Expanded Core Curriculum Special Issue

Visual Impairment and Deafblind Education Quarterly

Volume 65, Issue 4

The Voice and Vision of Special Education

Council for Exceptional Children
The voice and vision of special education

Cover photo description: Image of a make-shift home office in the bedroom of a home. A laptop is complemented by an external monitor and tablet computer. A nightstand is used as extra desk space, and a file box is tucked underneath the nightstand. The desk is strewn with notebooks, papers, notes, and books. A coffee cup sits next to a lamp, and a cane stands against the wall.

Photo by: Susan Yarbrough

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Message from the Guest Editor

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Welcome to this special issue on the expanded core curriculum (ECC). This issue features two primary purposes. First, I hope you gain actionable ideas from other teachers to emulate in your own ECC instruction, and second, I hope this issue prompts you to consider your own role in advocating for and supporting quality ECC instruction for all students with visual impairments.

This issue begins with historical background from Dr. Sandra Lewis, who was mentored by and worked closely with Dr. Philip Hatlen. Dr. Hatlen was among the first to articulate the need for a dedicated, disability-specific curriculum, later formalized as the ECC. Dr. Lewis' article gives context to our current quest to provide appropriate education for all children with visual impairments and defines the actions we need to take in the near future to ensure Dr. Hatlen's vision is realized in the generation to come.

The middle of this issue features stories from teacher-leaders who ceaselessly integrate ECC instruction into their work as direct service providers and supervisors. I have personally learned much from each of them, and I hope you will too. Christina von Reyn shares how she sets up supportive learning environments in which students learn math and science while also expanding their ECC skills. Sue Glaser shares details of an innovative summer project in which she helped deliver remote and ECC-focused summer enrichment for students. Next, Julia Hedrick describes strategies she uses both to purposefully integrate and embrace incidental learning of ECC skills into orientation and mobility instruction. The final teacher, Allison Conway, shares how she supports the integration of ECC skills beyond her lessons, back into the classrooms and the homes of children with visual impairments.

This issue ends with an article by Dr. Eileen Bischof, who coordinates a teacher of students with visual impairments and orientation and mobility specialist teacher preparation program. She shares her experience launching new professionals into their careers and challenges readers to consider the roles they can play to support pre-service and new in-service teachers in their journeys to become ECC teachers.

I hope this issue offers you the opportunity to consider the role you play in providing appropriate ECC instruction to all children with visual impairments. I challenge you to try something new to support quality ECC instruction. Implement a teaching strategy shared by one of the authors, advocate for the Cogswell-Macy Act, reach out the new TVI in your district, or offer to supervise a student teacher. Help us move toward the goal Dr. Hatlen set for us years ago: comprehensive instruction in all nine areas of the ECC for all children with visual impairments.


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President's Message

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Happy Fall everyone! I hope that you are having a good start to the school year and settled into a productive routine through the trials and challenges of the pandemic. We are pleased to have Dr. Susan Yarbrough guest edit this special issue on the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) and to share her insights and wisdom on this important topic. As educators of students with visual impairments, we strive to ensure students follow the same curriculum as their sighted peers.

However, there are certain areas beyond the core curriculum that students with visual impairments need specific instruction that others may learn incidentally. Unfortunately, due to academic pressures the ECC often gets pushed aside due to lack of time. There are various productive ways to build the ECC into routines that can greatly benefit students with visual impairments throughout their life. Skills learned through the ECC are critical and it is a team effort to ensure all areas are addressed. Throughout this issue I hope you find useful strategies on how to embed the ECC into daily instruction, understand its importance, and find ways to work as a team to address areas of the ECC.

Over the past few months, a lot has been going on at CEC headquarters! The 2021 Convention has officially been moved to a virtual format (March 8th-March 13th 2021). We are hopeful that this will open doors for more professionals and students to attend. Be sure to check our website and Facebook page over the next few months for more information on the Convention, DVIDB preconvention, and upcoming webinars. Our program advisory committee is working hard to build a high-quality session line-up for the convention in March. A special thank you to all of you for your hard work!

100 Years in the Making: Appropriate Services to Students with Visual Impairments

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The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) first originated in the mind of Dr. Philip Hatlen, one of the keenest—and most articulate—observers of the impact of visual impairment on learning who ever lived. Early in his career, Dr. Hatlen was an enthusiastic advocate for the inclusion of children with significant visual impairment in local school programs. He often spoke with pride of his role during this exciting time, when he and other pioneers of inclusion believed that the educational needs of children who were blind were no different than those of their sighted peers. They supported the notion that the primary roles of teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) were to teach braille to students who needed it, provide materials, and support students' acquisition of knowledge through tutoring (Hatlen, 1990).

That passion for inclusion was tested by an unanticipated phenomenon that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. The children whose education Dr. Hatlen had

supported in local school programs in the previous two decades had entered adulthood. Their parents, with whom he had established close bonds and still communicated, reported to him feeling despair as they watched their bright, well-educated children, who had been so successfully included in school, experience failure in typical adult behaviors, such as holding a job, establishing families, and engaging in the community. Such unrealized promise, such tragedy, spurred Dr. Hatlen to both thought and action.

It had become increasingly clear that inclusion while in elementary, middle, and high school was insufficient preparation for students with visual impairments. Something more was needed to adequately prepare these youngsters for adulthood. Already, by the mid-1960s, when orientation and mobility was first being taught to school-age students, an indication of what this "something" might be—specialized instruction—was emerging. In the same way that students were not able to learn safe travel skills by sitting in class with sighted peers, thoughtful educators were beginning to think that it was possible that students who are blind or who have low vision need specific, targeted instruction in those skills that their peers with vision learn primarily by observing others and that this instruction cannot always occur in the general classroom.

My first introduction to what is now known as the ECC occurred when I was a master's degree student at San Francisco State University in the late 1970s. Dr.

