUTE."

**Deaf-Blind Perspectives Volume 8 Issue 2**. Winter 2000-2001.

Miles, Barbara & Riggio, Marianne. **Remarkable Conversations**. Perkins School for

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the Blind. 1999.

**New Resource: Hot off the Press**  
***CHARGE Syndrome: A Volume in the Genetics and Communication Series***  
**By**  
**Timothy S. Hartshorne, Margaret A. Hefner, Sandra L.H. Davenport**  
**& James W. Thelin**  
**Published by: Plural Publishing, San Diego, 2011**

## Resource

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**Cochlear Implants/Free Consultation Services to School Districts**

**Source:** Leone Herring, Supervisor, Effective Practices

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has again contracted with Missouri State University (MSU), Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, through the Speech, Language, and Hearing Clinic for limited free consultation services to help **school districts** throughout Missouri as they meet the needs of students who have cochlear implants.

MSU will provide five (5) hours of consultation services on Tuesdays between 9:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. during the fall and spring semesters to teachers and/or therapists working in school districts in Missouri educating students using cochlear implants. A clinical faculty member with deaf and hard of hearing and cochlear implant specialization will be



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available for consultation to school districts. These consultations may take the form of e-mail correspondence, phone conferences (individual and conference), and/or Skype. A limited number of on-site visits to the MSU clinic may be arranged for school personnel and students based upon factors determined at the time of the request. Actual information shared with school district personnel is case-specific. Some topic areas include: device functioning, speech and auditory development, educational development, modes of communication, etc. Due to the unknown factors of numbers involved, distances of districts, and specific needs, the consultant will not travel to schools.

For more information about services or to start your consultation process, email Missouri State University's CSD Speech, Language, and Hearing Clinic Director Jill Oswalt at [JillOswalt@missouristate.edu](mailto:JillOswalt@missouristate.edu).



## **Transition Camp Helen Keller National Center**

Each summer, Helen Keller National Center sponsors a two-week summer camp for students with deafblindness who is a junior or senior in high school. The camp is very beneficial for students exploring their vocational goals and needing to learn strategies for college planning. Most importantly the camp helps the students to learn how to advocate for themselves.

This is an exciting, educational and action packed two-week program where students learn how to determine what they can do to accomplish their goals right now and after graduation.

According to the Helen Keller National Center, this camp is designed to offer students with information and practical experience to expand their awareness, knowledge and/or skill in the following areas:

- Share two weeks of your summer with your peers
- Explore vocational options
- Learn about apartment living
- Learn from a mentor who is deaf-blind
- Meet with leaders from the deaf-blind community
- Access college and community supports and services
- Learn how to fully participate in your IEP and transition planning
- Explore options in adaptive technology and other communication aids and devices
- Learn about self-determination and advocacy
- Identify your optimal and preferred communication methods
- Access interpreting and SSP services
- Participate in an Orientation and Mobility evaluation
- Cook a meal with your peers
- Meet with a low vision specialist
- Participate in an audiology evaluation
- Leave with an action plan so you can follow-up upon returning to school

In addition, students will

- gain information, skills and confidence
- develop a positive attitude
- know their options
- know who they are - their strengths/interests
- know their rights and responsibilities
- use their resources
- learn from others

For more information, contact Missouri's Helen Keller National Representative, Beth Jordan, at (913) 677-4562, Helen Keller National Center, Great Plains Region, 4330 Shawnee Mission Parkway, Suite 108, Shawnee Mission, Kansas 66205, [hknc7bj@aol.com](mailto:hknc7bj@aol.com)

## Family Visits New York

The Missouri Deafblind Technical Assistance Project was pleased to be able to assist one of our families in participating with other parents at the Helen Keller National Center's Transition Camp. One of our students on the census was able to attend the camp this past summer. He just completed his junior year in high school in St. Louis. This young man was unsure about his post-secondary education plans. He saw this camp as an opportunity to help him with his future planning. His Rehabilitation Services for the Blind counselor was able to assist with the cost of his attendance to the program.



