



Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired Outreach Programs

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Five Phases of Educational Treatment Used in Active Learning

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Abstract: This article shares information from Dr. Lilli Nielsen's book, *Are You Blind?* It focuses on five phases of educational approaches that teachers are to use in working with children if they are using an Active Learning theory approach.

Dr. Lilli Nielsen is the author of many books that look at the way children with visual impairments learn, especially those with other disabilities. Over a period of more than twenty years, she has developed her approach to working with these children that is called Active Learning. This approach is based on the notion that all children learn exclusively by doing until the developmental age of about three. The actions of examining and experimenting with objects using their bodies, is the foundation for the development in cognitive, motor, problem-solving and social skills. She believes that our role in helping children to learn is to create environments that build on skills the child already has, to encourage him to use his body and mind for higher-level tasks. In her book, *Are You Blind?* She discusses five phases of educational treatment that teachers are to use in working with children. This article will examine these five phases and share some of the highlights of this book.

It is important to note that before beginning to work with any child, a thorough assessment of his/her skills and emotional development is needed, so that you know where to begin. If you start too high you will likely frustrate the child and if you start too low, you run the risk of losing the child's interest and motivation. Dr. Nielsen has developed a comprehensive assessment tool, the "Functional Scheme" (Nielsen, 2000), and a curriculum to help teachers called the FIELA Curriculum – 730 Environments (Nielsen, 1999).

Phase I: Technique of Offering

Children at this Level

Children at this level of development may seem reluctant to do much. They are often passive or engaged in self-stimulatory behaviors. Their world exists for the most part within the confines of their own bodies. They seldom seek out others for social interactions and may have limited experiences interacting with objects and their environment. This generally occurs because of motor disabilities or health issues that make movement difficult, and/or sensory disabilities that

prevent the child from being enticed by the sights and sounds that motivate a typically developing child.

The Role of the Adult

At this stage, Lilli recommends using the technique of offering with the child. First of all the adult will need to set up an environment, such as a Resonance Board with many motivating objects, so that the child can come in contact with them incidentally if he or she makes any movement. The adult will also be with the child, either sitting alongside the child or supporting the child in a sitting position from behind if the child trusts the adult enough for this close contact. If not, the adult needs to respect the child's need for distance and only move in as close as the child seems comfortable with at any time. One of her goals at this level is just to have the child stay in the same room with her.

The adult's first job is to simply offer the child toys and objects by placing the objects under the child's hand. The child may touch or grasp the objects when and how he or she pleases. The adult does not talk to the child while the child explores the object in his or her own way. If the child drops or pitches the object, the adult simply offers another object. While offering the objects, the adult also must observe and take note of the objects the child seems to enjoy and those he seems to dislike. What is it about the object that seems to interest the child? What are the actions the child takes on the object? How does the child explore the object and with what physical actions (banging, mouthing, throwing, rolling, etc.)? What distresses the child and how does he show that distress? Does the child show interest in contacting the adult? How does he do that?

Purpose of the Offering Technique:

- To convince the child that he can trust the adult has no intention of demanding that he does anything at all. Lilli's only demand is that she wants to play in the same room as the child.
- To observe the reactions of the child.
- To learn about the child's likes and dislikes.
- To find out what may frighten the child most.
- To learn about the child's way of contacting, using this to assess the emotional level of the child.
- To introduce sound self-activity.
- To provide the child with the basis for successful introduction to phase II.

Points that Lilli Emphasizes at this Level:

- Do not move too close to the child too fast — move in a little and watch his reaction.
- Display an active and positive interest in whatever the child is doing.
- Some children will not initiate play until they feel certain the adult has left the room. Periodically stop playing for a minute to a minute-and-a-half and just sit silently to see how the child responds. Does his behavior appear to be an invitation for you to continue your activity?
- Everything the adult does should be done as an "offer." If the child attempts to initiate an activity, don't make a big deal about it; act as if he did that every day.