Hatlen, the instructor of one of my courses, drew two large rectangles on the blackboard and asked students in the class to identify the subject areas taught in school. As we listed various subjects—reading/language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, music, art—he filled the first rectangle. He then had us go through the areas of instruction for which children with visual impairments might need specific, targeted instruction, based on what we had learned in our coursework. Social skills, independent living skills, orientation and mobility, career education, concept development, sensory motor activities, and communication skills were among our replies. The question asked, but left unanswered, was: how to "fit" all of what children who are visually impaired need to learn into the 18 to 21 years of pre-adult development?

Although that answer remains elusive, the field of services to students with visual impairments has changed since the time of that exercise in a classroom so long ago. There is now broad acceptance that students with visual impairments do indeed have educational needs that cannot be met in general education classrooms and that these students must be provided with individualized, targeted instruction in key areas necessary for adult success: skills related to compensatory access, assistive technology, sensory efficiency, orientation and mobility, independent living, social interaction, recreation and leisure, career education, and self-determination. First referred to as unique, or disability-specific, needs (Hatlen &

Curry, 1987; Curry & Hatlen, 1988), the field has eventually coalesced on what those key areas entail and have identified a name for them: the ECC (Hatlen, 1996; Sapp & Hatlen, 2006).

The importance of instruction in the ECC is now a keystone of the philosophy of the field's professional practice for students with visual impairments. The Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness of the Council for Exceptional Children has incorporated ECC competencies into its Knowledge and Skills Standards for university programs that prepare TVIs. Most university programs now integrate these standards into their curricula, providing opportunities for their students to learn about and practice strategies to teach these skills. Some states have mandated assessment in the ECC in their student eligibility requirements, meaning TVIs must identify strengths and weaknesses in these nine areas known to be impacted by visual impairment in their planning for services for students found eligible for special education. Since 1998, 217 articles have appeared in the *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness* that have mentioned the ECC. Although still limited, some correlational research has demonstrated associations between instruction in various ECC skills while in school and later adult success (Cmar, 2015; Kelly & Wolffe, 2019; Wolffe & Kelly, 2019).

The field's philosophy may have changed, but our practices do not always support ECC acquisition. We all have met adults with early-onset visual

impairment who don not possess the most basic skills to manage adult living. We all know TVIs who continue to say that they cannot find time to teach the ECC. Refuting that position, however, are the many TVIs who are finding ways to implement the ECC in schools today. Compiled within the pages of this issue of the *Visual Impairment and Deafblind Quarterly,* in fact, are examples of the innovative strategies that some of our most creative and committed TVIs are using to find ways to fit needed instruction in these skills in students' programs.

If we are going to achieve a time when students with visual impairments leave school fully prepared to participate in adult endeavors—relationships, work, recreation, community—then many more professionals, like the ones highlighted in this issue, are going to have to find new ways of meeting their students' academic and functional needs and share those strategies with colleagues. The impact of these efforts, however, is limited; to influence change on a broader scale, more collective action may be necessary to achieve the outcomes we desire.

Fundamental to such collective action will be increasing the involvement of parents of children who are blind and who have low vision. More supportive and intensive early intervention services informed by recommended practices of both early childhood educators and teachers of students with visual impairments will be needed. We will need to help parents understand early what the ECC is, what acquisition of these skills means to their children's long-term development, and

their crucial role in the laying the foundation on which these skills are built—through immersion in a safe environment in which children are encouraged to participate, make mistakes, accept feedback, self-advocate, engage with others, and increasingly demonstrate emerging skills in more complex natural contexts. Parents will need support not just when their children are young, but throughout the formative years. Helping the adults who live and work with children who are blind and who have low vision to realize that the development of most ECC skills occurs not so much through teaching, but rather through an evolutionary process that involves the thoughtful presentation of opportunities, guided hands-on experiences, repeated practice, fading of prompts, and increasing expectations for independence will be key to our work in laying the foundation for later success.

Research, too, will be important to our collective action. Because the skills that make up the ECC are interrelated and evolve over time, there are challenges to conducting research on them. In reality, the ECC is a construct for which no directly observable empirical evidence is possible. Researchers are going to have to use complex research designs to demonstrate efficacy of innovative programs and practices. It will be necessary for researchers to carefully define participants, variables, and outcomes if we are to learn which components of the ECC must be stressed at which time in the lives of young people with visual impairment and their families. The kind of research that will be most valuable—single case and

longitudinal studies—are particularly expensive and difficult to accomplish with a group as small and heterogeneous as is the population of children with visual impairments. Without sound research, however, we will never know what works and what does not work—and progress toward our goals will be limited.

The kind of collective action by professionals who provide services to children with visual impairments and their families that has the potential to be most immediately effective relates to supporting the Cogswell-Macy Act (H.R. 4822, S. 2681; 116th Congress), which was introduced in both houses of the U.S. Congress in October 2019. This legislation would amend IDEA and require states to accurately account for all students who are identified as having a visual or hearing impairment or both, regardless of the category of disability in which they are reported. Further, it mandates that states ensure that there are "enough qualified personnel to serve children who have such disabilities and that a full continuum of alternate placements is available" to meet the assessed needs of children. Among the proposed law's provisions are the requirement that the U.S. Department of Education "monitor and report on states' compliance with their obligations with respect to instruction and services specifically provided to students who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, or deaf-blind," and that a national center be established "to proliferate evidence-based practices in the education of students with vision loss, to keep special educators current with the latest instructional

methods, and to supplement state and local educational agency provision of the instruction and services of the Expanded Core Curriculum." You can learn more about how you can support this powerful legislation at https://cogswellmacyact.org/ways-to-get-involved/. Vociferously advocating for the passage of the Cogswell-Macy Act may be the single most effective action that TVIs can take to assure that all students with visual impairments receive appropriate services to meet their academic and functional needs.

