

DB TEACHERS, AN INTRODUCTION BY JELICA NUCCIO, MPH.

[The video opens with a picture of the printed curriculum.]

Hello. Welcome to our video called an “Introduction to DB Teachers”. My name is Jelica Nuccio [name sign]. I’m the project director for the National Support Service Provider Pilot Project (NSSPPP). We’ve now changed the name to the “DB and SSP Training” (a curriculum) which I’m sure you can find on line. That was the goal of the first part of the project. We have now added teaching materials as a support for teachers, to give you different tools to use in your on-going training of SSPs and of DB people in how to use SSPs.

I, myself focused on DB teachers. The reason for this is that everywhere in the country we have gone, we found a shortage of DB teachers. Most of the people doing the training are sighted (deaf or hearing) and there are no – or very few DB teachers. That’s why we added the interviews with DB teachers here, to share their experiences with us. But today I want to focus on an overall introduction to this part of the curriculum.

[She holds up the printed version] It is the same curriculum you will find on-line that I printed out in large print for myself, since I myself am Deaf-Blind. If you look at pages 266 to 399, which is Chapter Five, you will find that it focuses on teaching DB people to use SSPs. If you read regular print or Braille the page numbers will be different, so I suggest you look in the Table of Contents to find the correct page numbers.

In this introduction I’m not going to explain each module or level but rather I’m only going to make some recommendations for DB teachers.

“What should our System Support Look Like.”

Here I want to discuss a “support system” for DB teachers. First, let me clarify that the pages 266-399 that I mentioned earlier, the section on teaching DB people how to use SSPs is not the only part that DB teachers will teach; ...but it is more challenging to teach DB people because for a very long time there has not been any such instruction for DB people. The focus up to this point has been exclusively on training SSPs only, and DB people were not included in that training. [One reason might have been a lack of guidance and materials.] For this reason we needed more resources for teachers on how to work comfortably with DB students, how to connect with them because DB people vary so greatly. There’s a wide range of communication¹ involved. So we want

¹ The communication of DB people may vary by language (English, ASL or another language), by modality (tactile Sign Language, visual Sign Language, some variation/combination of these, or speech & hearing), and by fluency since a significant number of DB people have been triply disadvantaged by a poor education and lack of world experiences.

to make sure the DB teachers are comfortable, especially the new ones and that more DB people would be interested in becoming teachers so we can expand the numbers.

So what do we mean by a support system? Because we're talking specifically to DB teachers like myself, I asked myself what my needs are, why I used particular approaches and how to support the skills I have so that I can be successful. First, do I want to use an interpreter, and if so what do I want from the interpreter? Second, would an SSP suit my needs? Third, would I specifically want a DB-interpreter? By that I mean a person who is both a skilled interpreter and has SSP skills as well, both skill sets together, that's what I'm calling a 'DB-interpreter'. Should I work closely with a sighted co-teacher (deaf or hearing or hard-of-hearing) and should I depend on that person for information? So, all these are questions a DB teacher needs to address before meeting the DB student.

Let me now explain what I have found works for me and you can look at the interviews of different DB teachers we interviewed and decide what works for you; the interviews you will find by clicking on the various links.

My own recommendation is that you use what I have just described as a DB-interpreter. The reason is that I don't want to have to worry about whether the student is hard-of-hearing and uses their speech rather than sign, or whether they are not comfortable using tactile communication with me and so on, so the easiest thing is to have a DB-interpreter there who can cover all these possibilities as a back-up. I do encourage the DB student to communicate directly with me using tactile Sign Language but if the student is not comfortable doing that, or not used to communicating that way and keeps trying to do what is more comfortable for them, such as backing up so they can see better, this becomes disruptive to the lesson. It can't be forced; it has to build, so in the meantime you can start with the DB teacher, I mean [smile] the DB-interpreter. So that's one idea.

Then it is important to discuss with the interpreter what my needs and expectations are. At the same time, it is also important to sit down with the DB student and establish the ground-rules. It's important to know what their needs are. For example, if the student doesn't understand something, to ask for a repetition and not depend on the interpreter but depend on me, the teacher. So, clarify all these ground-rules and expectations before you begin.

"How to Work with a Sighted Trainer"

Now we add how to work with a Sighted Trainer, how to work together, the two of us and when. It's important to discuss plans with the sighted person or trainer as to who will teach which topics. When you go outside the classroom, for example, as in our curriculum there is a lesson in which the students go out to a grocery store, at that point,

who will take-on what responsibilities [as the two groups of students – DB and SSPs – work with one another]? It's important that you can look at one another as equals. Both the DB teacher and the sighted teacher have equally valuable skill sets. Perhaps the sighted trainer will observe the SSPs and give them feedback while the DB teacher will observe the DB trainees and give them feedback.

Don't second guess yourself and depend on the opinion of the sighted teacher as you go along asking what they think or what they noticed. We don't recommend that. I have a DB-interpreter who will keep me informed. Talking with one another as colleagues, that's a different question. If you want to consult the sighted teacher regarding a particular approach, discussing strategies or ideas for different solutions, coming to a mutually agreed upon solution and then whoever is appropriate can handle it, approach and talk with the DB student or SSP to change their habits², or talk with them about what to do if the situation comes up again.

The goal is to work together as a team. Don't use the sighted teacher as an authority because they can see, that's the point.

I recommend you look at the video clip we have showing a sample of a DB teacher using a support system to observe a DB student. It's a clip of a DB teacher going into a store with her interpreter. When she approaches to give feedback she approaches the DB student first, not the SSP because if she did so the DB student would feel they were being considered last and would have to wait, not knowing what was going on while the SSP got feedback. So it's better to approach the DB person first so all participate in the communication at the same time. You can ask the DB person if they notice what just happened, if they feel comfortable, and if they did not like it what they would do³, have a discussion, and make suggestions. The SSP can observe this discussion and learn the perspective of the DB person too. This way it is more of a team approach.

What has been done – and this is true of deaf people too – is that communication is too often through an interpreter so there is that time lag. When the communication is direct, it feels so much better. DB people are always the last to get information. We'd like to change that. So our philosophy is to prioritize the DB person, put them first. This makes it more equal; everyone gets the information directly and at the same time. That's the philosophy we used in our curriculum and we encourage you to do the same.

² It is common for SSPs to become overwhelmed with the task of explaining visual information and the context and to then simply take over. This can become a habit that the teacher would want to 'interrupt'.

³ As Jenne Chalfant emphasizes in her interview it is difficult for a DB person to confront an SSP who is taking charge and pre-thinking this or practicing such a confrontation can be useful.

Summary

Again, we want to emphasize how important a good support system is, whether it is an SSP, interpreter, Braille and that you are ready to match the DB student's needs, that you can work together as a team. Look inside yourself and set up ground rules with the student, with the interpreter, with the sighted trainer and make sure you are all on the same page. It will go more smoothly.

Finally, ask for support from other DB teachers.