

Virginia Project for Children and Young Adults with Deaf-Blindness Spring & Summer Newsletter

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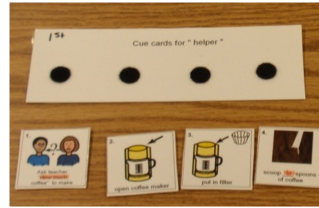
Meaningful Activities Perk Up Learning

by Julie Durando



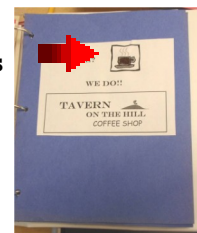
ders correctly, delivering, collecting/balancing money, and ensuring that they have the proper inventory.

Mrs. Marsh (pictured to the left with Ashley Nickerson, one of her students) has thoughtfully considered each step in the coffee making and selling to maximize the students' access and independence. For example, rather than using the coffee carafe to fill the coffee maker, a plastic water



transactions, inventory, taking orders, cleaning, working with others, and quality assurance, the Tavern on the Hill also gives the students authentic opportunities to incorporate academic skills.

Picture cards (pictured above) are used to help students complete the steps of their job in order. These same cards are also used before and after the activity for planning and reviewing, the perfect opportunity to incorporate concepts of before and after while practicing sequencing. Object cues, braille cards, or other alternatives could also be used to meet each student's needs. Mrs. Marsh guides the students through literacy activities, such as creating multi-sensory experience books. It was obvious to me that not only were the students learning, but that they enjoyed the meaningful activities!



Multi-sensory experience book. Note the real coffee grounds!

Our Project is frequently asked for ideas on ways to make vocational training and academic activities meaningful for students with deaf-blindness. Earlier this year I had the pleasure of visiting a class with a wonderful program that created opportunities for vocational and academic learning that were both enjoyable and meaningful. I realized the example of the *Tavern on the Hill* was too good not to share.

Mrs. Selene Marsh's class at J. R. Tucker High School in Henrico runs a school-based coffee shop, *Tavern on the Hill*. On Wednesdays and Fridays they sell coffee and similar beverages to staff at J. R. Tucker High School. Students take orders from email received from faculty and staff or via telephone. They are then responsible for filling the or-



Above: Ashley Nickerson making coffee for Tavern on the Hill.
Below: Ashley watches as the coffee brews.



pitcher with a boldly marked fill line, is used for easier and safer pouring.

In addition to job training opportunities in food prep, customer service, money

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For more information about experience books, see page 5.

"Imagine connecting with a student, helping her understand her world, and having the opportunity to build that student's self-determination."

Selene Marsh,
Teacher, J.R. Tucker
High School

Notes from the Director

We have had an eventful spring here at the Project. In March we welcomed Ms. Lauri Triulzi to Virginia by inviting her to present at the VA-AER conference in Fredericksburg. Lauri will be working with us part-time, specializing in training and technical assistance related to cortical visual impairment (CVI) and inclusion. You will find the introduction to her on page 3 and details about the upcoming CVI workshop on page 5.

In April we sponsored a two-day

workshop with Ms. Robbie Blaha from Texas on Assessment, Communications, and Routines. If you weren't able to make it, check out the recap written by Ms. Sarah Cardwell, a teacher in Henrico, on page 2. Peggy Sinclair-Morris explains more about object calendars on page 3 in her new feature, Coordinator's Corner.

I would like to send out a special thank you to all of those who helped us complete our annual census. With your efforts, 157 individuals between

birth and 21 who have both a visual impairment and hearing loss were identified this year in Virginia.

We have many events to look forward to with summer just around the corner. Be sure to look over the events on page 5. And of course, if there is anything you would like additional information about, turn to page 6 for all the ways to contact us. Have a wonderful spring and summer!

Robbie Blaha Presents Assessments, Communication, and Routines Workshop

By Sarah E. Cardwell

Robbie Blaha a renowned specialist and author, who works in the field of educating children with deaf-blindness, presented a workshop on building calendar systems for this unique population. Her presentation which was held at the Sheraton Roanoke Hotel and Conference Center on March 31 and April 1, stressed the importance of assessing a child's biobehavioral state (level of arousal) and motivational influences in the creation of such systems. She also stated that this information should be included in the accommodations section of IEPs (Individual Educational Programs). In addition to this, it is essential to tap into the preferred sensory modality of the child. Some children favor one sensory channel over another.

"Deaf-blindness is all about gathering information" stated Blaha. She went on to discuss sensory deprivation and how it can cause behavioral issues if not addressed properly. Such deficits also cause problems in memory and time. "A child should be engaged and happy" to successfully learn. No truer words were spoken. As those of us in the field of education



know, a child's emotional state is key to successful learning.