Nearly half a century ago, a question was asked about how to "fit" all of what children who are visually impaired need to learn into the 18 to 21 years of pre-adult development. A satisfactory answer to that question continues to elude the profession today. We are closer to understanding and communicating what those needs are and some innovative practitioners are creating ways within the current system to affect change with the students they serve. Now we need to collectively mobilize to assist policy makers, families, and other professionals to accept that an educational system committed to the inclusion of its most diverse learners must incorporate the notion that some students are best served, at least for some of their educational experiences, in environments that may not always involve typical students. Achievement of that goal is the important work of professionals in the next 50 years.

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Integrating the Expanded Core Curriculum with STEM Learning

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"Mistakes are expected, inspected, and respected" is listed as part of my class norms and proudly displayed in both large print and braille in my classroom. On the first day of school, students are shocked at hearing that phrase and ask with looks of horror, "You really want us to make a mistake? We are not supposed to make errors in school." My response is concise and attached with a bright smile: "yes, mistakes = life." Perhaps the actual equation is quite a bit more complex, but our methodology, mindset, and expectations as teachers of students who are visually impaired directly correlate to the success of our students. I will explore how I interweave the expanded core curriculum (ECC) to transfer beyond the classroom in both experience and practice to have students take the lead in their learning.

As a math teacher at a school for the blind, I have celebrated many mistakes while also experiencing enormous growth for my students who are visually

impaired in the ECC. Although the balance of meeting math standards and covering the ECC is quite difficult, I have found myself viewing the math concepts through the lens of the ECC. My framework for providing math instruction is built alongside the ECC skills the students need. It does entail time and creative energy to construct the units, but it provides personalized learning that engages critical thinking skills to use in activities beyond the classroom walls. In my experience, some of the components that promote success in interweaving ECC skills in instruction are: cultivating space where mistakes are accepted, planning concrete real world opportunities in problem based learning, building leadership roles for students, and collaboratively working with the entire IEP team. To provide a glimpse of how I accomplish intertwining ECC instruction, I have presented two units that I have taught to learners with a variety of skills.

Catapults. In my integrated Math I class, we explored quadratic functions in the form of catapults. I feel like there is no better way to motivate high school students then give them the opportunity to launch items across the classroom. On occasion, I have sacrificed myself to be the target to raise the excitement level. Prior to introducing this concept, I always include a formative assessment that captures both the students' concept development with quadratics and catapults. Taking the extra minutes to include ECC age-appropriate concepts, especially in a math assessment, has made impacts in constructing personalized learning units that

align with students' areas of need. My assessments have consistently found gaping holes in the students' direct experiences in real world areas of the ECC, especially recreation and leisure, social skills, and independent living skills. Most students have never built nor had any experience with catapults, so our journey starts there.

The challenge begins as the students research, build, and intricately model the projectiles' motion graphically and algebraically. At the beginning, students research and read about the history of catapults. (Yes, gore is included as we practice braille and literacy.) I present the students with models for them to explore, but we depart the classroom to delve into recreation and leisure activities. Exiting the classroom is necessary since many of the students do not understand the path the ball takes once it leaves their hands. We become scientists, and we test our hypothesis. Our lab becomes the gym in which we shoot hoops and throw baseballs. We practice on our form with the physical education teacher and work on throwing the farthest distance. As we practice, we record our throws so we can access the data later. When we return to the classroom, the sport connection fuels their understanding of this abstract concept, and their sighs turn into glee as they watch and tactually explore models of their expert launching skills.

Beyond the parabolic path, the physical action involving recreation and leisure fosters growth in this math concept, but it also provides opportunities to explore, fail, and persevere. In one particular class, the learning process was

progressing effortlessly fast until we all learned a lesson. I showed one student the small catapult, explicitly reviewing each portion, and then I left them with a projectile to launch. As I stepped away to help another student, I witnessed the prior student's entire catapult flying through the air. Yes, the entire catapult! It was a beautiful display of parabolic motion which tragically ended abruptly as the catapult slammed into the classroom door. We all giggled at the misunderstanding later, but realized had that mistake not occurred, the student would have believed that catapults are launched, not the ones doing the launching. It was through assessments, questioning, hands-on real-world experiences, and an environment that respects mistakes that made mastery of this math concept possible while also developing missing ECC concepts arisen from a lack of incidental learning.

Goal Day. One of the most exciting days for my students with multiple disabilities was a day they crafted themselves. They labeled the day "goal day" after a self-determination unit based on setting goals. For these middle school students and many students in general, setting goals is difficult. We spent several weeks on this topic to gather input from their families, residential life staff, and the students themselves through assessments and surveys. Proudly and after lots of modeling and practice, the students created their own goals! The students' goals ranged from braille literacy, brushing teeth, participating in new sports, practicing with assistive technology devices, cleaning tables, and organizing their

schoolwork. It was a beautiful gamut of the ECC that blossomed due to support from all members of the IEP team.

The success of goal day was due to a collaborative team led by the determination of the students to accomplish their goals. Based on appearances, goal day was chaotic. Students were spread out in the classroom, braille cards were strewn on the tables, shoes were on the floor, some were in the bathroom brushing their teeth, and some were brushing their hair. It was a stunning example of students learning how to be self-directed, motivated, and independent. The success of this day was also due to the tremendous support of our expert educational assistant, occupational therapist, and speech therapist, who altered their schedules to join. Students were leading the charge in preparing their supplies and practicing their skills.