His parent attended the several days to learn about the anticipated outcomes and network with the other parents who had a child attending the camp. The experience is considered invaluable for the students and families in planning for future accommodations, transition plans and most importantly connecting with others with similar needs due to the combined vision and hearing losses.

Missouri's young man hopes to go again in July 2011. He felt he learned so much concerning planning for college, learning about himself and meeting other students with similar needs. He has asked the people at Helen Keller National Center if he could become a staff member next summer. His parent notes that this has been one of the most positive experiences that he has had and did much to build his self esteem and self advocacy skills.

Assistance for the parent to attend for several days meeting with other parents was partially funded using the Family Involvement Fund of the Missouri Deafblind Technical Assistance Project. To learn more about the Family Involvement Fund, please contact Susan Bonner at (314) 776-4320 ext. 3255 or [sbonner@msb.k12.mo.us](mailto:sbonner@msb.k12.mo.us).

## **Deafblind Task Forces**

The Missouri State Deafblind Task Force was established in May 1989. The Missouri State Deafblind Task Force is an interagency group that collaborates to identify and address statewide systems problems affecting the needs of specific individuals with deafblindness. As a result of the work, local task forces developed addressing local issues surrounding the supports needed of individuals in their local community. Currently we have three task forces. They are the St. Louis Deafblind Task Force, the Greater Kansas City Deafblind Task Force and the Southwest Missouri Deafblind Task Force. Through interagency collaboration the task forces are able to provide resources and expertise to improve the services for individuals with deafblindness.

Members represent state, educational and service provider agencies that serve individuals with deafblindness. Parent and consumer participation is sought as well.

The Missouri State Deafblind Task Force holds certain fundamental beliefs regarding individuals with deafblindness and their families:

- ❖ The right to a quality life reflecting dignity, self-respect, self-reliance, autonomy, and personal choice.
- ❖ The right to full participation in the mainstream of the community life regardless of the severity of the disability.
- ❖ The right to supports that embrace these values.

The mission of the Missouri State Deafblind Task Force is to remove barriers and promote services through cooperative efforts that uphold meaningful opportunities for transition, employment, community involvement and/or equal access for the needs and choices of consumers with deafblindness and their families.

Participants on the task forces are committed to maintaining a person-centered approach. This is reflected in the various projects undertaken by the task forces. First, the task forces have adopted a formal case study approach to identify systems issues. The case study approach involves participation by individuals with deafblindness (if



possible) and their families. In addition, the task forces encourage the use of various person centered-planning strategies (e.g., Personal Futures Planning (PFP), and Discovery Profiles etc.) and help resolve roadblocks and barriers faced by the individuals' circles of support.

If you have an individual that you feel would benefit for the task forces' assistance contact Susan Bonner at [sbonner@msb.k12.mo.us](mailto:sbonner@msb.k12.mo.us).

## Visit our Web Page

The Missouri Deafblind Technical Assistance Project, an Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funded grant, is based at Missouri School for the Blind (MSB) in St. Louis, Missouri. Among the goals of the Project are the dissemination of information and identification of resources to Missouri's school districts serving children with combined vision and hearing losses. The MSB website serves as an immediate link between the Project and school districts. Most recently, the Project has developed a web-based instructional module. This instructional module focuses on basic



communication skills used by persons with combined vision and hearing losses. This module includes an accompanying workbook which may be used to apply the information from the presentation to individual students to develop a communication profile. A certificate based on contact hours is available upon completion of the workbook. Teams may submit their profiles to the Project for review and guidance. Additional technical

assistance is also available.

Also, we added linkages to various web sites, that have videos and resources on effective practices, instructional strategies and general information on deafblindness. For accessing the module and linkages, go to: [http://www.msb.k12.mo.us/deafblind\\_home.htm](http://www.msb.k12.mo.us/deafblind_home.htm) and look under Communication Strategies for Persons with Deafblindness and Instructional Web Links.

