TEACHERS' BIOS

Anindya (Bapin) Bhattacharyya

Hello, my name is Anindya Bhattacharyya but my real name, the one that everyone knows me by is Bapin. I was born in India, in the village of Telari, 20 miles south of Kolkata (which used to be called Calcutta; that was the old name).

I was born deaf and became blind at the age of 9. This meant I had to drop out of school because there was no interpreter and I could no longer see to lipread. So for 4 years I was at home with nothing to do all day until my father found the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston, Massachusetts, USA where I was sent in 1983 at the age of 13. There I learned English, ASL, and Braille all at the same time and I made good progress through the use of technology. It started as a hobby and from there developed into a career.

I have been working for several years, developing and teaching the use of various technological devices to DB people for the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults (HKNC) in New York. Three years ago I was able to move to California since my job for HKNC involves travelling all over the United States, providing individual training to DB people and

offering workshops or other types of training for others. That's me.

[Well, I started teaching back] in high school and college where I did some volunteer work tutoring other students, friends, as to how to use computers. That was back when everything was still DOS-based before Windows became accessible by Braille. I set it up for them and taught DB people how to use their computers for email, to print out papers, large print and so on. This was back, before the web was developed; it was all through the phone lines through a few service providers to access email and so on.

Now I've been working for 12 years teaching DB people how to use everything related to their computers, adaptive equipment, and special adaptive equipment and software, including how to use the Windows operating system through various screen readers and Braille displays, including commonly used applications such as MS Word, Internet Explorer, Instant Messaging, and phone programs. Most recently some DB people are asking how to use Mac programs since Apple is finally including output in speech, large print and Braille - included in their operating system. Some students are very interested in that including some who are interested in using an I-Pad, or I-Phone, as well as other portable devices

such as Braille-note-takers, PDAs (personal digital assistants), and GPS systems, and now the Deaf-Blind Communicator (DBC).

aj granda

Hi! I'm aj granda; very happy to be here. I live here in Seattle. I've been teaching for many years and teaching DB people for about 10 years, [thinking] yes, over 10 years. I remember way back when I very first started teaching DB people in Rochester, NY, in a very small, tiny group. It was a few of us with Usher Syndrome and the focus was on identity and how to cope with losing vision, how to look inside at who we are. It was a support group really. It was then I realized how much I enjoyed making that connection with others who have Usher, and forming that bond. It's wonderful how DB people really connect with other DB people. But that was just a small group of people.

A few years later I moved to New Mexico and got very involved in teaching. I taught general Independent Living (IL) classes to people who were deaf-blind: how to shop, manage money, keep a clean house, and how to communicate with other DB people. We started a social group of DB people, getting together to enjoy

each other's company with no SSPs or other people, just direct communication.

Later still, I moved to Seattle where I again did some IL teaching. I taught a cooking class that was really fun. It's funny Jelica, now that I look back, I see – whether or not I realized it at the time, but looking back the pattern is clear – that I wanted to teach one-on-one so we'd have direct communication and not go through interpreters. It was DB person to DB person. We had full access to one another. The difference is incredible.

So time went on and I was hired by the Deaf-Blind Service Center to teach a variety of different classes but the best - my favorite class was Tactile Communication. It was about 5 years ago now that we put forward the concept – and Jelica and I talked about it a lot at that time – how to teach a group of deaf-blind people in that same direct way. You know, the usual assumption is that once you have a group of DB people you immediately have to bring in sighted people to interpret, whether they are volunteers or paid, and it's a big production getting everyone together, pairing everyone off so each DB person has an interpreter/SSP and so forth. But, at that time, 5 years ago, when you think about how people really learn best, it's through direct communication. Deaf

people grow up suffering in school with interpreters – going through a 3rd person. Everything is mediated, changed through this 3rd person, this interpreter. It's just what you've gotten used to and you think this is the way it has to be.

Kimberly Powers-Smith

Hi, I'm Kim Powers-Smith. I was raised in Texas, and live in Austin. I've been very involved and active in the Deaf and DB Communities in Texas. I've been the President of the Deaf-Blind Association, on the Board of the Deaf-Blind Service Center of Austin for 6 years; I've served as a mentor at the School for the Deaf with young deaf students with Usher, and helped to their support families. I have a long list of experiences.

[Mostly I teach.] How I teach depends on the place or the topic. For example, when I go to the residential school, I bring the materials or equipment I need. For example if I'm teaching how to cook I bring blindfolds and the food, maybe peanut butter and jelly and encourage them to use their smell to identify them. I have them make a sandwich spreading the ingredients and for drinks (coffee or soda), how to use their finger in the cup to measure when it is full, different techniques blind people use, or how to change a baby's diaper and burp the baby.

For another workshop, say for the teachers in Deaf Education and how to accommodate children with Usher or other forms of low vision, it's important to consider communication so think about lighting, background, clothing – having no rings on your hand that will interfere with tactual communication, having your hair pulled back out of your face, all of these considerations.

[I'm passionate about my work because] I always think it's so important for young people to have connections with other DB people, to become involved in the Deaf-Blind World. I know some of their families want to keep it a secret, or won't admit there is a problem; but I always encourage them to become involved. So that's another thing I do. I give them tips about how they can go out independently, how to take a guide, things to look out for like low hanging branches or things in the way.

There are so many topics I've taught, I can't cover them all. I've been teaching SSPs for 20 years, I go out to colleges, schools, and I've also taught communication skills workshops. I've taught many, many things.

<u>Bruce Visser</u>

I graduated from NTID with a major in Data Processing, technically programming. I then got a B.S. in computer information systems. These two programs made me very interested in finding resources, and solving problems using technology, and I've been involved in that general field ever since.

After graduation I spent about 5 years in software design and development, systems and program analysis, documentation, design and all that. Then I decided to make a change into a different field of as a Deaf-Blind/technology teacher, teaching DB people how to use technology including computers, Braille displays, screen magnification, I mean you name it, all the adaptive equipment. By 'adaptive', I mean intermediary devices or software to match the needs of the individual DB person. The DB person themselves may know or not know what they need so I need to know the various options and then the needs of the individual and match them up.

Where I learned to do this [teach] was on the job. There's really not a lot out there in terms of ready sources of information about the technology or resources on how to teach DB people; virtually none. It was a steep learning curve, but I felt good about learning from and with the DB people I was working with. It became an effective working relationship; with

their learning and my instruction we made a team. That's what I've been doing now for roughly the past 9 years.