Six Strategies for Meaningful Literacy Instruction for Emerging Communicators
- Charles Beavis, Educational Specialist, California Deafblind Services

Making Meaningful Connections to Grade Level Curriculum: An Approach to Adapting Core Curriculum
- Julie Maier, Project Coordinator, California Deafblind Services

Moving from an IFSP to an IEP
- Kayla Coburn, Educational Specialist & Myrna Medina, Family Engagement Specialist, California Deafblind Services

CDBS Introduction
- Charles Beavis, Educational Specialist, California Deafblind Services

What’s the Difference? A Look at Tactile Sign Language, Haptics, and Protactile
- Kayla Coburn, Educational Specialist, California Deafblind Services

Building Connections at CDBS Family Picnics
- California Deafblind Services Staff

Six Strategies for Meaningful Literacy Instruction for Emerging Communicators
By Charles Beavis, Educational Specialist

The value of literacy instruction for learners can’t be underestimated, including students who are deafblind with emerging communication skills. It is important to ensure all learners have access to the numerous functions of literacy (e.g., communication, concept development, imagination, self-expression) (Miles, 2005). Being deafblind should NOT be a barrier to literacy development. But all too often in the classroom, children who are deafblind are not receiving meaningful literacy access (Maier, 2017). This can be influenced by teachers’ expectations about the student’s learning potential, their confidence level about teaching literacy skills, and contextual elements such as appropriate reading materials, or district support (Ruppar, 2015). In order to provide meaningful access, teachers need to be flexible, creative, and persistent when creating and adapting lesson plans around literacy.

I’d like to present six strategies for literacy instruction, which can be used in any literacy lesson. Using these strategies, I have created a sample instruction guide for the picture book Brown Bear Brown Bear, by Eric Carle. Keeping these ideas in the forefront of your mind will help you during literacy instruction and throughout your entire school day.
6 Strategies For Literacy Instruction

These strategies are interconnected, and you should implement all the strategies in concert. You will notice they build and loop back on each other as you instruct.

1. **Slow:** New skills take practice to master. Doing activities slowly allows for more focus and accuracy.
2. **Wait:** When a student notices a label, word, object, motion etc., wait to see how they respond.
3. **Observe:** Pay attention to their reaction and immediately acknowledge that response.
4. **Mirror:** Mirroring behavior and actions encourages turn taking and communicates to the learner that you understand their intentions. Copy their response whether its body movement, vocalization, reaching, turning away, facial expressions (Miles, 2005).
5. **Comment/Respond Conversationally:** Commenting and responding in a natural way lets the child know you understand the intention of their response. A conversation should not feel like a test or interrogation. Comment on what the child did, what they are interested in, what they looked at, what they might be feeling, etc. (Miles, 2005).
6. **Increase Opportunities:** Increase the number of opportunities an individual has for communication and literacy practice throughout the day. This means you need to consider their access to books, communication partners, and print rich environments.

Example Literacy Instructional Guide: Brown Bear, Brown Bear

This lesson is intended for an emergent communicator in a lower elementary class with emerging pre-literacy skills. This lesson guide is for learners who are not easily engaged in typical, interactive read-aloud.

**Book/ Adapted Materials:**
- Multiple versions of *Brown Bear Brown Bear* (e.g., large print, hardback, paperback)
- Braille printed and glued next to target vocabulary words
- Visual/tactile representations of each animal
- Laminated photos or pictures of animals in the book
- Space on pages to match photos/pictures to target vocabulary words
- Fur/feathers representing the different animals
- Page fluffers (glue raised material on corner of pages to make it easier to turn)
- Communication system that the individual uses

**Environmental Considerations:**
- Be attentive to glare from windows or overhead lights.
- If the child has limited mobility, bring the lesson to them.
- If this is a group lesson, set up the chairs so the focal student is a part of the circle, not just a bystander.
- Make sure the FM system is working and is connected to the child’s receiver.
- Try to limit outside noise or distractions and try to schedule literacy instruction at quieter times.
- Consider whether or not this should be a group lesson or an individual lesson.
- If conducting the lesson in a general education classroom, consider how to include informed peers.
Using the 6 strategies as a guide for literacy lesson plans

- **Slow:**
  - When first introducing the book, allow the student to explore the book with their hands, if they are able.
  - Remember that there are many steps to reading a book, from feeling it to smelling the pages, opening the book, turning the pages, feeling the weight of the book, hearing the sound it makes when dropped.
  - Read through the book slowly, pausing on each page.
  - Give the student time to find and feel the braille in the book.

