OVERVIEW: TEAM Project
Susan Sternberg-White, Project Coordinator

California Deaf-Blind Services’ pilot project, Transdisciplinary Educational Assessment Model (TEAM), received federal funding for the period of October 1, 1992 through September 30, 1995. Creating systems change to provide locally and regionally based functional, transdisciplinary assessment of children with deaf-blindness was the major emphasis of the project. Upon completion of the project, the 11 agencies participating in this project had in place: local support teams for facilitating implementation and continuing refinement of their assessment strategies; locally developed policy and procedures to support implementation; trained staff within the agencies; and the availability of consultation and products from CDBS. The educational agencies have assumed the costs and responsibilities for maintaining the local teams. A total of 50 deaf-blind students were served by these assessment teams in the following areas of California:

- National City (San Diego County)
- Chula Vista (San Diego County)
- Garden Grove (Orange County)
- East Valley SELPA (San Bernardino County)
- Los Angeles County Office of Education, El Camino Principal’s Administrative Unit, San Gabriel Valley Area (Los Angeles County)
- Morongo Valley USD (San Bernardino County)
- Butte County
- Sacramento County
- Fresno County
- Fresno USD (Fresno County)
- Stanislaus County

Teams from Nevada, Oregon, Arizona, and Idaho also participated in the trainings during the first year of the project to initiate their own statewide programs on transdisciplinary educational assessment. Membership of the teams consisted of: classroom teachers, parents, administrators, specialists (e.g., vision, hearing, communication, audiology, orientation and mobility, adapted physical education), school psychologists, therapists (e.g., physical and occupational), and school nurses.

Teams were provided a 2-3 day training in the Fall or Spring each year, followed by a statewide summer workshop with all teams together to develop linkage, to share expertise and to maximize the benefits of the consultant services purchased for this project.
The teams were trained in areas of collaboration with families, family interview techniques, assessment planning, medical issues, routine analysis, discrepancy analysis, IEP development and instructional planning and strategies. CDBS staff and consultants provided specific information on content in the areas of: vision, hearing, recreation and leisure, orientation and mobility, cognitive development, social skills training, communication, cultural competence, transition planning, employment training, and hearing aid management. Teams participated in activities to learn strategies for conflict resolution, working with difficult people, developing buy-in for suggestions made to site staff, team building, communication systems between team members, and team planning strategies.

For the summer workshops, each team prepared a video of their assessment and/or instructional questions for other teams and consultants to provide feedback on process and content. The videos represented the range of ages and functioning levels of the students served by the project as well as the range of issues facing the various teams (i.e., positive behavior change, communication, mobility, class size, medication side effects, etc.).

Benefits of the project included expansion of our sites for our Effective Practices Network, increased collaboration between families and professionals, identification of additional students who are deaf-blind, participation of families in the CDBS Family Network, as well as the progress made by the children based upon the new assessment and instructional planning process. Changes were also made in the state assessment center for deaf-blind children at the California School for the Blind. The center previously had a waiting list of children which averaged 18 months to 2 years. The waiting list is now down to a few months as local teams feel better able to assess in their own area. The assessment center has also shifted its services to locally-based assessments rather than center-based assessments. The specialists from the assessment center can now see the students in their own environments and can have more direct contact with the local service providers.

The participating teams tended to select students for assessment who had previously “fallen between the cracks” with unrecognized needs and inadequate services. The teams felt more confident in their abilities to address the needs of these children following participation in the project and generally reported an increase in services and progress for each child. Team members were very pleased with their efforts as a team as well as the changes in children which resulted from implementation of their suggestions. Family members indicated that they felt they were a valued member of the team following the team assessment and that their child made significant progress as a result.