The energy led by the students radiated outward to staff and families to practice their ECC skills beyond the classroom and to monitor progress. As part of this unit, students were expected to evaluate their growth. Based on their learning differences, we used an adjective system instead of a numerical range. Students would say they did "better," or "still need help," or "I can do it all by myself." The data may not have been quantitative, but having the students be part of this process was crucial. Self-determination skills enriched the entire unit to foster independence. The students kept their goal sheets in the backpack and it regularly

became part of their homework to practice with the residential life staff. On the weekends, parents would also be able to see their child's growth and practice the skill. A majority of the parents and the residential life staff participated in this activity which made a significant growth in areas beyond their ECC goals. It also created a strong line of communication between the adults in the team as the students gained independence. The unit exceeded my own expectations because a month later when the students experienced difficulty with a novel task, they said, "I think I need to make this my new goal."

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Teaching Social and Career Skills from a Distance to Students with Visual Impairments

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Despite the daily and often hourly reminders to socially distance during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, in many ways, students have had opportunities to become socially closer. Maintaining a physical distance from one another is crucial, but with all the options to communicate with friends, family, and peers through the use of technology, socializing can feel closer than ever. Focusing on being physically instead of socially distant can also assuage feelings of isolation and being cut off from society. Working directly with students, families, and teachers at the Lighthouse for the Blind & Low Vision (LBLV) in Tampa during virtual and remote instruction has proven it is possible to maintain an adequate physical distance while still maintaining close contact. The following social and career skills lessons, strategies, and ideas created and implemented by teachers from LBLV kept dozens of middle and high school students with visual impairments from two districts of over 3000 square miles, engaged, interactive, and socially close during virtual instruction for our Year-Round and Summer

Transition programs. These strategies do not replace the benefits of face-to-face, in-person interactions and relationships, but they show how our society can be resilient, flexible, adaptable, and successful despite adversity and challenging circumstances.

Being with friends was the one thing students consistently reported missing most about not being at school, so in order to keep them engaged and motivated, we brought them together! What was once an incredible hindrance for individuals with visual impairments to be able to socialize was suddenly a non-issue: transportation! Using a video conference platform, those with video capability could see their friends and peers and interact without having to travel. Students without a computer or tablet could use a phone to dial into the platform to communicate with peers. Some students who did not participate in past programming were more likely to attend virtual sessions. They became more social and interacted with peers on a more age-appropriate level.

Capturing short attention spans is one thing, but keeping them is another! In order to keep students interested and returning to lessons or activities, an incentive program was created. Teachers used the "Transition eRewards Points Program and Store" to encourage students to show up to lessons and activities early and on time, remain engaged, actively participate, and work independently. After several weeks of instruction, the eRewards Store was open for online ordering. Students received

a spreadsheet of all available items in the online store, brief description, and point value. Items in the store included things like silly socks, fidget spinners, keychains, magnets, school supplies, earbuds, signature guides, hair bands, and $10-15 gift cards. An online ordering system was created using Microsoft Office Forms. It asked for the "customer" to enter first/last name, email address, street address, city, state, zip code, and list of items to be purchased. Personal information requested on the online order included personal information many students struggled to memorize. Weekly emails also announced sales like "Buy One Get One" and a print/braille packing slip was included. Orders were processed and mailed weekly. If a mailing address was incomplete, the email was entered incorrectly, or not enough points were in the account, the order was not processed. The opportunity for natural consequences through this system allowed for more real world situations and the need for students to self-advocate, pay attention to details, budget, and use various communication methods.

One last-minute idea became one of the most popular incentive programs during the summer. Two to three names of students were announced each morning before the start time. If those students were signed on early, they went to a breakout room with the lunch teacher who took their order. To participate, students had to know their address, local fast food restaurants, food preferences, and budgeting. These students were then rewarded with lunch for the day!

Giving students opportunities to socialize is an ongoing goal of LBVI's Transition Program, so we watched and listened to find out what was important to them. Students liked when someone's pet showed up on camera, laughing and being silly, and music. We held an informal "fur and tell" at the beginning of some sessions that consisted of bringing nearby pets onto camera. This made some camera-shy students turn their cameras on so they could show off their pets. We met dogs, cats, kittens, a guinea pig, and even a lizard. Breakout rooms were used to hold small group classes and to allow activity choices. A music room was offered for those who liked to sing, dance, play or listen to music using Giving Tree Music and YouTube. A hangouts room was used for those who just wanted to catch up. A popular Dungeons and Dragons room allowed players to create their own world. A game room presented different options that allowed students to have fun, but also to work on job readiness skills (without them realizing it!). We used online games, available with a quick search, easily adaptable to small or large groups, that required little to no materials. The Game Gal site we used not only has instructions for dozens of group games, but also has pre-made lists or stories as needed. The various games required students to pay attention to a story line, use deductive reasoning, formulate descriptions, work together, work individually, follow time restrictions, categorize, problem solve, use written or verbal

communication effectively, and develop additional job readiness skills in addition to social skills.

The virtual format allowed for instruction in career education areas not as easily accessible in a face-to-face format. Guest speakers from around the country spoke to students during live virtual presentations. We were able to expose students to many more positive role models and mentors with visual impairments. Speakers were arranged based on students' career interests such as a baker, small business owner, forensic scientist, writer/author, professional singer, aerospace engineer, sound engineer, music producer, high level mechanic, social worker, artist, animator, nutritionist/Registered Dietician, accessibility specialist, and others. Podcasts and pre-recorded audio or video interviews from organizations such as American Printing House for the Blind, Apple, and Perkins eLearning made it easy to bring professionals or workers who are visually impaired to our students.

