

Good Orientation & Mobility Skills Essential for Equality in Education

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The importance of good orientation and mobility skills training for visually impaired learners cannot be overemphasized. It is however disturbing that in many schools and institutions in Kenya and in many other developing countries- academic pursuit receives great emphasis while the teaching of life skills and orientation and mobility receive peripheral or casual attention.

In a holistic approach to education, good orientation and mobility skills training must be included in the curriculum and teaching programmes. This will enable visually impaired learners to benefit from the total learning experience, just like their sighted peers benefit from theirs. Self-reliance and confidence building will also be enhanced while other benefits will accrue.

A good training programme should include academic subjects, games and leisure activities, life skills including orientation and mobility. Contrary to the current practice where orientation and mobility is not taught to visually impaired learners I believe this has to change. The curriculum in schools should be revised, more orientation and mobility instructors be trained and sufficient time be set aside for orientation and mobility training.

A good training programme for visually impaired learners that is holistic would aim at equipping the learner to attain full independence movement and travel, good daily living skills, variety of games and leisure activities as well as academic knowledge. This will benefit the learner in various ways as outlined below.

Good orientation and mobility training helps the visually impaired learner to overcome fear. The learner will therefore develop self confidence necessary for successful living. The person will also feel good about himself/herself. This will greatly reduce the impact of sight loss.

Without orientation & mobility training the visually impaired learner will tend to over depend on sighted peers for assistance. Once trained the learner will achieve a good level of self-reliance. This is very important in assisting him/her to run his/her life purposefully which is useful in academic excellence. In places like Kenya where children have to go to school on foot, orientation and mobility skills are a must for the visually impaired children if they have to get an education.

Visually impaired children with good orientation and mobility skills gain much respect and admiration from their sighted peers. This is good for social integration. Training that incorporates field excursions and other varieties of exposure will go a long way in promoting the total learning experience. Good orientation and mobility training will assist the visually impaired learner to expand his/her social sphere.

For those who lose vision as children it is important that learning orientation and mobility skills is done from an early stage. This would initially include skills such as body image and sensory awareness and stimulation. Young children can be taught to use their senses of smell, touch and hearing to enhance their interaction with the environment.

It is important to train the young visually impaired learner in basic safety and self protection techniques and how to avoid accidents. Young learners can also be taught to develop good posture and gait which will help them integrate in the community.

When all is said and done orientation and mobility training is must for all visually impaired children to enable them attain a holistic learning experience and gain independence.

There is therefore need to include orientation and mobility training in the school curriculum and to train more orientation and mobility instructors to enhance proper training of visually impaired learners.