

Reflecting on Deafblindness: Recommendations for Implementing Effective Strategies

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Abstract : There is little available information concerning the cognitive and communicative abilities of the people who are deaf-blind. This mainly stems from the general inadequacy of existing assessment instruments employed with deafblind individuals. Although considerable variability exists with regard to cognitive capacities of the deaf-blind, careful examination of the literature reveals that the majority of these persons suffer from significant deficits in cognitive and adaptive functioning. The few reports available primarily are case studies, narrative program descriptions, or position papers by workers in the field. Without the objective verification afforded by controlled research, specialists in psychology, education, and other rehabilitation services must rely on personal speculations or biases to guide their decisions in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of services to deaf-blind children and adults. This paper highlights the framework and discusses the results of an action research network. The aim of this study was twofold: a) to describe and analyse the different ways in which a student with deafblindness approached a number of developmental issues such as novel tasks, exploration and manipulation of objects, reactions to social stimuli, motor coordination, and quality of play and b) to map the appropriate functional approach for the specific student that could be used to develop strategies for classroom participation and socialization. The persons involved in this collaborative action research scheme were general teachers, a school counsellor, academic staff and student teachers. Rating scales and checklists were used to gather information in natural activities and settings, and additional data were also obtained through interviews with the educators of the student. The findings of this case study indicated that there is a great need to focus on the development of effective intervention strategies. The results showed that the identification of positive reinforcers for this population might represent an important and challenging aspect of behaviour programmes. Finally, the findings suggest that additional empirical work is needed to increase attention to methodological and social validity issues.

Keywords : action research, cognitive and communicative abilities, deafblindness, effective strategies

Conference Title : ICMELS 2018 : International Conference on Mathematics Education and Learning Sciences

Conference Location : Sydney, Australia

Conference Dates : January 29-30, 2018