- **Wait:**
  - During each phase of the reading (each page or topic or action), wait for the student’s response.
  - Providing wait time allows them to explore the book at their own pace, empowering them to comment and ask questions.
  - Waiting, sometimes for at least a minute, can show you what the student is interested in. Incorporate this interest into your lesson.

- **Observe:**
  - Pay close attention to any reaction the student may be making.
    - Their eyes and/or hands are drawn to the images in the book.
    - Their hands are drawn to the raised braille cells.
    - They turn towards or away from the book at intervals.
    - They smile when they heard the words “yellow duck”.
    - They just want to turn the pages (It’s fun to turn pages).
    - They are communicating with intention.

- **Mirror:**
  - Whatever they are doing, do it too.
    - Maybe they really like the feel of the bird feathers. Feel it with them!
    - Maybe they laughed when you said the word “dog.” Say it again and laugh with them.
    - Maybe they are running their fingers up and down the spine of the book. Take turns running your fingers down the book’s spine.
    - If they are interested in only turning the pages, join them. Make it even more fun to turn the pages.

- **Comment/Respond Conversationally:**
  - Make comments about what they are doing and/or the interest they are showing using a total communication approach (e.g., spoken language, signed communication, and objects or visual supports).
    - “You want to turn the pages.”
    - “Dog is a funny word.”
    - “Those are the red feathers you are touching.”
    - “I noticed you turned away when we got to the white dog.”
    - “It’s fun reading this book with you, too.”

- **Increase Opportunities:**
  - Plan to read this book for more than a week, maybe multiple times a day.
  - Children love to anticipate and predict when reading stories. If you only read this book once, the student will miss many of the important concepts.
  - Consider opportunities to read, listen, or even just EXPLORE this book with an informed peer.
  - Post images and words from the book around the classroom and bulletin board.
  - Leave the book out on a shelf where the student can easily access it at any time during the day.
  - Watch a video of someone reading the book or find an animated version of it. Some children really enjoy this type of literacy experience.
Remember, you should plan to present a book for more than a week or two, so the lessons will grow and develop as you use these strategies as a guide. Also, be ready to change the lesson on the fly if your student finds great interest in something.

References:


Maier, J. (2017). Promoting Literacy for All: Thinking beyond just reading & writing. California Deafblind Services ReSOURCES. 22(1), 4-12. https://5871e0203a.clvaw-cdnwnd.com/5f010285cae218a5d7d72c471fa8f71/200002631-3b5963c536/A2reSourcesFall2017CDBS.pdf


Making Meaningful Connections to Grade Level Curriculum:
An Approach to Adapting Core Curriculum
By Julie Maier, Project Coordinator

In our Fall 2021 ressources, I wrote an article about the importance of equity and inclusion for students who are deafblind, especially those with emerging communication skills who require significant changes to grade-level curriculum to participate and make progress. In Equity and Inclusion: Ensuring Meaningful Participation in General Education, I stressed the importance of equitable access and opportunities to participate in grade-level curriculum for all students. The article discussed barriers to access and opportunities for these students. It also described approaches for aligning Individualized Educational Program (IEP) goals to grade-level standards and adapting grade-level core curriculum to meet a learner’s unique interests, skills, and educational needs.

This factsheet describes an approach educational teams can use to increase meaningful access to grade-level curriculum by individualizing lessons and learning activities for a student who is deafblind with emerging communication skills.

Foundational elements that help when planning for curricular modifications:

- A commitment to collaborative team planning. Many educators on a child’s team can contribute to planning and adapting the curriculum and lesson.
- A clear picture of the focus student’s learning profile and sensory profile. This is important to spark student interest and to ensure the modifications selected address any sensory preferences or limitations.
- A list of the high-priority goals for the student--from their IEP as well as other learning and life skill goals important to the student and family.
- Knowledge of grade-level standards and access points for students participating in state alternate assessments. In California, schools follow the Common Core State Standards and these access points are called Core Content Connectors.
- Clear learning goals for the lesson, unit, or project for all students and for the focus student. What is the relevance of this lesson? What new knowledge and skills do you want the students to learn and demonstrate?
- Identification of barriers. What access barriers exist in this lesson, unit, or project that limit the participation of the focus student?
- A plan for how the focus student will demonstrate what they’ve learned. How will they demonstrate interest, progress, understanding, and new skills?

In 2014 Courtade, Jimenez, & Delano contributed a chapter in the Handbook of Effective Inclusive Schools: Research & Practice and discussed an approach to providing effective instruction in core content areas through modification of grade-level curriculum in core content areas. It includes five simple, understandable supports and research has demonstrated that this approach produces results for learners with extensive support needs who participate in the state’s alternate assessment. When pairing the five supports with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Principles of Engagement, Representation, and Action and Expression, a team can identify multiple ways to ensure meaningful access and participation for an emergent communicator.
This following description of the five supports includes considerations for a student who is deafblind.