Volunteer or work-based learning experiences initially seemed impossible, but wound up being just as valuable as face-to-face work experiences. An online list of work experiences was posted on our agency's website for students. After reading the job descriptions, students completed an online application, created by Office Forms, listing their top three preferences. The applications were reviewed and students were notified of a mock interview appointment and video conference

link. Small group instruction on how to prepare for an interview and dress for success preceded the interviews. The day of the interviews, students were expected to dress nicely and arrive to the virtual appointment to be interviewed by someone they did not know. A teacher was present for observation and supervision. Many students returned with stories about what went well and what they could have done differently. One young lady immediately said she needed to remove some inappropriate material from her social media account because the interviewer planned to view the student's artwork online! The following day, students were notified of work experience offers. Students who did not answer their phones or check their voicemails were left not knowing if they were "hired" or what position they were offered and wound up calling their teacher days later.

During the work experience, students were assigned both a teacher job coach for daily "work" and a supervisor from the employer with whom we partnered. Students were required to sign into a designated video conference platform or conference call line to report for job duties as scheduled. Their assigned job coaches provided instruction and guidance specific to the work experience. The supervisor gave an overview of the company, explained the importance of their work, provided real world advice on being effective employees, and offered feedback each week. If students required materials or supplies to complete their assigned duties, teachers arranged with them ahead of time to drop off the items to

their house. As work was completed, students then communicated with their job coaches to have items picked up and new ones delivered. Students were given the opportunity to work in small groups, one-on-one with the job coach, or independently depending on their skill level, need for instruction, and responsibility. Those who took initiative to work more earned more hours on their timesheets. During our Summer Transition Program, students received a maintenance stipend to learn about money management and budgeting, but the work-based learning experiences could also be completed as volunteer experiences giving students the opportunity to help others and learn they have just as much to offer society as their peers. Many students applied for specific positions because they wanted to help others.

Work experiences options included the following:

1. Virtual Children's Storyteller: Practice reading aloud children's stories in braille using voice and body to bring the story to life. Through live or pre-recorded videos, read the stories at a virtual story hour for an audience of young children.
2. Social Broadcasting Correspondent: Plan a talk show with fellow correspondents to provide entertainment and socialization opportunities using a conference call line for Lighthouse clients who are unable to leave

their homes. Determine topics, transitions, audience engagement, and advertisement.

3. Donation Care Technician: Responsible for monitoring the quality of gently used clothing items, accessories, and basic household goods and preparing them for donation to thrift stores. Check items for imperfections (holes, rips, stains, etc.), launder, fold, and sort into categories and based on condition (poor, good, excellent).
4. Braille Menu Designer: Reach out to local food truck vendors via email or phone and offer to convert print menus into braille using word processing and braille translation software. Prepare and send the electronic document for embossing then assemble the menu for delivery.
5. Website Accessibility Analyst: Responsible for testing websites for accessibility for a variety of users. A summary report with recommendations and accolades was provided to the business owner. Required to email companies/business owners to offer the website review service.
6. Product Reviewer: Testing, assembling and reviewing educational or technology products from the American Printing House for the Blind and Florida Instructional Materials Center for the Visually Impaired. Testing includes reading instructions to learn how to use the item and teaching

others how to use the item. Reviewing requires completion of a leveled product review form giving ratings and recommendations.

Through virtual work-based learning experiences, students learned and practiced time management, taking initiative, responsibility, personal accountability, meeting deadlines, working individually or with a team, written and verbal communication, report writing, completing electronic timesheets, money management, office tools, and more. They contributed to their communities and challenged themselves to learn new things, ultimately increasing self-determination.

Dozens of teenagers with visual impairments were able to stay connected from a distance while improving social skills and career education skills through virtual Transition Program activities. Individual or additional instruction was provided to students who had more unique learning needs or home situations, but ultimately, all students rose to the challenge of virtual instruction.

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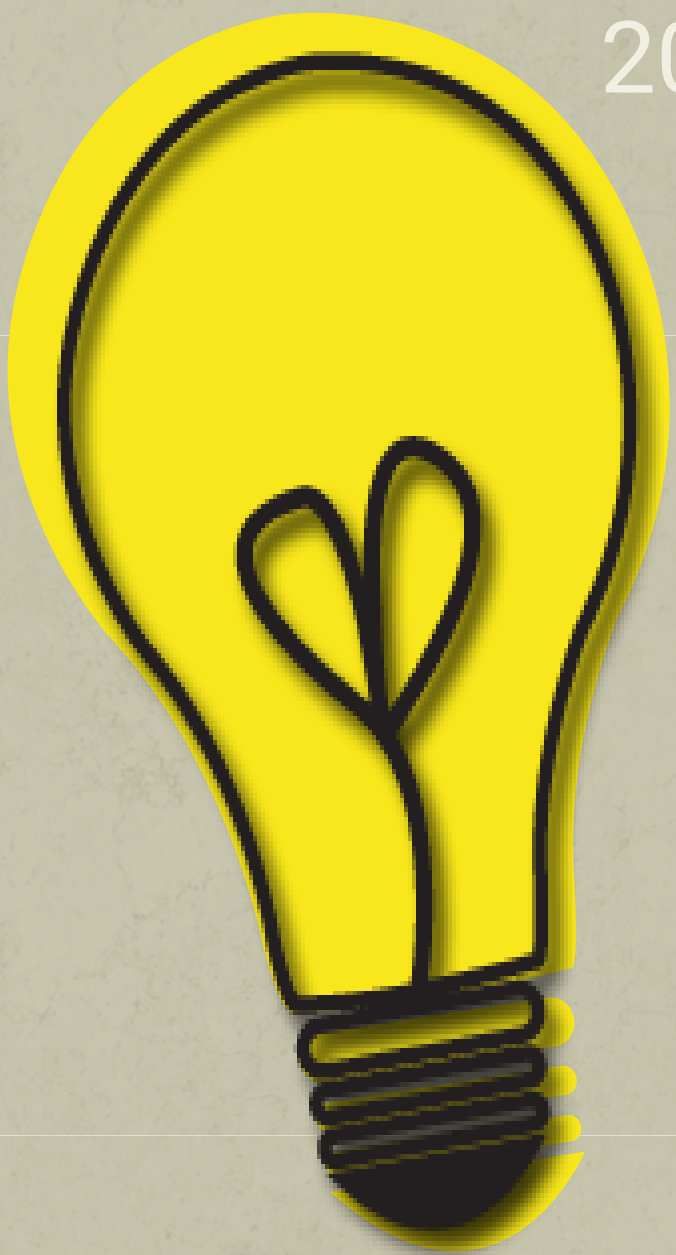

