ON THE NEED FOR USABLE VIDEOS FOR DEAF-BLIND STUDENTS AND HOW IT CAN BE MET WITH CAPTIONING AND DESCRIPTION

INTRODUCTION

The Described and Captioned Media Program (DCMP) is a national non-profit that is federally funded to serve as a free-loan media library of accessible educational videos for K–12 students who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, or deaf-blind. DCMP recently conducted interviews in order to determine how accessible videos are used in the classroom with students who are deaf-blind and what other options need to be included in order for these videos to meet the widest need possible.

In April of 2009 DCMP advisory board member Jamie Pope (Executive Director of AADB) presented at the 2009 DCMP advisory board meeting on the needs for captioning and description of deaf-blind children and adults.

During the presentation itself, Ms. Pope offered up several suggestions toward making accessibility options more usable for teachers of students who are deaf-blind, including how to alter captioning and description by providing more user-driven controls. For example, since the deaf-blind community is diverse, it is difficult to offer one option from which everyone can benefit; however, if the accessibility options can be navigated and changed by the user as needed, there is capability to have captions and description benefit more students. The following topics were discussed:

- Font size of captions
- Color of captions
- Speed (captions rewritten in fewer words, audio spoken at a slower rate)
- High-contrast captions
- Captions remain in one place (Consistency helps those with low and tunnel vision follow the captions with ease without making adjustments and trying to read—or find—the words with different background or placement.)
- Description should be spoken and recorded clearly, without slurring or vague speech
- Option to go back and repeat the description
- Captioning of the description (Often those with low vision cannot make out the picture, or they take a little more time to recognize what is being shown)

These suggestions were taken into consideration while formulating interview questions. (See section INTERVIEW/SURVEY QUESTIONS.)

CONTACTS

Subsequently, and at Ms. Pope's recommendation, the DCMP contacted two individuals at the National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness regarding dissemination of a survey to selected members in the professional community.

It was recommended that instead of a survey, a telephone interview be conducted with a variety of members in the field. With this in mind, people from/in the following groups were contacted:

- Four teachers of the deaf-blind
- Two school superintendents
- Three individuals from national organizations and groups (AADB, Charge Syndrome Foundation, and the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf: Deaf-Blind Members)
- One professor who conducted research on literacy media used with students who are deaf-blind

All participants were asked the questions in the following section. Their recommendations appear in the section RECOMMENDATIONS.

INTERVIEW/SURVEY QUESTIONS

During the months of April and May, the DCMP conducted interviews to garner answers to the following questions:

1. Do you know of any teacher, yourself included, using video-based materials—like VHS, DVDs, CD-ROMs, and streaming files—in the classroom with students who are deaf-blind?

    (a) If yes:

    (1) Would you tell me about that use? (The types of students, their age, grade level, present cognitive disabilities, etc.)
    (2) Is this media captioned and/or described?
        a. If so, from where has this content been obtained, and do you know the value or degree of success that stems from its use?
        b. If not, how does the teacher(s) use the media ("as is," pausing the showing to add explanation, etc.)?
    (3) Is there potential use for a free-loan collection of described and captioned media for students who are deaf-blind? How many of these students may benefit from such a service?
        a. If yes, are there special considerations in captioning and/or description for making the media more accessible? (See chart below)
        b. If no, the interview is concluded.

    (b) If no:
    (1) Any comments about why you think they do not?
    (2) Is there potential use, if any, for a free-loan collection of described and captioned media for students who are deaf-blind?
        a. If yes, are there special considerations in captioning and/or description for making the media more accessible? (See chart below)
        b. If no, the interview is concluded.

CAPTIONS	DESCRIPTION
Font	Volume
Size	Rate
Placement	Pitch
Color	Expanded description
Alignment	Captioned description
Identification of non-dialogue sounds	Other:
Other:	

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key recommendations and comments from the group include the following:

> *"What I am looking for is not out there; it is in me."*
> *-Helen Keller*

- Add a description transcript and a caption script with every title being made available with captions and description
- An option to turn description on or off as necessary
- Expanded description, especially for students who are deaf-blind (once they grasp that the production is being paused visually to be expanded upon audibly)
- Different levels of description; maybe "simplified description"
- Any CD-ROMs used with students who are deaf-blind should be compatible with screen readers
- Rate and size are the main problems with captions
- Rate and vocabulary are the main problems with description
- Translucent boxes with subtitles do not work for students who are visually impaired; high-contrast, or at least black boxes, work better
- Recommended pre-teaching and conclusion on media items, described and captioned, for students who are deaf-blind (as most have cognitive delays/impairments)
- Everything should be open-captioned so students can pause the media and read the captions
- As there is media for interpreters, there should be more media for interveners

The recommendations provided by each group were fairly similar and consistent with one another.

CONCLUSION

One theme was persistently repeated in every interview: The more accessibility options a video has, the better it is for both the teacher and the student. User control is essential. This cannot be stressed enough. Due to the wide spectrum of disabilities—including vision loss, hearing loss, cognitive delays, and behavioral problems–and access to media items with accessibility options, the more options that are present, the more combinations can be made to meet each student's unique needs.

Out of the 10 million students in America with vision and/or hearing loss, only 1% of these are deaf-blind, and of this 1%, a small part of it can benefit from the use of audio-visual media in a classroom setting—as it currently stands. However, all participants agreed that if more accessibility options were

present on video—not just for students who are deaf-blind, but also for students who are learning English as a second language, are slower learners, have attention disorders, are deaf, blind, visually impaired, hard of hearing, and/or mainstreamed—all students can benefit from a teacher being able to choose (a combination of) which accessibility options will be used with his/her students based on student needs.

More research needs to conducted regarding how to prioritize such an undertaking. While most participants agreed more options needs to be available, they differed on which options would be essential as opposed to luxuries.