1. **Adapt the text.** Text is simplified and may include additional high-contrast photos or picture symbols and tactile graphics. For some students, braille exposure may be presented by placing braille over some text. Pairing actual objects or objects that represent content presented in the text might increase interest and understanding of the text.

2. **Use of a graphic organizer.** This tool can help a student organize the content presented and support concept development. A graphic organizer can be used to tell a story, categorize information, or create a timeline. For some learners, graphic organizers will need to be presented with a tactile element.

   *Examples*: Use two hula-hoops to form a Venn Diagram that the student or instructor uses to categorize objects that were present in two Folk Tales the class studied. Or present a timeline graphic organizer made of three enlarged yellow squares on a black background that a student or instructor uses to place pictures or objects from a story or event in chronological order.

3. **Identify key vocabulary.** Consider the vocabulary used in the lesson or unit, both words and concepts. Which words and concepts connect to the student’s past experiences or daily life? Which words will they be able to learn and use?

   *Example*: A Habitat Unit might include these words for a student who has been camping or boating or lives near a wooded area: Water, lake, fish, tree, forest, bird, squirrel, deer. These vocabulary words might be presented to the student with a bucket of water, a pine branch, materials that feel like feathers, animal fur, or fish scales, and larger high contrast photos.

4. **Determine the BIG ideas, or main concepts or facts, from a lesson or unit.** The focus student likely cannot learn all the content from the lesson or master all the lesson’s goals, but what do you want this particular student to know and learn? Identify facts, concepts, skills that their peers are learning and choose a few that are most important and relevant to this student.

   *Example*: Big Ideas for A States of Matter Unit: **Three States of Matter: Solid, Liquid, and Gas; change of states; hot and cold.** This could be directly experienced by presenting the student with opportunities to explore water, ice, and steam or vapor in a variety of activities with a peer partner at school and with their family at home. The student could do an experiment involving freezing or melting liquids and explore steam after a bath or shower or when using a teapot.
5. **Determine a well-matched comprehension response.** The team identifies all opportunities and ways the student can indicate the information and skills they've learned. For learners with extensive support needs this might include the following: selecting a choice from numerous options, completing a fill-in-the-blank response, dictating an answer, or completing an experiment or project with a partner and using a switch. For a focus student who is deafblind this might additionally include selecting from a choice of 2 or 3 objects or large high contrast photos; expressing a response through use of signed communication; completing a worksheet with enlarged print and images.

**Examples:** When recording results from a science experiment, a student responds with their individual gestures for “Yes” or “No” when a peer partner asks them yes/no questions, such as “Did the liquid change colors? Yes or No?”. Or when presented with adapted vocabulary words or enlarged pictures from the lesson, the student responds with the correct ASL sign for the word. Or a student completes a multiple-choice worksheet with simplified text presented in high-contrast, enlarged font by marking a picture symbol choice.

From my experience, a significant benefit of this approach is that once a team has identified five effective supports for a focus student (level of text adaptation; amount and level of key vocabulary and big ideas; useful graphic organizers that the student can comprehend; and accessible formats for student responses), they can then use similar materials or formats for engagement, representation and action and expression in future lessons. If you’d like more explanation, resources, or training on using this approach or these instructional supports, contact our team for technical assistance.

**References:**


Maier, J. (2021). Equity & Inclusion: Ensuring Meaningful Participation in General Education. *reSources* 26 (1). 8-15. California Deafblind Services. [https://5871e0203a.clvaw-cdnwnd.com/5f010285cae218a5d7d72c47c1fa8f71i/200002807-890f2890f5/CDBSreSources2021Fall.pdf](https://5871e0203a.clvaw-cdnwnd.com/5f010285cae218a5d7d72c47c1fa8f71i/200002807-890f2890f5/CDBSreSources2021Fall.pdf)

Moving from an IFSP to an IEP
By: Kayla Coburn, Educational Specialist, and Myrna Medina, Family Engagement Specialist

Now that you have figured out how to schedule countless therapy appointments, memorized all the new acronyms, and feel like you have a basic understanding of your child’s unique needs, the time has come to transition from early intervention services to preschool, whether at a school or home-based. When the Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) is coming to an end, it is now time to determine special education eligibility through assessments in all areas of suspected disability. If your child is found eligible, you and the educational team will determine goals and services and supports. Which brings us to your child’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP). You may feel that you are starting all over, but we are here to help! This article provides some basic information regarding both documents, how to transition smoothly from IFSP to IEP, and how to shift your mindset to individualized, meaningful educational goals.