2021 Submission Dates

Spring

Convention Issue
March 31st

Summer
Back to School

June 1st

Email the editor- Kathleen Farrand
Kathleen.Farrand@asu.edu

Orientation and Mobility and the Rest of the Expanded Core Curriculum

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Recently when discussing the areas of the expanded core curriculum (ECC) with two of my students, one high school student made the comment that some skills fit under more than one category. As an orientation & mobility (O&M) instructor, I have the privilege of teaching an ECC area on every lesson. In addition, opportunities to cover multiple areas of the ECC are abundant. I primarily work with middle and high school students and spend a lot of my day on lessons in the community. I incorporate many ECC skills into my lesson plans and many incidental ECC experiences occur during our lessons.

In planning bus lessons, I incorporate assistive technology to use either a computer or a cell phone with GPS to plan the route using the transit setting. Once on the bus, I teach students how to use the GPS to track their location so they know when they are approaching their bus stop. Once a student exits the bus, he or she may also need to change the GPS from transit to walking directions to complete the route to their destination.

While on the bus, opportunities for social interaction may occur. Students may need to speak to the driver to confirm the bus number and direction, to ask for assistance locating their stop, or to ask for help locating a seat on the bus. This is a good opportunity to work on making sure the student faces the person to whom they are speaking, speaking loudly enough to be easily heard, and being concise in a request because the driver is likely in a hurry.

Once seated, fellow passengers may want to have a conversation with a student. Teaching students not to give too much personal information and how to disengage with conversation when they chose to do so can be valuable lessons. This can overlap both social interaction and self-determination, as students make decisions about what interactions they want to have and problem solve how to end interactions they do not want to have. Students also need to make certain they do not let other passengers distract them from tracking their location, or they may miss their bus stop.

Upon exiting the bus, students must travel to their destination. Compensatory skills may be addressed by using tactile graphics to learn about the area they will travel. Some lessons lead to stores, where students work on sensory efficiency by using optical devices to read store signs, locate items, read small print to get more information about items, and read price tags. Then independent living skills may be needed to work on budgeting, estimating tax, learning to round

the price of item, and keep a running total to make certain items chosen stay within the student's budget. For students who are not able to use low vision devices, we work on using listening skills to locate registers or customer service, using smells to identify areas of a store or stores within a mall, and using differences in surface areas for orientation.

Some lessons provide opportunities for unexpected lessons, particularly when working in an area with many pedestrians. Opportunities to work on social interaction and self-determination come up frequently. Students must determine how much interaction they want with other pedestrians who initiate conversation. I often use some of the time driving to lesson locations to discuss hypothetical situations or give examples of things that have happened on lessons with other students to help students brainstorm how to handle different types of interactions, such as someone trying to help a student cross the street when they do not need assistance, someone trying to take hold of them and guide them, someone trying to tell the life story of their cousin who was blind, and many other similar possibilities. On the drive back from lessons, we may discuss any situations that arose on that lesson and discuss how the student handled it, if they were happy with the way they handled it, and other options for similar situation that may arise in the future.

On one lesson with a student who was Deafblind, my student was learning to use assistance signs to request assistance to cross a street. The student wore hearing aids, and in quiet areas, could often cross safely without assistance. However, in a location with additional noises, such as construction, lawn equipment, or music venues, he was not always able to determine when it was safe to cross at an intersection. We worked on how to use the assistance sign and how to determine when he needed to use the assistance sign. First, we role played as I pretended to be a random passer-by who would help him cross the street. I offered to help without being close enough for him to easily take my arm, I tried to grab his arm to pull him across, and I modeled other things well-meaning people might do. When the student became comfortable using the sign, I asked if he was ready to use the sign at an intersection with me nearby, but pretending I was not with him. He was ready.

On the student's very first crossing, a lady came right away, but kept trying to turn my student away from the intersection and kept giving him the direction, "Two blocks that way." She put two fingers in my student's hand, and she turned him "that way," which was south, and pointed his own hand the direction she wanted him to go. My student told the lady he needed to cross the street in front of him. Finally, she allowed him to take her arm and she guided him across the street. On the opposite corner, she again turned him south and repeated, "Two blocks that

way.” My student said thank you and took a few steps in the direction the lady wanted him to go. I quickly joined my student and we discussed the interaction.

The student asked me, “What is two blocks that way? Where did she want me to go?” After a brief consideration, I realized the lady was trying to direct my student to the downtown Rescue Mission! My student was very surprised and asked if he looked homeless. The true answer to that was, maybe. This particular student liked to wear layers and jackets no matter what the weather was, the jeans he was wearing were noticeably too short, and his hair was pretty messy. We discussed that he was the only person in downtown on that 85 degree day wearing layers and a zipped up fleece jacket other than homeless people who kept all their earthly belongings with them all the time. I had previously encouraged this student to dress more appropriately for the weather, but he had not seen a valid reason for doing so. After this lesson, he would take off his jacket before getting out of our van without any comment from me.

Through the interaction with the lady, we were able to talk about his appearance and the impression he might give to others without it being a judgement from me. In future lessons the student would sometimes bring up what happened and laugh about it, but he was also more aware of how he might be viewed by strangers. He would occasionally ask questions about his clothing, what

colors he was wearing, and if his clothes matched. This was a valuable lesson in independent living skills that I certainly did not have in my lesson plans.

