

The Purpose of This Monograph

Cynthia L. Ingraham

It has been more than half a century since Robert Smithdas became the first deafblind person to obtain a Master's degree. He attended college with the support of a 1:1 attendant and a host of classmates and volunteers who made certain that all his textbooks, many of his assignments and exams were available to him in braille. This accomplishment was thought to be rare and unlikely even though some 50 years prior, Helen Keller had obtained an undergraduate degree with the assistance of Anne Sullivan serving as her 1:1 attendant.

Today, there are a number of deafblind students who are forging their own way through secondary and post-secondary education programs without the support of a 1:1 attendant or seemingly any accommodations beyond preferential seating, materials in alternate format and the occasional interpreter. Unlike Helen Keller and Robert Smithdas, many of these students are often not given a chance to live up to high expectations. Too often, today's deafblind students are misplaced in programs that do not meet their individual support needs and do not challenge them academically. For the very few who are placed within integrated classrooms and provided with access to the same scholarly material as their peers who are not disabled, their access to other areas of the curriculum that focus on developing social skills, independent living and travel skills, and vocational exploration opportunities are limited at best.

This monograph has assembled together student and parent biblioessays, position papers and reflective commentary from professionals who work with deafblind students. For the students profiled in this monograph, like many deafblind students, access to academic achievement was often met with obstacles due to low expectations, inadequate support services and misgivings concerning the ambiguous characterization of deafblind individuals. The goal of this monograph is to open a dialogue among students, family members and professionals regarding the attested state of education for deafblind students whose academic potential is predicated on how they are viewed within the education system especially and society in general. This sample grouping of bright deafblind students offers a

foundation for evidence based research in the area of curriculum design which recognizes academic potential in all students irrespective of severity of disability or level of support required.

Advances in technology, understanding of cognitive development in children, and civil rights legislation for persons with disabilities have created an environment that is rich with potential for the millions of deafblind children and adults who face academic, vocational and social obstacles on a daily basis. However, legislation can only go so far to address the unconscious bigotries that are held by many in society toward those who think, speak or look differently.

The expectation of this monograph is that just as Helen Keller and Robert Smithdas demonstrated that when given appropriate educational opportunities deafblind students can excel; educators and parents will see that today's deafblind students have the capacity to realize similar success which can in turn have a positive impact on future academic and employment outcomes for the deafblind students of tomorrow. As more stories of intellectually gifted, artistically talented and self-determined deafblind students are revealed, the greater the likelihood that societal attitudes will collimate civil rights legislation resulting in successful academic and employment outcomes for the large majority of deafblind students and not merely a select few.