**Linking Up – Linking In**

**Perspectives in Vision and Deafblindness**

**October 2013**

**Story Boxes – Jane Litman, Greater Victoria**

In this digital age, when the answer to every question seems to be “There’s an app for that,” it may be easy to forget about the basics. Educators of blind, low vision, and deafblind students know that real items and concrete materials assist the child in developing concepts and early language. Adding real items and objects to the experience of listening to a story being read aloud will enhance the child’s experience of the story. Story boxes are not a new idea; they simply offer the student another way to connect words and meaning. Story boxes are created to promote purposeful exploration to gather information as they allow and encourage the student to handle the objects mentioned in the story. Story boxes also offer an interactive way for a sighted child to share a story with a child with a vision loss.

To facilitate our discussion, I have gleaned some selections, both anecdotal and research-based, on using touch and tactile learning.

**Adapted from**: **Story Boxes: A Hands-On Literacy Experience WonderBaby.org**

***By Norma Drissel***

A Story Box is simply a collection of items in a box or bag that corresponds to the items mentioned in a story. It is a way for young children with visual impairments to experience a story. Educators have long emphasized the importance of tactual exploration i.e. hands-on learning for young children with visual impairments. This is important . . . so that they can take in information, build concepts, and further understand their world.

Purposeful exploration involves thinking and concept building. Children gather information through the experiences that they have. These experiences give meaning to their lives through the development of concepts. Literacy emerges from hands-on experiences for all children.

**Important things to remember about story boxes**

• Give your child lots of time.

It takes more time to figure out what an object or shape is through tactual exploration than through vision.

• Think beyond words on a page.

Hands-on experiences help to provide meaning to words.

• Just do a little at a time.

You need not present all the items in a box with each reading.

• Share the story with others.

**Making a Story Box in three easy steps**

1. **Books, Books Everywhere: Choosing a Story**

When selecting a story for your child, choose one that is simple and talks about familiar objects and concepts.

Variety is fun. Expose you child to different types of books.

Choose books that have items that are readily available.

Often simpler is better.

Choose a book that does not rely on visual experiences or pictures to provide meaning to the story.

**2. Getting It All Together: How to Construct the Story Box**

Begin with an appropriate book then select corresponding items. You may choose to go on a shopping spree but often collecting familiar objects from your household will do just fine.

Label the exterior of the container. A tactile marker will enable you and your child to "read" the title; e.g. three pieces of fake fur for Goldilocks and the Three Bears.

**3. Reading the Story**

Handle the objects in the box one at a time, giving your child lots of time to explore.

**Adapted from: From active touch to tactile communication - what’s tactile cognition got to do with it?**

@The Danish Resource Centre on Congenital Deafblindness, 2010

ISBN 987-87-90526-03-00

Author: Jude Nicholas, Resource center for the deafblind and

Haukeland University Hospital, Bergen, Norway.

Children who are deafblind often use their own unique tactile communication signals, such as movements, muscle tension, postures, and gestures, which may be missed or misunderstood by parents or caregivers. This difficulty with interactions and tactile (communicational) deprivation over a long period can cause emotional, behavioral and relational problems. Thus, they may become passive and withdrawn, show signs of tactile defensiveness or develop self abusive or aggressive behaviors. . . Harmonious interactions and mutual sharing of emotions, often done through movement and active touch with children who are deafblind, are essential for the development of tactile communication (Janssen et. al., 2003). It is also an important step in the path to prevent the development of “challenging” behaviors.

By studying the cognitive and emotional aspects of tactile communication of the deafblind, future research may find answers to some of following questions:

1. What is the connection between dual sensory impairment and tactile defensiveness?
2. What is the relationship between tactile working memory abilities and the use of linguistic constructions in tactile communication or tactile language?
3. How are the ‘autobiographic’ forms of tactile memory established in the deafblind?
4. How will tactile memories deteriorate over time compared to visual and auditory memory?
5. How does emotion influence tactile cognition in the deafblind?

Tactile cognition in the deafblind must be understood in terms of sensation and perception but also in relation to emotion and communication..