First, let’s make sure we have a basic understanding of an IFSP and an IEP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LET’S BREAK IT DOWN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IFSP</strong>&lt;br&gt; <em>Individualized Family Support Plan</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Early intervention focused on child’s developmental progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For ages 0-3 (the day before they turn 3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family focused goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine services needed to reach goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Records family goals and outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In California, the Regional Center system coordinates the funding and contracts for services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandated by Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Early State Program (Regional Center)</td>
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The transition process should begin by the time your child is two and a half years old. Before the child's third birthday, your child will be assessed by the local school district who will be serving your child. A Transition Planning meeting will be held to discuss the assessment plan to prepare for your first IEP. After the assessments are completed, you will meet with the educational team at the first IEP meeting to review the assessments, determine eligibility, develop goals, and determine services and supports. Oftentimes, early interventionists who served your family will participate in these meetings. After three years of age, if your child meets the eligibility criteria for Regional Center, they will continue as a client. However, the school district is now responsible for funding their education from three years old until their 22\textsuperscript{nd} birthday.

The biggest transition from an IFSP and an IEP is making the shift from family-focused goals to child-specific, age-appropriate educational goals. The IEP is a legal document designed to track your child’s progress on their educational goals. Educational goals during preschool (3-5 years) will focus on pre-academics, social skills, communication, motor skills, and independent living skills and should align with California Preschool Learning Foundations. Once your child is in kindergarten, their academic goals should align with the Common Core State Standards and be modified to your child’s specific needs. Your child’s educational team will explain different categories for goals as you develop your child’s learning goals and monitor progress on those goals. The goals in the IEP may be longer than IFSP goals because each goal will include the setting and conditions for the goal, any necessary accommodations or adaptations, and a description of how progress will be measured. Let’s go over some examples below.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>IFSP and IEP Goal Connections</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IFSP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will sign “more”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start bathroom steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show interest in stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold a utensil</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
When leaving the IFSP behind and creating your child’s IEP with their new team, you might feel concerned that you are losing some “life skills” goals that were not met by your child’s third birthday. The examples included in the table on the prior page show very generalized adaptations that you can make from IFSP to IEP, but what is important to understand is that these skills won’t be dropped, they will be focused on within their educational goals. For instance, you want your child to sign “more,” but the child’s educational team updated the goal to sign 4 words, including “more,” while also participating in an educational activity. This is good news for you and your child as the expectations for their academic progress and learning potential is increasing. California Deafblind Services is also prepared to help support you along this journey. This is one of the many technical assistance services we provide and you can request technical assistance if you need help with your IFSP or IEP.

Additional Resources for Transitioning from Part C to Part B Services

Transition to Public School Guide (2007) by Myrna Medina

Moving Forward with the Transition to Preschool through Collaborative Planning

References


CDBS Introduction
By Charles Beavis, CDBS Educational Specialist

Hello, my name is Charles Beavis and I am the newest member of the CDBS team. I am excited to tell you a little about myself. Upon graduating from college, I didn’t know what I wanted to do for a career until my partner encouraged me to leave retail behind and put my Bachelor’s degree in Developmental Psychology to use. My life in special education began.

I started working for a company who partnered me with a family with three-year-old triplets, all diagnosed with autism. On my first day on the job, all we did was play. We played games, sang songs, ran around the house, read books, and genuinely had a wonderful time. I’d never experienced anything like it. My interest in the special education field began to grow. I loved learning about people’s differences and how I could help them be more successful in communicating, learning, and having fun with their peers.

After moving to the San Francisco Bay Area, I worked as a paraprofessional in an elementary class for students with autism. Each child was their own self, with their own abilities and capacities. It was my first time working with this population in a school setting and I soon learned that all children express their true selves in unique ways. At that moment, I realized that this is where I am supposed to be.

I wanted to learn more and enrolled in the San Francisco State University Extensive Support Needs Credential and Special Education Master’s Degree programs. The individuals who piqued my interest were the students labeled as low-incidence or multiple disabilities, the individuals who are often deemed as more challenging to teach. I realized that autism was just the start of my journey. A true passion was forming in my mind as I completed these programs.

While at San Francisco State University (SFSU) I enrolled in the SFSU Specialization in Deafblindness Program and had the privilege to work closely with Julie Maier, Maurice Belote, and David Brown. David Brown changed the way I viewed the world. I connected deeply with his way of looking at the individual child and simply following them as they move through the world. He taught me the importance of careful observation when assessing and instructing individuals who are deafblind or have multiple disabilities, which I continue to practice today.