Local or regional support teams were developed to continue the TEAM process in future years. CDBS staff will continue to provide training and technical assistance to these teams as additional needs are identified. The local agencies have developed policies and procedures to support the efforts of the teams and will provide the funding and release time needed to facilitate team planning and participation.
Ethnicity of Students Served By Project

- White
- Hispanic
- Black
- Hmong
- Filipino
- Chinese
- Vietnamese

Languages Spoken By Families

- English
- Spanish
- Hmong
- Tagalog
- Chinese
- Vietnamese

Regions of California Participating in Project

- Northern: Sacramento Co., Butte Co.
- Central: Fresno Co., Fresno USD, Stanislaus Co.
- Southern: National City, Chula Vista, Garden Grove, San Bernardino Co., Los Angeles County, Morongo Valley USD

Becoming a Team for the TEAM
Helen Porter, Fresno TEAM Member
Teacher of the Hearing Impaired,
Fremont County Office of Education

Put a hearing specialist, a vision specialist, an orientation and mobility specialist, a psychologist, a speech specialist, a special education teacher, the parent of a deaf-blind child, a nurse, and an adaptive physical education specialist into a small room together once a month and what do you get? Chaos? No! Many caring, knowledgeable people in the field of special education who have a lot of expertise and a huge desire to make a difference for some very unique children. When we were called together three years ago to participate in the TEAM project we were ready to work, but we really had no idea what part we would play in the whole synchronization of this assessment process. We all knew the Individual Education Plan process; we all had our own favorite assessments in mind for each of our areas. None of us had yet experienced the exponential complications that deaf-blindness brings to a child’s evaluation.

The idea of putting together a Transdisciplinary assessment and report for the deaf-blind child is great; we could all understand that. How do you put nine different viewpoints into a unified report? We couldn’t see that at first. Nine different opinions, nine areas of concern,
nine personalities, nine educational backgrounds...one report for one child? We who had been working within the special education system for years, still had a lot to learn about synchronized teamwork. We learned and practiced the order of the assessment process. We explained our roles in each step to each other. (Eighteen sets of toes to step on!) We made decisions about who would do which job on our first assessment. At almost every transition in the process we reached a point at which someone said, “What now?”, and the order of process and role definition had to be explained all over again. By the time we were ready to write our first report, none of us could quite understand that we really were supposed to write the report together, so we each gave our segments to one person to combine into something that addressed the whole child. It was rather like trying to dress a store mannequin from a scrap box. How much better the entire “outfit” flowed together when, on our second assessment, we worked together to make our ideas mesh into a total theme!

Sacramento County TEAM
Marianne Quinn
TEAM Member, School Nurse

The mechanics of the Transdisciplinary process can seem overwhelming to a group of professionals newly formed into an assessment team. When the Sacramento County Office of Education developed our deaf-blind assessment team, we were fortunate that most of our members were familiar with a Transdisciplinary approach for triennial assessments for severely handicapped students served through county programs. From the initial team of a nurse, speech and language specialist, special education teacher, teacher of the visually impaired and an orientation and mobility instructor, we grew to include another vision teacher, nurse and two psychologists. Fortunately, all the members of the team were comfortable with a collaborative approach to the assessment process. Our Transdisciplinary process is a modified version of the theoretical ideal due to distance between and time commitments of the members.

One of the fundamental reasons we were successful in our assessment process was that each individual member had respect for the other’s area of expertise and we also basically liked each other. No member felt threatened by another. We successfully integrated the classroom teacher into the assessment and report writing partly due to the individual rapport established by a member or members of the team with the teacher. Parents were receptive to the assessment for the same reason.

The students who were chosen for assessment were referred to the team by individual members, although one student was assessed by our team as part of a mediation agreement in another district. The person who referred the student usually made the initial contact with the parent and teacher in order to gain their cooperation for the assessment. At that point, the team members involved in the assessment met to establish a timetable. Included in this timetable were dates for assessment by the vision, speech and language specialist and psychologist (who generally liked to do their assessments together); the orientation and mobility assessment; a home visit and which members of the team were going to do it; compiling the report; and lastly, an IEP (Individual Education Plan). Usually, the team member who made initial contact with the parents confirmed these dates with the parents and teacher. The IEP was generally scheduled
approximately two months from the date the team met and the team utilized the Sacramento County Office of Education Permission for Assessment Form for the parents to sign. We have a template that we utilize for our report writing. The first page includes the personal data as well as any tests administered. The nurse is responsible for health information, reviewing medical records (including the vision and hearing diagnosis), immunizations, medications and obtaining recent medical information. The vision teacher does a functional vision exam. The speech and language specialist focuses on expressive and receptive communication. The psychologist covers cognitive, behavioral, and social characteristics of the student, as well as some fine motor and self-help skills. The orientation and mobility instructor reports on adaptive travel skills and gross motor development. The classroom teacher describes the educational and familial background, current educational background, and academic skills. Depending on the student, the teacher may report on fine motor and self-help activities also. The teacher also reviews progress made by the student on the previous IEP goals. In our experience, the nurse has been the contact person for the team regarding scheduling, transmitting information to other members, etc. because the nurse generally has more flexibility and is easier to reach than other team members who are involved with students on a scheduled basis.