Blaha discussed the use of stop/start games in reinforcing the use of calendar systems. Such games create an anticipatory element to such systems. A playful presentation of objects is paired with steps in a sequence of an activity to reinforce attention and learning.

Calendar systems are typical modifications recommended for children with deaf-blindness. Blaha explained that such systems are considered "time pieces" for these children. They are a method to mark past, present and future occurrences. Instructional routines can be built into such systems so that the child knows how his/her day is organized. Students who successfully build a relationship with cues and objects incorporated into their calendar system can gain a sense of security and anticipation. This allows them to more fully participate in decision making and thus experience more control in their world.

My "take away" from this conference was "a place to start". I have several students with severe and profound disabilities who are also non-verbal. Blaha's anticipation calendar is the perfect introduction to the concept of time. The tools are easy to set up and implement. I have set up two distinctive containers. One container represents the "future" with an object placed in it which symbolizes the activity the student will do. The second container represents the "past". The symbol is placed in this basket after completion of the activity. In the past I did not pay attention to the significance of the containers. In fact, I used the same type of containers for future and past. The selection of different containers reinforces the concept of different time periods. This has made a difference in the comprehension of my students. Previously, my students would at times place the symbol back in the start basket after the activity was completed. I have noticed that they are beginning to place the object in the correct "past" basket at the end of an activity. This indicates to me that they are reaching a higher level of understanding.

Sarah E. Cardwell is an Exceptional Education Teacher at Varina High School in Henrico County.



The Project is Happy to Welcome Lauri Triulzi



Hi. My name is Lauri Triulzi. I recently moved from Pennsylvania to Washington DC and began working with the Virginia Deaf-Blind (VADB) Project as a Training and Technical

Assistance Consultant. I entered the field of deaf-blindness through the "significant disabilities door". For ten years I taught students who had significant disabilities; some of those

students also had the label deaf-blind. During these years I worked with elementary, middle, high school, and transition age students in both community-based and inclusive education settings. In October, 1997, I began working with Donna Gilles at the Florida Deaf-Blind Project and have been working in the deaf-blind community ever since. Donna Gilles is now the Principle Investigator for the VA Deaf-Blind Project. I also met Julie Durando, the VADB Project Director, while working in Florida.

I have recently had the opportunity to receive training from Dr. Chris Roman, an expert in the area of Corti-

cal Visual Impairment (CVI). On August 22, I will be sharing information concerning assessment and intervention of children and young adults with CVI in Manassas, VA. Here is the link for more information:

<http://cvi-conf-reg.tadnet.org/home>

It is great to be working with the dedicated professionals on the VADB Project. I look forward to meeting the children and young adults who are deaf-blind in Virginia, their families, and the professionals who serve them.

"Coordinator's Corner"

Peggy Sinclair-Morris
Project Coordinator



Recently I was visiting a classroom, observing a student who uses an object calendar system which helps him make sense of his day. This young man's calendar has real objects that have meaning to him and connect to different activities throughout his day. When it was time to go the gym, the student checked his calendar, found the ball that symbolizes P.E., paused for a minute, and then moved in the direction of the door. This slight movement of his body told me that the ball means something to him; he's anticipating what's coming next and he's ready to go!

In the article, *Let Me Check My Calendar*, by Robbie Blaha and Kate Moss, the following are some of the why's behind using a calendar system:

- It provides the child with emotional support and the security of

what's going to happen next.

- It gives the child something to anticipate and look forward to.
- It alerts the child to possible changes in the day.
- It allows the child to participate in decisions and gives him a sense of control.
- It provides the child with mutually understood topics of conversation.
- It is invaluable in developing time concepts.

Some important things that need to happen **before** starting the calendar system are:

- The student's individualized communication program must be in place, be it sign language, objects, or pictures.
- Be clear about what you want the student to do. Is he requesting or rejecting something? Is

he initiating a conversation?

- Activity routines must be developed so there is something to put in the calendar.

The calendar needs to be presented to the child in a clear and consistent manner each time; it needs to be part of the daily routine. A common mistake with calendars is giving up too soon. Remember, many children take significant time to learn the calendar system. It can possibly take an entire school year for the child to make sense of the calendar. Through repetition and experience, it will all fall into place!