O&M provides many opportunities for intentional inclusion of ECC skills. Assistive technology is used for many lessons, and many lessons also provide opportunities for social interaction. Travel in stores can overlap with many independent living skills. Problem solving and self-determination skills may be needed when encountering construction, unexpected obstacles, and unpredictable people in the teaching environment. However, sometimes the best ECC lessons are the ones not in your lesson plans. Real life experiences are so often the most meaningful experiences.

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Transitioning Expanded Core Curriculum from the School to the Home

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As teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs), we talk to students and families using the word "independence." Years ago, I asked a middle school student who was totally blind to define what she thought independence meant. It was quite revealing. She saw herself going to college (a realistic goal) and having a job and family, but with someone always around to help her with materials, making her food, cleaning her home, and helping her travel. We had a lot of work ahead of us. I am happy to report she has been successful in college and become independent in other areas of her life.

We begin working with families and students early toward that end goal of having a student be as independent as they can be when they are older, whether that is independent in the community, in a work-shelter and group home environment, or helping a caregiver with a task. When we are working with families and their children age birth to five, we are encouraging parents to teach

their child age-appropriate chores and responsibilities. We teach parents how play is connected not only to language, but also to skill development while we model for parents how to work with their child.

I recently held trainings for middle and high school parents and found a gap in the expanded core curriculum (ECC) skills students were taught in school and what they practiced at home. As the TVI, I expected the parents were continuing to have their child develop age-appropriate chores and responsibilities about the house and be engaged in community activities. If there were any concerns, we would work on them together. What I found was the parents' expectations had not developed past preschool-age skills. In the IEP meetings, when ECC instruction was discussed, parents agreed on the priorities and services received. What I missed was asking the families what supports they needed at home to practice these skills. The parents in the training were unsure about how to teach or reinforce skills and were nervous about some, such as cooking. It was a revelation that I needed to start making sure the students, families, schools and I were all working together when it came to ECC skills and expectations. There needed to be a plan to help families incorporate ECC skills into the home.

Working in the school setting with consistent routines remains the best way to teach and refine ECC skills. As a TVI working in several school systems in rural areas, it is difficult to meet with students on a consistent basis to work on skills.

Incorporating skills and expectations into their regular schedule is vital. Pull-out services for specific skills continue to be valuable. In many schools, at all ages, it has become increasingly difficult to find the time and the willingness of administrators and teachers for release time to meet the ECC needs of our students. Explaining the purpose of the ECC and how it can impact the student in the classroom continues to be an important part of the process.

An opportunity came about to team-teach in a self-contained classroom for students with visual impairments. The class was for forty-five minutes once a week throughout the year. The class consisted of six students: two who were totally blind and four who had low vision, including one student who used a wheelchair and a communication device. The goal was to incorporate ECC skills into their work activities, which included counting skills. To incorporate ECC skills into the program, an activity was developed to engage the students in counting during a functional activity. The students were given the task of putting three pieces of candy and a friendly note into a baggie to deliver to staff in their school pod. For some students, counting was involved. For others, the activity was designed as an assembly line to complete the task. For the remaining students, the items for each bag were placed in their work areas one at a time. The students were given a set amount of time to make the bags (the number was individualized for each student) to allow enough time for delivery. Before leaving the room, the students practiced

social greetings like “hi” or an appropriate seasonal greeting, and “you’re welcome.” For the student who needed a communication device, the messages were set on the device. The students took turns delivering to the rooms and practiced knocking on the door and waiting for a response before entering. During delivery, the students had to walk in a line, trail with their hands and/or canes, pay attention to the pace of others, and stop when they bumped someone. The use of specific directional words was reinforced, as was “squaring off” to wait while a peer made a delivery into the room. After the last delivery, the students were challenged to find their classroom. The student in the wheelchair was asked to say, point, or somehow indicate the direction of travel. This activity went from being just a math lesson to one that incorporated skills needed for career education, (ex. assembly lines and time management), social skills, independent living (ex. learning how to package a snack), and orientation and mobility (O&M). The students enjoyed seeing the staff and friends in other rooms, and the staff enjoyed the weekly treats.

Many of the skills practiced in the school setting transfer to the home environment. For example, at home the student can practice putting items in a baggie to make their own snack or part of their lunch for home or school. Depending on the skill level of the student, items can be placed in a specified work area like a bowl or tray to more easily corral items to put into the bag. Snacks for

the week can be completed in batches on the weekend to allow more time to focus on the task than a weekday may allow. An area in the cabinet or refrigerator can be defined for the snacks. The student can put away the snacks in the specified area and retrieve one when it is time for a snack or to pack it for school. This simple skill can then expand to the student getting out all the necessary materials for the process, putting everything away, putting dirty utensils or dishes in the sink or dishwasher, and cleaning the work surface. The students can also learn about different tools in the kitchen and what is needed for different types of food. Other concepts can be included such as counting and days of the week. For other students, this routine can lead to discussions about meal planning. The ECC skills involved can include independent living, career education (ex. time management and organization), O&M, self-advocacy (ex. choice of snacks) and in general being a participant in some of the home responsibilities.

As TVIs, we generally have a close working relationship with families. The carryover between school and home can increase with better communication about how a skill is taught. A video of the student working at school can assist the families in helping the student at home. In addition, the family can also send videos for teachers to see progress and assist with instruction. Giving the parent the task analysis, language, and visual/tactile cues used in school for prompting can create a more consistent program for the student. Being very specific about prompt

levels and what they mean, especially when indicating a student is independent with a skill, is vital. A user friendly, specific data sheet with prompt levels can help everyone. Such data collection sheets not only have information about the skill level of the student, but also serve as a reminder to adults in school and home to not overly assist the student. The goal for our students to learn skills of independence carrying into adulthood is one that needs to be practiced in all aspects of our students' lives with a solid team approach.

