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## Practice Perspectives

### Why It Is Important to Encourage Practicing Professionals to Become Authors

Jane N. Erin

In February of 2009, the *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness (JVIB)* published the first articles under the heading of Practice Perspectives. These articles featured work by three professionals who described how they taught reading to children or adults. Trina Brichter of West Virginia, Charla Rose Houston of North Carolina, and Lisa Serino of Arizona described how they motivated their reluctant readers. Their articles were the first of more than 65 Practice Perspectives that have been submitted for publication by practicing professionals to describe their successful practices. The feature reflects the commitment of the American Foundation of the Blind (AFB) to address the interests of professionals who work daily with people who have visual impairments. Since the inception of Practice Perspectives, *JVIB* has also continued to publish Practice Reports, which describe systematic exploration of a question or issue related to practice.

These last few years, it has been my good fortune to be *JVIB's* associate editor for practice. In that role I have considered ways to encourage practicing professionals to become authors, so that these skilled professionals would share their insights into instructional practices that worked for them. Unlike many authors of full-length research articles, whose jobs require writing and research, practice authors write mainly because they have experiences or ideas to share with colleagues and the people they serve. Some authors e-mailed me or talked with me at conferences to say, "I have an idea. Do you think this would make a good article?" Others submitted their

writing after reading the Information for *JVIB* Authors website at: <[www.afb.org/info/publications/jvib/for-jvib-authors/125](http://www.afb.org/info/publications/jvib/for-jvib-authors/125)>. Most submissions were revised one or more times before publication, which is common for peer-reviewed professional articles. For many authors, the peer review process was daunting: most did not have prior experience with an anonymous reviewer reading their material, but they accepted and sometimes welcomed the suggestions of outside reviewers as well as my own recommendations.

As a retired faculty member from The University of Arizona, now experiencing another retirement from my role as practice editor of *JVIB*, I sometimes reflect on the trail that our professional field has traveled since I entered the field of visual impairment in the 1970s. Topics that have been addressed by recent practice features speak to the degree to which the world of practicing professionals in visual impairment has changed since I entered it in 1972.

The 1970s marked a time when legislative foundations created a new world of opportunity for people with disabilities, including those with visual impairments. Families of children with visual impairments no longer had to exert time and energy to convince their educational systems to allow their students to enter public schools and to receive an appropriate education after the passage of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Legislative policy established equal opportunities for individuals with and without disabilities, supported by team planning with families and individualized goals for each student. As a teacher at the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children, I remember both the anticipation and concern about the goals I recommended at those first meetings with teams and families—my first IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) were more than 20 pages long!

Several recent practice authors have described the outcomes and challenges of im-

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plementing current systems of planning and service delivery, the foundations of which were created by this early legislation. Craig Phillips, Jeri Hile, and Traci Jardes described professional collaboration that effectively supported the team of a young man with deaf-blindness (2013). Superintendent William Daugherty of Texas School for the Blind (2014) described changes in their systems that created a strengthened linkage between the school and statewide educational agencies. Author Valery Kircher-Herring (2015), an orientation and mobility instructor, described the challenges in consistently interpreting the role of the orientation and mobility instructor in her state of Virginia. As evidenced by these authors, we now view team planning and systems development as important parts of providing long-term educational plans for students with visual impairments.

Similarly, rehabilitation law and policy, such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, also resulted in increased focus on preparing students for jobs. Recent practice items described how this focus has evolved into current practice. Author Jim Blackshear (2014) relates how he helped his students prepare for work through the expanded core curriculum. An article about the student teaching experience of a young woman who is blind, written by collaboratively by Thomas Oren and Maria McLeod (2011), describes the adaptations that were helpful for Ms. McLeod in successfully completing her student teaching. In the past, such adaptations may not have been supported under public policy, and individuals with vision loss might not have been considered eligible to student-teach and become teachers.

Perhaps the most visible changes in education and rehabilitation of people with visual impairments since the 1970s are related to technology. Beginning with the Optacon, the first device that allowed people who are blind to access print without the assistance of a sighted individual, new technology has been

produced at a rate that puts rabbits to shame. *JVIB* practice contributions testify to the wide variety of technologies that affect education and rehabilitation today, including the use of the iPad with students who have multiple disabilities, described by Laura Campana and Donald Ouimet (2015); use of a GPS system combined with braille output, Maya Delgado Greenberg and Jerry Kuns (2012); and the effects of introducing new technology to the Braille Challenge (Niebrugge, 2012). In the 1970s, who would have imagined the potential of technology in providing options for people with visual impairments to gain, store, and manage information?