**Adapted from: An Introduction to Dr. Lilli Nielsen's Active Learning**

Stacy Shafer, Early Childhood Specialist, TSBVI Visually Impaired OutreachReprinted from *VISIONS* newsletter, Volume 3, No. 2, June 1995

**Slow down, when interacting with a child**. We must be willing to wait and give the child time to take a turn in the interaction. When playing with a child, Dr. Nielsen tells us to give the child time to explore an object alone, rather than jumping in and showing her/him how to use it.

**Let the child have control of her/his own hands**. Dr. Nielsen feels it is important when we are interacting with a child who has a visual impairment, that we not take her/his hand and bring it to the materials. Instead, we need to develop alternate strategies for presenting objects to the child (e.g., gently touching the toy to the child's arm or leg to alert him of the object's presence, making noise with the object to arouse his curiosity to encourage him to reach out, placing several objects so that they are touching the child's body or very close to it so any movements he might make will bring his body in contact with an object).

# Adapted from: Using Touch with children with complex needs

# RNIB Guide updated: July 2011

## Types of touch:

### 1) Purposeful touch

### 2) Cued touch

### 3) Social touch

### 4) Independent touch

### 5) Meaningful touch

### 6) Consistent touch

### 7) Informative touch

### 8) Communicative touch

### 9) Invited and acceptable touch

# Adapted from: Developing Concepts with Children Who are Deaf-Blind

## Barbara Miles, M.Ed. Barbara McLetchie, Ph.D

National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness

**Encourage anticipation and memory by gesturing, signing, and talking about things you have experienced together. Use memory boxes and memory books as concrete references to help facilitate conversations about shared experiences.**

**Make experiences tactual and close-up.**

**Provide interesting materials that encourage exploration.**

**Adapted from: Sensory environments for deafblind children and adults**

Sense 101, Pentonville Road London N1 9LG

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Updated June 2012

**Why are sensory experiences important for children with multi -sensory impairments?**

Children with multi-sensory impairments (MSI) have to cope with a range of sensory difficulties . . . which will affect how they develop and learn. . . It is important that children with MSI . . . are supported to develop their early play and sensory skills. They may not realise there are objects “out there” waiting to be discovered and played with, and we need to bring this world closer to them.

Early stimulation is key – learn to make use of residual hearing and sight from as young as possible.

Some children can only use one sense at a time initially, so do not do too much too quickly – try only one or a few things at a time.

Children need time to respond and do things for themselves. Let the child feel for things without pushing them – you can use hand under hand guidance to feel things together.

Observation is important so as not to miss any of the child’s milestones such as increased babbling or increased use of visual or hearing skills.

**Adapted from: What a Concept!**

**By Jim Durkel, CCC-SPL/A and Statewide Staff Development Coordinator, 2000**

How do we help a child with visual impairments develop a solid base of concept development? The key is not to so much tell the child about the world around them, as it is to provide the child with experiences that allow them create these concepts for themselves. . . You can use words to describe what the child is experiencing, but don't use words without the experience.

Another way to help the child develop these concepts is to give them opportunities for exploration and play.

Children need toys that help them make comparisons. If we give a child blocks to play with, we should give her all types of blocks. She needs LEGOs and wooden blocks and big blocks and small blocks; so that she can compare and discover for herself what makes a block a block.

Toys and objects should respond to the child's actions. The child needs to have things that she can squeeze, rattle, open, close, stack, turn, pull apart, and put together.

Provide the child with real, every day objects. Pots and pans, cups, plates, forks, blankets, brooms, TV remotes, toilet paper, towels, and sponges.

We need to provide experiences. We need to take the child with us . . .

Hooking new learning on to old concepts is one way to help the child learn more about her world in a meaningful way. It allows the child to try new things . . . New things should not be totally new. . . Some part of the new thing should be familiar to the child.

Children need lots of time to try something over and over in order to make sense of it. Let your child play. Let your child direct the play. You can join in and play with your child, but do what she is doing before you try to show the child something new.