

On teaching practice in Kenya

Training as a teacher of deafblind children in Kenya proved a rich and rewarding experience for Malawian teacher **Joseph Kuphazi**, as he reveals

Established in 1985, the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE) is a government-owned institution that offers courses in various types of special needs programmes, such as visual impairment, mental handicaps, hearing impairment, autism, physical disabilities, deafblindness and gifted and talented.

Teaching practice occupies a key position in the programme of teacher education. It is the culminating experience in teacher preparation and provides an opportunity for beginning teachers to become socialised into the profession. Therefore, teaching practice should provide the student teacher with the opportunity to integrate theory and practice at work.

KISE offers a two-year diploma course in special educational needs. Last year, teaching practice was scheduled from 9 May to 16 July 2010. I did my practical teaching at Kabarnet School for the deafblind in the Baringo district in the Rift Valley Province of Kenya. Erick Muriuri was my learner. I gained a lot of knowledge, skills, expertise and experience in teaching learners who are deafblind.

Deafblindness

Deafblindness is a unique disability. It is a condition in which there is a combination of visual and hearing impairments that causes severe communication and other developmental and learning needs so that a person cannot be educated appropriately in special education programmes solely for children with hearing impairments or visual impairments or severe disabilities without supplementary assistance to address their educational needs due to these dual disabilities.

Children who are deafblind are singled out educationally because of their impairments of sight and hearing (distance senses). They require thoughtful and unique approaches to ensure that they have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Before developing and commencing my individually designed teaching of Erick, I did the following:

- Assessed the learner's ability. This is the starting point in teaching and helped me to find out what Erick was able to do and what he wasn't able to do.
- Took the historical background of the learner, including information such as birth history, onset of deafblindness, and number of children in the family who are disabled.
- Assessed the learning environment. Learning takes



place in an organised, pleasant and secure environment. Arrangement of the physical environment is especially important for children who are deafblind. I made sure that the environment was conducive to learning.

- Established the present level of performance. Since every child is different from each other intellectually, I made test tools in order to gauge Erick's present level of performance. The information I got was used to plan learning activities for him.
- Developed an individualised education programme (IEP) – a written plan developed by a team of professionals, including the specialist teacher and parents, to plan academic goals and come up with methods of teaching in order to meet the intended goals. It contains the following information: description of the learning disability, the learner's current skill levels based on formal assessment, measurable and observable goals for improvement in each area of educational need, measurable and observable objectives describing specific skills needed to reach IEP goals, and type of instructional materials to be provided.
- Formulated short- and long-term objectives and developed schemes of work based on these.
- Prepared a progress record for the learner to help me monitor his progress.
- Prepared the learner's IEP timetable, showing the subjects to be taught for each day and the duration of each subject.
- Made the seating arrangement. The classroom must be structured in a such a way that a child can move around freely without bumping into furniture.

How a deafblind child learns

Deafblind children need to receive undistorted information about the environment. They need to be taught how people communicate and they need a communication system that can enable them to interact with others. They need to anticipate events in life and should be given opportunities to make choices. When teaching Erick, I made sure that I did the following:

- Introduced my sign name to the child in order to let him know me and understand that I was a teacher.
- Developed a trusting relationship with the child.
- Remembered that the child was the best teacher – I was supposed to learn more from him.
- Created opportunities for responses, like rhythm games, finger plays and songs.
- Created opportunities for turn-taking.
- Allowed the child to observe with his hands and use his hands as his ears and eyes.
- Did activities with the child and not for the child.
- Used calendar boxes/schedules to allow Erick to organise time, develop anticipation and understand that one thing has to be completed before going on to the next one.
- Used team planning to overcome challenges.
- Broke work into smaller, manageable units (task analysis).
- Varied teaching methods and the pace of teaching according to Erick's ability.
- Enhanced teaching materials so that they were easily seen, heard or interpreted tactually.
- Used prompts to let the child start and complete the task.
- Made sure that I was enthusiastic, determined, flexible, creative and positive all the time.

Subjects and work covered

By the end of my teaching practice (tenth week), Erick was able to perform activities in various subjects as follows:

Activities of daily living

- Eating food using a spoon
- Chewing food
- Washing hands before and after meals
- Scooping food/water
- Washing the face, legs and the head
- Combing hair
- Applying toothpaste on the toothbrush and brushing teeth
- Toileting
- Dressing and undressing.

Pre-academics

- Sorting objects according to size, shape and texture
- Building with blocks
- Fixing pegs
- Folding paper
- Threading a needle
- Signing numbers 1–3 tactually.