The team meets on the predetermined date to compile the various reports into one coherent, non-redundant document. Each individual reads his/her report out loud. The other members of the team listen for clarity of expression, grammatical errors and to make sure that all the information is included in the appropriate section. Occasionally, for example, the psychologist may include in her report information that is more appropriate for the communication section. In cases like this, we literally will cut from one section and paste into another. Sometimes, the same material is covered in two sections and the team decides from which section of the report that information is best suited. Occasionally, a team member may have pertinent information regarding the student that should be included in another member’s section. The team then writes the summary and recommendations together, submits the report (with each individual page numbered consecutively in a prominent spot) to a wonderful secretary who puts the report in a professional format.

The Sacramento County Office of Education has had positive experience with the Transdisciplinary process for a variety of reasons. We like and respect each other. Because of that, we are committed to the timelines established by the team for the assessment process and consider it a high priority to honor those commitments. The template for report writing helps define the roles for the individual members. We have had support from our administrators and from California Deaf-Blind Services. Lastly, we feel strongly that this process helps provide a better educational program for our students. Our biggest obstacle to working together was time. At the most, in our jobs, we arranged meetings around three or four schedules; but with the team we had to bring out nine daily calendars to find one common time. It was impossible! We arranged for as many as possible to meet, and we tried to ensure that the key players were there.

Who were the key players on our team? It was clear that, because of the deaf and blind disabilities of the children being assessed, a vision specialist and hearing specialist should always be involved. It was also obvious from the beginning that we needed a leader at each meeting, someone who could act as the “tugboat” to keep us going and pull us out of distractions and
back on track. Essentially the people who naturally took on the leadership roles made sure the meetings were scheduled at a time convenient for them. As limited as all our schedules are, we had to strictly adhere to the time allotted for our meetings. Our “tugboats” were also our timekeepers, reminding us as we meandered that we only had so much time left to complete our tasks. Interestingly, we never pinpointed one person as our official leader, choosing instead to keep our roles in a round table format.

After our second year, our format became more like a wheel. The five people who had evolved as the most active participants formed the hub and they reached out to call on the other members as needed. This plan made logistics easier and the small group of five people were able to work more quickly than the larger group. Again, the question was raised; Who was essential for our core team besides a hearing specialist and vision specialist? A psychologist was necessary for issues around a child’s cognitive ability and behavior and how to assess those factors. The nurse was needed to help interpret medical terminology and manifestations of syndromes. Each of these four professionals had enough knowledge to realize when one of the other team members needed to be called upon. We also wanted the person who had the most experience and knowledge of the student who is deaf-blind.... the parent.

Our parent tells us how practical and realistic we are (or are not) as we toss around our theories and professional experiences. The parent speaks out to keep us focused on the child and family. When we are assessing and working with the child the parent on our team can act as facilitator for the parents who are facing the assessment of their child for the first time. Every member of our team is important for their knowledge and the role they play, but the parent provides an important link to the true reason we come together...the deaf-blind child and his or her family.

After three years of monthly meetings and trainings and assessments, have we made a difference for the children? We think so, and we continue to get occasional reports from the teachers and caretakers of the children we’ve seen. We are concentrating on getting the word to the 35 districts in Fresno County that we are ready and willing to assess any deaf-blind children whom they have discovered. The machinery of our team has been humming along smoothly in our third year, but we will need to continue practicing our steps of synchronization as we become more fluent in this assessment process.

Newport or Bust
Anita Aasen
Sacramento County TEAM Member, Speech Teacher

When our supervisor, Edie Martin, came to us and asked if we were interested in a five-day workshop given by California Deaf-Blind Services on the Transdisciplinary Education Assessment Model (TEAM), we had two questions: WHEN and WHERE?? August!! No way! Newport Beach at the Balboa Bay Club!! Well, maybe we could fit this into our busy schedule. The Sacramento team never regretted committing to this process.