More information on calendar systems can be found at: www.nationaldb.org/ISSelectedtopics.php

Distance Training Opportunities



The Hadley School for the Blind

The Hadley School for the Blind provides online, distance education programs in Adult Continuing Education, High School, Family Education and Professional Studies. Courses range from Introduction to Braille, Assistive Technology, Literacy and more. More information can be found at:

<http://www.hadley.edu/default.asp>

National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB) Webinars

Interested in technology? Customized Employment? Family Resources? Check out current and past webinars at NCDB online at www.nationaldb.org. Go to the Conferences and Trainings tab, scroll down to Current or Archived Webinars and take your pick!



Just Released from Dr. Jan van Dijk!

Perkins School for the Blind presents a webcast on Child-Guided Assessment Strategies by Dr. Jan van Dijk. To download this and many other wonderful webcasts go to <http://www.perkins.org/resources/webcasts/>. If you register with Perkins, you will receive free chapter downloads and previews of educational materials before it is released to the public.

You May Also Like...



Like us on
Facebook

Did you know that you can now find our project on Facebook? Go to Facebook, search for the Virginia Deaf-Blind Project, “**Like Us**” and then you will receive updates on workshops, trainings, links and more! It’s also a great way to share ideas and connect with other families and professionals.

Braille Reading Pals Club

The Braille Reading Pals Club is an early literacy program that promotes early literacy skills, a love of reading, and a positive attitude about Braille by encouraging parents to read daily with their blind or low vision child. Participants receive a print-Braille book, a plush reading pal, and many other resources! To learn more and to register go to: www.NFB.org/



Do you have fun activities planned for the summer? Try making an experience box, story, or book with your child!

Writing about experiences builds expressive language, reading concepts, self-advocacy, and creates a product to enhance memory about activity. Here are some quick steps to get you started: 1. Select an activity to write about. 2. Select objects meaningful to your child from the activity. 3. Find appropriate writing tool for your child to use (for example: a Perkins Braille, markers, computer, communication objects, or an assistive technology device). Remember scribbling is the start of writing. 4. Ask probing questions like, “What should we write about going to [the park]” or “What was your favorite part of ___?” These questions give your child control over content. Resist the urge to edit!!!! Let the objective be to promote expression, not to perfect grammar.

While it is fine to focus on logical steps of the experience, also include the tiny details that are most interesting to the student, such as sounds and smells or details s/he found amusing. Make the activity fun and enjoyable!

Calendar of Events

For Families and Professionals

June 20-24, 2011.

Connections Beyond Sight or Sound Summer Institute on Communication Development and Instructional Strategies for Students with Deaf-blindness and/or Severe Disabilities—University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland

Website: <http://www.cbss.umd.edu>

Presenter: Dr. Linda Mamer. Registration \$85.00.

July 29-31, 2011

International CHARGE Syndrome Conference - Rosen Shingle Creek Resort, Orlando, Florida

Website: <http://chargesyndrome.org/conference-2011.asp>

August 22, 2011



**Assessing Students with Cortical Vision Impairment (CVI) Using the CVI Range
Comfort Suites, Manassas, Virginia**

Websites: Registration: <http://cvi-conf-reg.tadnet.org/home>

Hotel: www.comfortsuitesmanassas.com

Join us for this one day workshop presented by Lauri Triulzi, who trained under Dr. Christine Roman-Lantzy.

Can't wait to learn more about the CVI Range? Find the article by Ms. Sandy Newcome in the current issue of Deaf-Blind Perspectives at:
www.nationaldb.org/dbp/pdf/apr11.pdf

For Students



June 19-23, 2011

**American Association of the Deaf-Blind (AADB) National Symposium: The Future is in Our Hands—
Ft. Mitchell, KY, just across the river from Cincinnati, OH**

Website: [http://aadbd.org/conference/past conference updates.html](http://aadbd.org/conference/past%20conference%20updates.html)

August 10-14, 2011

Camp Abilities - Merrick, MD

Website: <http://www.campabilitiesmaryland.web.officelive.com/>

Camp Abilities at Lion's Camp Merrick offers the following activities: Goalball, Beeper Baseball, Martial Arts, Soccer, Swimming, Canoeing, Fishing, Ropes course, Rock wall and more.

July 24-30, 2011

Super Summer Camp - Camp Easter Seals, Roanoke, Virginia

Website: www.vdbvi.org/supersummerncamp.htm

Super Summer Camp, sponsored by the Department of the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) is coming in July; potential campers must be open to DBVI. For more information, see the above website.

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Mission Statement

The Virginia Deaf-Blind Project is committed to supporting families, teachers and service providers in their endeavors to improve outcomes for children and youth who experience both vision and hearing loss. Through providing technical assistance, training, and information, we aspire to improve the quality of life for people who are deaf-blind as they live in their homes, learn in their schools, socialize in their communities and access the services they choose.



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