The intended purpose of the Spring 2021 convention issue is to provide manuscripts aimed at practitioners about presenter contributions to the CEC 2021 program and work related to the field of visual impairments and deafblindness. This will allow those who were unable to attend your session to know more about your work.

Guidelines:

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Deadline for submissions: March 31, 2021

Preparing the Next Generation of Expanded Core Curriculum Teachers

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In our professional roles, *how do we prepare pre-service and newly certified teachers to demonstrate the skills they will need to positively affect the trajectory of their future students' lives?* Both personnel preparation program faculty and practicing professionals must ask themselves this guiding question if we are to collectively prepare the next generation of teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) and orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists.

Collectively, TVIs and O&M specialists recognize the importance of maximizing students' access and increasing their meaningful interactions with others and the world around them. As a result, educators and professionals in the field adopted the expanded core curriculum (ECC), providing a framework within which to teach the skills and strategies learners with visual impairments can use to reach their full potential and levels of independence. Comprising nine primary domains, ECC skills in the areas of compensatory access, sensory efficiency,

assistive technology, independent living, social interaction, recreation and leisure, career education, orientation and mobility, and self-determination are all related. To navigate daily activities, ECC skills cannot occur independent of one another. To successfully tackle life's demands, learners with visual impairments must possess the ability to demonstrate successes across all areas of the ECC, applying various combinations of skills that are based on the ever-changing tasks they encounter.

At the university level, we prepare our Florida State University TVI graduates for this important work not only by teaching content within each area of the ECC, but also by providing these future TVIs with practice opportunities to infuse these essential life skills into the daily home and school routines of learners with visual impairments.

Beginning in their first semester of our teacher preparation program, faculty stress what we believe to be an essential characteristic required of an effective TVI: *flexibility*. Because of the varied needs of learners with visual impairments and the necessity for TVIs to frequently navigate within the constructs, schedules, and environments of families and school personnel, demonstrating flexibility by remaining professionally agile is crucial to meeting the changing needs of these learners. The quality of flexibility also affords these future TVIs the openness to capitalize on teachable moments: those spontaneous and unplanned opportunities

to fill in conceptual information or hands-on exploration on-the-go with their students.

To infuse ECC content within all courses offered in the TVI preparation program, we developed various learning activities that include low vision and blindfold simulations, frequent in-class peer-teaching activities, and extensive practice developing lessons where our students are required to incorporate and intertwine multiple ECC areas within each instructional activity. Rather than learning to teach ECC skills in isolation, pre-service teachers are guided toward a comprehensive approach to delivering instruction. The infusion of ECC content across courses also provides these pre-service teachers with opportunities to learn and refine their teaching personalities and develop a personal toolkit of instructional strategies from which they can confidently pull when advocating for the daily infusion of ECC instruction and practice for their future students.

Sample assignments in our teacher preparation program include developing month-long literacy units that must address all nine areas of the ECC and creating ECC activity plans that can be incorporated into a typical school routine. For example, in our *Teaching Independent Living Skills to Students with Visual Impairments* course, pre-service teachers design simple snack lessons appropriate for an elementary-aged learner. Based on the learner's assessed abilities and needs, these pre-service teachers choose a simple snack such as cereal with milk or a

microwavable macaroni and cheese cup – activities that can occur in the TVI's resource room or during a designated snack time during the school day. By incorporating the planning, preparation, and cleaning aspects of the simple snack task into their lessons, the pre-service teacher is able to provide the learner with practice that encompasses numerous life skills and concepts. In addition to the category of independent living, the other eight areas of the ECC can be included in these activities and easily incorporated into a typical school routine: compensatory access (writing and reading the recipe); sensory efficiency (use of a low vision tool, use of hearing and smell to locate items); assistive technology (use of a computer or other device to search for food ideas and to write the recipe instructions); social interaction (conversational exchanges, turn-taking, requesting and refusing assistance); recreation and leisure (increasing confidence in movements, identifying preferred activities); career education (following instructions, organization and planning, exploration of food preparation); orientation and mobility (safe and efficient movement to retrieve items, spatial concepts); and self-determination (goal-setting and choice-making). By choosing routine activities within which to teach and reinforce ECC skills, opportunities are substantially increased for learners with visual impairments to frequently practice these critical life skills.

By providing pre-service teachers with a myriad of hands-on practice opportunities with ECC skills, they are able to refine the assessment, educational planning, and teaching skills they will need to increase positive student outcomes. Through participation in community and school district partnerships that provide enhanced practice experiences within the field, these pre-service teachers also gain confidence in their ability to design instruction in the ECC that meets the individual needs of their students and encourages their personal development as dynamic educators who can effectively respond to the needs of their students. Through collaboration with these agencies, pre-service teachers are mentored while being afforded opportunities to practice designing and teaching comprehensive ECC lessons to children and adolescents with visual impairments, teaching them specialized techniques for activities such as cooking, shopping, personal care, household maintenance, and recreation and leisure.

The need for effective mentorship does not stop when students complete teacher preparation programs; it continues throughout internships and new career placements. Our field *needs* experienced teachers to share their knowledge and provide encouragement with novice TVIs. The expertise professionals may take for granted can be eye-opening to a new colleague. Whether through a structured mentorship program or developed between individual teachers, TVIs can benefit from the support of fellow professionals throughout their careers.

With a common goal of positively affecting the trajectories of our students' lives, the expansion of collaborative activities between university personnel preparation programs and practicing TVIs provides authentic opportunities for pre-service and novice TVIs to refine their skills. At the university level, we initiate the learning process through coursework and practice activities. As a TVI, you can help ensure quality ECC instruction to learners with visual impairments by mentoring pre-service interns and new teachers: an essential and critical component of the teacher preparation process.

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