After earning my credential and master’s degree I taught in special education programs at three different schools, always carrying this badge of honor that was my experience at SFSU. After the pandemic and arrival of two babies, my role as a teacher shifted and I needed to reevaluate my role in the field of special education.

In the Spring of 2022, I saw a job posting for a part-time position at CDBS. It was like a dream come true, serendipitous. I feel fortunate that I’m now a part of the CDBS team and am excited to support California families and educational teams. I hope to meet you all soon!
What’s the Difference?  
A Look at Tactile Sign Language, Haptics, and Protactile  
By Kayla Coburn, Educational Specialist

Today, people who are deafblind have a variety of ways to communicate. Articles have been surfacing in the last couple of years describing tactile sign language, haptics, and protactile sign language, but what’s the difference? Well, there are a lot of differences (and some commonalities) in each one of these areas of communication. These different modes of communication are not interchangeable but are connected to each other. Each mode provides a person who is deafblind with more information about their environment and provides opportunities for successful group interaction and increased independence. Most importantly, these different ways of communicating were created by people in the deafblind community.

Tactile sign language, protactile, and haptics are so important to the deafblind community because they provide access to language and environmental information. The images above show the differences between ASL and pro-tactile ASL. In the left photo a man signs “tree.” In the photo on the right the same man is being led to sign “tree” by the person who is telling the story (to view the full video demonstration see our reference list). To make the differences between these communication methods as clear as possible, we have created a one-page handout for you on the next page. The definitions and explanations in the chart were found within the resources included in this factsheet. These resources can provide more information on this topic.

Photo source: Pro-Tactile ASL: A new language for the Deafblind  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GrK3PjS1YU&ab_channel=Quartz
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>American Sign Language (ASL)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Tactile American Sign Language (TASL)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Protactile</strong></th>
<th><strong>Haptics</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• A complete, natural language that has the same linguistic properties as spoken languages, with grammar that differs from English</td>
<td>• A tactual version of ASL following the linguistic properties and using same vocabulary</td>
<td>• Created by the Deafblind community</td>
<td>• Not a language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ASL is expressed by movements of the hands and facial expressions</td>
<td>• A method of communication using touch, in one or two hands</td>
<td>• Communicates entirely through touch and practiced on the body</td>
<td>• Provides information and feedback in real time and individual receives information without interruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Visual signs for words or phrases</td>
<td>• Fingerspelling or American Sign Language in the person’s hands</td>
<td>• Can be used to connect small groups of people, instead of just one-to-one communication</td>
<td>• A standardized system describing and/or receiving visual and environmental information via touch signals on a person’s back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A language used by the Deaf community</td>
<td>• This language is used by Deafblind individuals who cannot access ASL or spoken language</td>
<td>• Adding tactile gestures, i.e., a tap on the arm during a conversation signifies nodding</td>
<td>• Examples: a person’s facial expressions, directional information, size, actions, layout of a room, describing people in the area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Backchanneling, or constant feedback through touch</td>
<td>• Provides an individual with a full understanding of what is happening around the person</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Resources**


Building Connections at CDBS Family Picnics

For many years California Deafblind Services has hosted summer and fall picnics with families in both Southern and Northern California through support from the Coalition of Parents and Educators of the Deafblind (COPE-DB). Since March 2020, restrictions on large group gatherings and safe travel during the COVID pandemic limited us to virtual family trainings and support groups. Thankfully, we’ve now safely moved back to outdoor family gatherings.

We were so happy and grateful to be able to greet families in-person at our annual Family Picnics in the Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay areas. We reunited with families our staff has known for years and met many new families. The most memorable part of each gathering was experiencing the warm connections that families and children made with each other as they reconnected or met for the first time.

Our Southern California picnic was held in late August in Long Beach at El Dorado Frontier Park. This small amusement park, designed as a Gold Rush mining town, entertained the children, teens, and the adults alike with train and carousel rides. Some families even tried their luck with “panning for gold”. The families had plenty of space and time to talk and laugh together at the picnic grounds under tall trees and feast on the potluck treats contributed by each family.
Our Northern California picnic was held at Kennedy Park in Hayward on October 15th, which was also White Cane Awareness Day. The park with a newly designed farm-themed playground and kiddie train, carousel, and saucer rides was a fun, spacious park that was easy to navigate for our friends using white canes. The children and youth who joined us had fun decorating and carving pumpkins while the parents chatted and caught up. Everyone enjoyed the delicious potluck picnic fare. We’re looking forward to continuing these annual family picnics in the future!