

Abstract No. 5.3

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**Title: The important role that touch has played in my life**

Presenter: Vanessa Vlajkovic, University Student, Australia

Main focus: Mainly practice/Acquired deafblindness

Abstract: Sight and hearing are senses that most humans take for granted. So, given that their primary means of taking in information is through their eyes and ears, they are not usually required to rely on their sense of touch in daily life. However, as a deafblind person, I can vouch that touch is absolutely crucial for people who cannot obtain cues via the "normal" pathway. Of course, all deafblind individuals have different levels of vision and hearing, and not all of them will be dependent on touch. But whether they will readily admit it or not, most of them will certainly find it easier to sometimes receive something via touch than through their limited sight/hearing. I can explain, through personal experience, how Braille, sign language and social haptics have all combined to allow me to achieve my life goals in an effective and more involving way. I hope to educate others with my knowledge of these three particular methods of communication. I have no ground-breaking research; however, I do have my own life's challenges that I overcome, and these in turn are perhaps more valuable than any research could be. It allows an insight into the life of someone living with dual sensory loss whilst also helping people become more familiar with how particular communication methods work. Braille is a system of dots that can be felt with the fingertips in order to read print that is otherwise too small to be read. Technology such as the BrailleNote can open up countless opportunities making it feel as if literally anything is possible. A person can have all the freedom and independence they desire by learning how to access language and technology through Braille. It truly is revolutionary but unfortunately there is a shockingly low number of blind and deafblind people accessing Braille and Braille technology. Social haptics is fairly new to me, but it has given me so much joy since I was introduced to it. The feeling of being able to have someone convey information to me instantly by touch, by drawing facial expressions, room lay outs and more on my back or arms, is unlike any other I have known. It is highly effective and provides much more opportunity for involvement socially. Finally, sign language - most deafblind will be aware that this exists, but some may never have used it. Tactile signing in itself is an entirely separate method of communication, and can be relayed quickly and easily from one person to another. In short, these three means of communicating by touch are extremely powerful; they enable a deafblind person such as myself to enjoy life at the same level as an average individual with normal sight and hearing.