

TEACHING TECHNIQUES, PART TWO

Kim Powers

Ok, teaching SSPs, Support Service Providers, and families: families are sometimes confused about SSPs so I explain to them, including sisters and brothers, whatever, I explain carefully that a person with Usher or vision problems may have difficulty seeing at night and will sometimes need to hold your arm for a guide. If the family members sign well, then it's important that the parents communicate with the young DB person, inform them what is around, and ask what they want and let the deaf-blind young person say; it will depend on them.

I'll share with you that some families won't let their deaf-blind child be involved with hearing-sighted children because they're so fearful and over-protective. They're afraid their child can't really do it and will be hurt. I teach and encourage the families to break through that protective barrier, loosen the bonds, and let the child have friends, play with other hearing or deaf children. It's so important to their happiness. They tell me that they see their sisters and brothers having fun, playing with others and ask to do the same but some parents won't let them. They feel caged, isolated, and lonely. This is wrong. I advise the parents to have a heart for the child, and let them go, that there are other ways the child can be safe. What the child needs is mentors (adult DB people) and SSPs. It's very important so they can develop and mature into healthy adults.

Interviewer: What common techniques do you use for teaching?

Bapin

Well, let me think. Common techniques... The number one priority for most DB students is to have one-to-one instruction so they can have direct communication with their teacher because they say there is less stress, and they understand better when the communication is direct than through an interpreter. This way they sense where I'm going, get a sense of my style, and get my personality through communicating with me directly. They can't do this through an interpreter. Through an interpreter, they can't really get a sense of who I am. But with hands on, with that physical contact, they feel more connected and they know who I am. Suppose they are having frustration with their SSP and want to talk about it. If they're going through an interpreter they feel they have to be careful to not offend the teacher [and they're not sure how the teacher is responding to their comments]. I understand that. It's a common comment from DB students that when they work with a teacher who does not sign well or a teacher who does not know about working with DB people and they just bring in an interpreter, the DB student feels lost and overwhelmed. The process is very different.

And that leads me to the next thing, it's important not to 'lecture' giving lots of explanation or information without an opportunity to have hands-on contact with what I'm talking about. That hands-on, tactile experience makes the explanation itself clear. So once they have touched the devices I'm talking about, I can explain more or give more information. In other words, the information has to be interspersed with actual physical contact with things (sensory experience). I apply that in the lab here at Seabeck Retreat. I'm in the lab for people all day but I don't stand here just giving lectures, no, I have all the equipment laid out and I let them touch each piece first, before I begin, so they know what it is I'm talking about. I also let myself be guided by their questions. They can explore the devices and then ask me questions and I'll explain it. They can do this for each piece of equipment one by one. I don't first give them an explanation first, and then invite them to touch it, no, I invite them to touch first and form questions themselves. Then I give them the explanation.

...If I were to teach a DB person how to use an SSP, the first thing I would emphasize would be to develop a good rapport with the SSP, and learn to respect each others' feelings and perspectives. Second, I would emphasize the need to respect each other and honor each other and your values. You don't want to force your opinions or values on the SSP or let them force theirs on you. The third principle is to work together and be flexible. Because sometimes you can't predict what will come up in a particular situation. Both the DB person and the SSP have to be able to accept change and adapt. You can't be rigid and set things up this way or that way according to some abstract terms, no, you have to be flexible and at the same time remain professional. Finally, the DB person should not be overly dependent on the SSP and ask for their opinion of things. Rather, ask the SSP for visual information and then the DB person makes the decision. I mean, the SSP should not be involved in the decision or interfere with the DB person's autonomy. The SSP's role is to function as the eyes and ears of the DB person, nothing more.