There were actually two steps involved in the training. The first was a series of team meetings in Sacramento where we met Susan-Sternberg-White who seemed to know the answers to our
questions even before we asked. Cindi Avanzino gave us a different perspective on our students from the parent’s view. Last but not least, we met Maurice Belote. He had a way of making things fun, even during intensive six hour sessions.

These meetings enabled the team to discuss issues we might face in actual assessments such as dealing with difficult people, building motivation within our work core and providing the necessary resources to those who would receive our services. We discussed the Transdisciplinary Assessment Model currently in place in the Sacramento County Office of Education and how to improve it. The team also talked about how to provide training to additional key players and who to invite to Balboa.

If you’re going to spend five days at a conference, there’s no better place than the Balboa Bay Club. The only thing better than the scenery was the company. It was beneficial to hear teams discussing their Transdisciplinary processes and how problems were resolved. Each year we incorporated additional members into our team which increased our ability to provide comprehensive services. An activity our team especially enjoyed was the “Job Alike” group. This exercise gave us an opportunity to discuss specific issues in our area of expertise. Additionally, we benefited from working on improving our functional assessment of students with dual sensory impairments. We are continually working to improve this process!!!

The Sacramento team concurs that this three-year project was worth the time and energy invested. We gained an abundance of knowledge which has benefited our students, parents, teachers and ourselves. We remain in contact with both Cindi and Maurice who have given so much of themselves and whose support is greatly appreciated.

Thanks from the Sacramento TEAM!

- Vickie Aasen - Speech Therapist
- Terri Moss - Vision Specialist
- Marcia Bekins - Psychologist
- Juliana Murray - Psychologist
- Ann Hinshelwood - Vision Specialist
- Janelle Gee - Teacher
- Kathleen Deaver - O&M Specialist
- Marianne Quinn - Nurse
- Ellen Covairt - Nurse

**Mark Twain TEAM**

Donna Phillips, Garden Grove
TEAM Member, Vision Specialist

The deaf-blind TEAM training and conference in 1995/96 was very rewarding for the Mark Twain team. Our team is comprised of our principal, Dr. Virginia Ramos, the grandmother, Lupe Gonzales; psychologist, Alyce Erdsieck; vision consultant, Donna Phillips; speech and language pathologist; Linda Jones, school nurse practitioner, Carol Acton; Adaptive Physical Education
teacher, Dorothy Helfer and two teachers; Bob Pacho and Carol Tackett. Each member of our team has utilized the TEAM training in unique ways.

The principal of Mark Twain team stated that the training increased her awareness of deaf-blind issues and their use in Transdisciplinary training and the Individual Education Plan process. The parent as a crucial and equal member of our team was also emphasized. The training has helped staff equip the school with the needed references which meet the needs of our dual sensory impaired students. Virginia stated “The culminating experience of having the consumer come and speak to us at the summer conference was breathtaking. It brought tears of hope and joy to my eyes. Seeing these students demonstrate the gift of communication using coactive signing and interpreters was awesome. I will never be the same. As an instructional leader I will promote these strategies and continue to stay connected with our trainers, Susan Sternberg-White and Debbie Roseborough”

Alyce, our psychologist, is working with the parents and staff at Mark Twain on a book for each child to carry to each new teacher. It contains, among other things, a personal and family history contributed by the parents. Alyce solicits family input during assessments, including triennials. Alyce has presented workshops on the parent role in assessment to groups such as The California Association of School Psychologists (CASP) and Team of Advocates for Special Kids (TASK).

Donna, our vision consultant has increased the number of home interviews with parents and care providers. She works more closely with classroom teachers and other team members during the triennial assessment process. She has coordinated the use of several assessment tools such as the INSITE Developmental checklist (SKI-HIGH), and the Oregon Project for Visually Impaired Children.

Linda, our speech pathologist has utilized an on-going task analysis of the functional skills model in her classroom therapy and for assessment of setting and skills. Linda feels that overall this model has more application for the student, teacher, and parent follow-through than the traditional isolated pull- out model of service and assessment.

Carol, our nurse has worked with the team in assessing students and doing reports. She has an increased awareness of consistent communications with families and home hospital settings.

Dorothy, our APE teacher has worked with other team members during her assessment process. She also incorporates more task analysis in her goals.