## Hand In Hand



**Hand In Hand: Understanding Deafblindness for Education Teams of Students Who Are Deafblind**, is a course, totaling seven days throughout the academic year, that provides instruction on the theory and practice for the education of students with deafblindness. The course is intended for the educational teams of students with deafblindness (including parents/family members). The course combines self-studies, homework assignments, and action planning with on-site mentoring, and three face-to-face sessions (totaling seven days) with course instructors. Participants apply acquired knowledge regarding visual impairment, auditory impairment, communication and movement to the programming of the students they serve with the dual sensory losses. The course is offered free of charge and all training materials (including text) are provided by the Missouri Deafblind Project. Optional two hour graduate credit is available from Lindenwood University. Family members are provided financial support (mileage, housing, and meals).

The 2010-2011 class for the Hand In Hand Course will be held in Independence, Missouri this school year. The educational teams will meet for a total of seven days over three sessions scheduled for October 27-29, 2010, January 26–27, 2011 and April 6-7, 2011. At the end of each session, the teams develop an action plan addressing how they plan to implement the concepts learned during the course. Mentors, who are also instructors for the course, are assigned to each team. The mentors provide follow up consultation with the teams and visit the teams at their schools to provide direct technical assistance, free of charge to the schools.

For more information about attending the course, please contact Susan Bonner at [sbonner@msb.k12.mo.us](mailto:sbonner@msb.k12.mo.us). Registration forms may be downloaded from web site: [http://www.msb.k12.mo.us/msb\\_opportunities.html](http://www.msb.k12.mo.us/msb_opportunities.html).



## Calendar of Events

Fall, 2010

**Date & Location:** Farmington (9/24/10), Cape Girardeau (10/22/10), Columbia (11/4/10) and Poplar Bluff (11/12/10).

**Topic:** The Comprehensive Low Vision Project free clinics sponsored by Lighthouse for the Blind – St. Louis

**Audience:** Students who meet the eligibility requirements as a student with a visual impairment, with visual acuity ranging from 20/70 to 20/1000.

**Contact:** Jennifer Coy at [jenniferkcoy@hotmail.com](mailto:jenniferkcoy@hotmail.com) or [jcoy@lhbindustries.com](mailto:jcoy@lhbindustries.com)

**Date:** October, 26-29, 2010; January 26-27, 2011 & April 6-7, 2011

**Topic:** Hand In Hand: Course for Educational teams Supporting Students

with Deafblindness

**Location:** Independence, Missouri

**Audience:** Teachers of students with deafblindness and their educational teams including parents

**Contact:** Susan Bonner, Missouri Deafblind Project 314-776-4320, ext. 3255; [sbonner@msb.k12.mo.us](mailto:sbonner@msb.k12.mo.us)

**Date:** November 2-3, 2010

**Topic:** Employment Services, Disability Policy & Studies from the University of Missouri Health Systems

**Location:** Homewood Inn, 7312 NW Polo Dr, Kansas City, MO 64153

**Audience:** Job developers, job coaches, employment specialists, transition personnel, state agency personnel

**Contact:** Kris Estes, [www.dps.missouri.edu/calendar.html](http://www.dps.missouri.edu/calendar.html)

**Date:** November 16, 2010; February 1, 2011; March 15, 2011 & May 3, 2011

**Topic:** Assistive Technology for Students with Blind & Visually Impaired

**Audience:** Teachers for the visually impaired, special education teachers and related services personnel

**Location:** Missouri School for the Blind, St. Louis

**Contact:** Jennie Mascheck [jmascheck@msb.k12.mo.us](mailto:jmascheck@msb.k12.mo.us)

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**Missouri Deafblind Technical Assistance Project**  
**Missouri School for the Blind**

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**Susan Bonner .... Editor**

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