Among the most significant changes that have taken place since the 1970s are professional roles and the development of innovative new ways to prepare vision rehabilitation therapists, teachers, orientation and mobility instructors, and low vision specialists. Many of us who are now retiring were prepared for our roles at a time when federal funds allowed large groups of new professionals to be prepared quickly; in my master's degree class, 21 individuals were supported by stipends for tuition while attending full-time classes for one year. Now opportunities for full-time study are less common, and professional preparation takes many different forms: online instruction, summer classes, and structured professional development have provided flexible options for professionals in many settings. In 2015, a practice item about a collaboration between New Mexico and Utah, author Hong Phangia Dewald and colleagues described an innovative approach to preparing professionals for the highly specialized role of teaching orientation and mobility to infants and toddlers.

In fact, the topic of professional change is a reminder that both researchers and practice authors will have an exceptional opportunity to present their work on personnel preparation in an upcoming issue of *JVIB*. The 2017 special issue of *JVIB* will focus on personnel

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preparation and professional development, a topic that includes not only formal preparation through universities but also other ways of expanding the skills and knowledge of professionals, including staff development, online programs that address specialized topics, and professionals and mentoring. If your agency, school, or research team has successfully prepared professionals through an approach that may be useful to others, now is the time to begin your writing. Submissions must be received by February 28, 2017, to be considered for this special issue, which we hope will provide new perspectives on the diverse ways that professionals are prepared in an era of technology and innovative communication—one that is very different from the way professionals were prepared in the 1970s.

Perhaps it is appropriate that I am completing my role as practice editor with the Special Issue on Aging and Vision. As a new retiree, I am reminded daily of the challenges and joys of being a senior citizen. The practice authors featured in this issue focus on how visual changes among older adults can be managed through effective communication in telehealth rehabilitation (Ihrig, 2016) and on changes in color perception that can occur in older adults as a result of medications (Rassi, Saint-Amour, & Wittich, 2016). Both reports convey the importance of assessment and ongoing interaction with older adults in facilitating optimum function.

It has been a great satisfaction to work with practice authors like those who contributed their work to this issue's practice section. I am especially grateful for the many practitioners who have taken on the challenge of the peer review process in the hope of seeing their words in print; I am also grateful for the more than 100 professionals who served as peer reviewers, often without prior experience with the review process.

The development of new practice features could not have taken place without the initial

wisdom of Natalie Hilzen, former director of AFB Press, and the support and insight of George Abbott, the current director of AFB Press. The section has benefitted immeasurably from the technical skills and editorial expertise of Rebecca Burrichter, senior editor for *JVIB*. The responsiveness of former Editor in Chief Diane Wormsley and current Editor in Chief Sandy Lewis has also helped to support the publication of practice.

It is a pleasure to welcome the journal's new Associate Editor for Practice Rona Poggrund, a professor in visual impairment at Texas Tech University. She brings to the role a rich background of teaching practice, scholarly production, and participation with the issues of our field. Now is an excellent time to consider your best ideas for writing. Dr. Poggrund will be ready to receive your articles beginning in January 2017!

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***Journal of Visual Impairment    Blindness***  
**2017 Special Issue on Personnel Preparation  
and Professional Development**

**Guest editor:** *Jane N. Erin, Ph.D.*, retired professor, The University of Arizona; editor emerita, *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness (JVIB)*; and practice editor, *JVIB*

The *Journal of Visual Impairment    Blindness (JVIB)* invites papers addressing a variety of topics related to the preparation and professional development of individuals who work with people with visual impairments. Research about innovative and effective personnel preparation in universities is welcome; in addition, professional writing about staff development and public education programs that develop understanding of learning processes of people with visual impairment is also appropriate for this issue.

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Personnel preparation
- Professional and staff development
- Personnel qualification and certification
- Internships and practica
- Accreditation for preparation programs
- Instructional standards for specialized skills areas such as assessment, technology, and daily living skills
- The state of university curriculum

International contributions are also welcome. Practice papers, as well as conceptual and research papers, are also invited.

Guidelines for contributors are available from AFB Press, American Foundation for the Blind: website: <[www.afb.org/jvib\\_guidelines.asp](http://www.afb.org/jvib_guidelines.asp)>; phone: 212-502-7651; e-mail: <[press@afb.net](mailto:press@afb.net)>. The maximum length of full manuscripts is 5,000 words. Maximum length of Research Reports, Practice Reports, Practice Perspectives, and Around the World is 2,500 words.

Submissions should be sent to: <[jvib@fsu.edu](mailto:jvib@fsu.edu)>. Submitted manuscripts will undergo standard peer review.