

Poster

Title: Identified Needs in Deaf-Blindness: Recommendations for Orientation & Mobility Training

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Main focus: Both research and practice/Both congenital and acquired deafblindness

Abstract:

Introduction: Historically, orientation and mobility preparation programs, have been found to be insufficient in providing graduates with in-depth knowledge of how to work specifically with clients who are deaf-blind. Often an overview is provided, yet many orientation and mobility specialist express a need for additional training to best serve the unique needs of travelers who are deaf-blind. As a result, this qualitative survey seeks to identify the key areas of need for pre-service orientation and mobility specialists and thusly provide insight to modifications that could be beneficial towards improving current practices of orientation and mobility preparation programs.

Objective: To identify necessary supports for orientation and mobility specialist working with individuals who are deaf-blind in order to improve personal preparation.

Methods: Qualitative research design was used in this study, specifically interviews. Participants were recruited through professional listservs and were asked to identify their needs when working with students/clients who are deaf-blind. The interview protocol included a set of open-ended interview questions, with follow-up/probe questions asked throughout the interview as needed. Data were analyzed to determine systematic categories through coding. The method used to create these categories was the constant comparison method. Categories drawn from meaning units across all participants and/or in more than one interview question were retained. Categories that did not appear as meaning units of all participants or across several questions were discarded for lack of support. Finally, categories were clustered together into themes based on similarity of content.

Results Similar to current literature in the field, in this study it was found that communication is often the greatest barrier in providing high quality orientation and mobility services to individuals who are deaf-blind. Participants also identified modified techniques, assistive technology, and the use of interpreters as challenges when working with this population.



Conclusions: Findings from this study indicate that orientation and mobility preparation programs should provide more training on working with individuals who are deaf-blind including communication and strategies on how to better serve this population. Further professional development and resources to in-service professionals are also needed. This could potentially mitigate the noted needs and challenges expressed by the participants of this study. Additionally, further research is warranted to enhance strategies for best serving individuals who are deaf-blind.