Bob Pacho, a teacher at Twain, feels that communication has increased among our team members as well as more of an exchange of ideas and thoughts.

Carol Tackett, a teacher at Twain, attended the van Dyke conference and loves the programming ideas that she got from the deaf-blind trainings. She has increased the number of home interviews as well. Each team member has used the training information in unique and creative ways. Our team is now closer and more effective than ever before.
San Bernardino Schools TEAM  
Thomas Ryerson, TEAM Member  
School Psychologist  

Having had the opportunity to be involved in the Transdisciplinary Educational Assessment Model (TEAM) trainings the past three years has been a great source of valuable information and help to us here at San Bernardino County Schools. Of course, not only the TEAM members of San Bernardino County Schools have benefited but also the children and the families whom we serve. The INSITE trainings and the availability of materials which has been provided has been extremely beneficial in helping us work with our families and their very “special” children. Often in desperate need of securing services and/or individual assistance, it is important for the children and their families to know that these types of services are available and will continue to be easily accessible.

Often, it seems, one meets with some resistance when the attempt is made to get a variety of educators together (especially, those who come from different disciplines) in order to form a Transdisciplinary team. Time is always a factor for everyone and sometimes administrative support can be wanting. Fortunately, we have had a great deal of administrative support here within San Bernardino County. This makes it easy to find the necessary time whenever the team has been asked to help, particularly since our team is derived of professionals who cross various programs and schedules. With the support we receive, the TEAM members feel as though they can realistically make a concerted effort (and meet with success) in order to provide information, assess a student, meet with parents, or consult with teachers. The TEAM trainings have been very successful showing us ways which promote and encourage this process.

Additionally, my involvement in the TEAM trainings has also given us the opportunity to meet other professionals from a variety of districts. We often are working in our own “world” so having that fresh insight from other individuals, who also work with the same population, is invaluable.

Parents and teachers have increasingly asked for assistance and have expressed their appreciation for the input which they have received. So it would appear that our work as a team (TEAM) has not gone unnoticed. But isn’t this the real purpose? To benefit the children and the families whom we serve! And that is what makes this really enjoyable.

Summer TEAM Training  
Les Smith, Stanislaus County TEAM Member  
Deaf and Hard of Hearing Teacher  

Five members of Stanislaus County Office of Education’s (SCOE) Special Education Department were able to participate in last summer’s TEAM training for the first time. SCOE has identified seven students who are within our area so there was a need for qualified training. We were rather “green” since we had just been introduced to the TEAM concept. Nonetheless, we were able
to have a complete team represented. It was composed of a Vision Specialist; Judi Baggese, a Resource Specialist; Gail Bettencourt-Claudle, a Psychologist; Deborah Hoagland, a Hearing Specialist; Les Smith, and a parent Deanna Mello. We came with many questions about the function and organization of our team. We were having difficulty with this because most of our deaf-blind referrals were already being served under a team approach. The problem became differentiating between our existing procedures, the Individual Education Plan process, and the TEAM approach. The California Deaf-Blind Services team was especially helpful in assisting us to sort out things. I suppose the most important thing we learned was that there was no single formula for building a team. The process seemed more evolutionary, depending on the individual needs of each participating county. It was helpful to listen to other teams report their progress (and tribulations) over the past year. We were relieved that we didn’t have to report our own attempts at forming a TEAM which consisted of a lot of meetings which only seemed to generate more questions. At last we were getting some answers!

The second and third day breakout sessions were very informative but wish they could have been longer as there was so much information to absorb (thank God for handouts). Our Team split up and attended most of the lectures. When we reassembled before lunch, we were able to share what we had learned with each other.

The third and final day was also enlightening. Deaf-Blind Service Team’s skit was hilarious! All the staff did a great job showing us how things can sometimes be in the classroom. We’ve decided that Maurice Belote gets the Oscar for his portrayal of a deaf-blind student trying to make sense out of classroom procedures.

Probably one of the most useful discussions was watching people who are deaf-blind communicate through an interpreter. It was also nice to see that our non-communicative toddlers actually could learn to communicate, become more independent and more capable of making decisions for themselves. It was a nice conclusion to three days of intense focus.

Of course not enough can be said about the location, the good food, and hospitality we received while we were there. A lot was accomplished and we thank California Deaf-Blind Services for allowing us to participate!