Pre-vocational

- Sweeping the floor
- Mopping the floor
- Cleaning the table
- Washing kitchen utensils
- Gardening
- Feeding animals.

Adapted physical education

- Kicking a ball
- Passing a ball forward
- Jumping
- Running in a straight line
- Rolling forward
- Swinging arms in the air
- Doing sit-ups
- Frog jumping
- See-sawing
- Sliding
- Climbing stairs
- Walking on four limbs
- Star jumping
- Wheelbarrow walking
- Taking part in a tug of war
- Lying on the back
- Caterpillar walking.

Orientation and mobility

- Using a white cane when walking.

The importance of teaching practice

Teaching practice encourages interaction between the student teacher and the learner so that teaching and learning take place. Interaction is the vehicle for communication, and good communication leads to learning.

Teaching practice also helps to encourage interaction and collaboration between student teachers. Learning is enhanced when it is done as a team and experiences are shared by working together.

Student teachers learn to use active learning techniques. Learning is not only done in classes listening to the teacher. The children must talk about what is learnt and apply it to their daily lives. Feedback can then be given to the student teachers, helping them to understand what they know and don't know. In this case the student teachers are forced to seek more knowledge. This is a learning process.

Time management is important in teaching for effective learning, and teaching practice helps student teachers to manage their time well.

Teaching practice requires self-discipline. A student teacher has to maintain discipline all the time. It also helps the practising teacher to manage strange behaviours of the child.

Challenges faced during teaching practice

Apart from knowledge gained, there were challenges that I encountered in the process of teaching.

- Language barrier – tactual signing was supposed to be accompanied by the learner’s own local language, Kikuyu, which I did not know. Most of my teaching was done in English. For the first three weeks it was difficult to communicate with Erick in English.
- Teaching and learning resources – there were inadequate resources and that made teaching difficult at times, although I did use locally available resources.
- Physical education was not taught by the regular classroom teacher – Erick resisted and cried when it was time for physical education, but with encouragement and reinforcement he was able to perform.
- The regular classroom teacher went for an in-service course at KISE during my teaching practice – this made it difficult for me to get information about Erick from other teachers

Shortfalls of the Kenya Institute of Special Education

KISE conducted teaching practice in the second term of the second year. This meant that the syllabus was not fully covered and the students had not yet been taught

Braille. In addition, tactual signing was done only for a short time; therefore, it was a problem to many students. If funds were available I would need to go to another institution for tactual signing for at least three months in order to meet the international standard.

My teaching practice was made possible because of financial assistance from the Malawi Ministry of Education and various charities, including Kentalis (St Michielsgestel), Sense Scotland, the Woodford Foundation UK and the Woodford Foundation Scotland. I really appreciate the moral and financial support given to me. The knowledge and skills gained during teaching practice will be used to teach deafblind children in Malawi who are still being marginalised. The main challenge is that I will be the only teacher trained in this programme in Malawi. There is a real need for the Malawi Government and donors to work together to support training for more teachers in deafblind programmes so that all deafblind Malawian children have access to basic education, just like other children.

At the time of writing Joseph Kuphazi was a second-year student teacher at Kenya Institute of Special Education. He is currently a teacher for deafblind children at the Malawi Education Centre for the Blind.



All about working memory

Terezinha Nunes explains how working memory is assessed and explores deaf children’s performance in working memory tasks

Working memory is the ability to keep information in mind and use it to guide behaviour in the absence of external cues. In reading, for example, we need to remember what we read earlier on as we continue to read a paragraph in order to understand its meaning. In arithmetic, we often have to implement several steps as we remember intermediary results in a calculation. For example, when we calculate 12×18 , we compute 8×2 , write down 6, carry the one, then go on to compute 8×1 , and we have to remember that we carried 1. Tasks that require storage and manipulation of information at the same time involve *the central executive* component of working memory. This article will use the abbreviation WM to refer to the central executive component; there are other aspects of working memory not discussed here.

According to various studies, deaf students’ performance in WM tasks is significantly related to their performance in reading comprehension and this

is also true of deaf children who have a cochlear implant. WM is also related to deaf students’ geometry learning, so WM plays an important role in deaf children’s school learning.

How is WM assessed?

WM tasks require manipulation and recall of the information. Recall is different from recognition. In recognition tasks, people are presented with materials and have to say whether they have seen the material before, but in recall tasks they have to come up with the information themselves, not just recognise it.

In a widely used working memory task, called backward digit recall, children are presented with digits and asked to say them in the opposite order of presentation. They need to manipulate and recall the digits. For example, if I said 7 4 6 2, what would you have to say to get the answer right? Backward digit recall is a task that appears in different standardised assessments of WM.

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