Phase II: Technique of Imitation

Children at this Level

Children at this level are generally somewhat more interested in things outside their own bodies, although they still may exhibit withdrawal, especially with unfamiliar people or people they do not trust. Their interests may also be very limited in scope. They may continue to show a lot of self-stimulatory behaviors, but are more aware of others and can be enticed into interactions with trusted people. They typically don't initiate many interactions or have limited ways to make contact with others. They are able to play more with objects, but their play with others is more at a level of parallel play rather than interactive play. They also may have only a few actions they perform on objects and have only limited participation in activities. At this point the child may seem unsure of himself in many of his actions.

The Role of the Adult

At this level the adult continues to set up the environment with objects and activities that are highly motivating to the child. For example, if the child likes an object that vibrates, the adult will try to find many different objects that vibrate in differing ways. If the child is particularly fond of a certain color or texture, the adult finds things that seem to expand the child's experience with other objects that share that quality. One child we know liked banging on and playing with disposable aluminum pie pans. The quality about these objects that seemed to be of most interest to him was the sound they made and that they could be bent to change shapes. He might also have enjoyed that they were lightweight, shiny and cool to the touch. Other things that could be offered to him would include: many sizes and types of metal containers such as individual pot pie pans, turkey roaster, tin cookie canister, metal coffee can; sheets of shiny aluminum foil; wire whisks; metal springs; metal spoons; metal ball bearings or Chinese Mediation balls; and other shiny and/or pliable materials.

In this phase the adult begins by imitating the actions of the child on the objects. For this reason, it is a good idea to have multiple numbers of an object. If the child bangs on the object, so does the adult; simply playing alongside the child at the same level. After a time, the adult can introduce a new action with the object and see if the child will imitate him. If the child does, great! If not, the adult should go back to imitating the action of the child again. This is a conversation of a sort, a turn-taking game. "You show me something, and I pay attention and copy you. Now I show you something. Maybe you will pay attention to and copy me. Now it's your turn again."

The Purpose of Imitating

- To increase the child's interest in activities happening nearby.
- To increase the child's ability to take initiatives.
- To increase the child's belief in himself.
- To introduce activities and movements not as yet performed by the child.

Points Lilli Emphasizes at this Level are:

- Imitation is primarily through auditory and tactile sensory modalities.

- If the child throws an object, don't correct him/her! Pick up the object, repeat your play and then place it before the child. It is best to have two of each object — one for child and one for adult.
- The adult should begin by imitating child, then add some more constructive games (e.g., putting materials together or into one another) briefly before returning to the action the child began.
- An increase in crying or screaming in a child who was doing that behavior before should be read as a positive “call for attention” from the adult.
- Your goal is to give the child the opportunity to discover that being with the adult is “pleasant and exciting, and may include new auditory and tactile experiences.”
- You also want the child to have the opportunity to “discover that he can take initiatives and that doing so leads to the ability to master something in his surroundings.”
- He learns he has more actions to contribute to the interaction. This provides him with growing self-identity and ability to initiate interactions with other people.

Phase III: Technique of Interaction

Children at this Level

Children at this level are beginning to be interested in more interactive types of games (Lilli calls these “you to me and me to you” games). For example, you might have a bowl with marbles that you both hold on to and take turns pushing and pulling it back and forth between you. You want to see the child attempting to take a turn. The child may not necessarily initiate these games in the beginning at this level, but can be more easily engaged with others. He may, at times, want to take time out for his own exploration of an object, but will come back to the adult to share his interest after a time. This is the child that is interested in his environment and the actions of others and so is ready to begin learning that he can help others. This is a child who may also need support to transition from an enjoyable, interactive activity to a new activity without the adult. Some children at this level may fuss when an interaction comes to an end. It is as if the child were saying, “I want you to stay” and signals an emerging self-identity. The child begins more and more to attempt to make contact with others as he progress at this level.

The Role of the Adult

The adult sets up situations and environments that will foster interactive games. It is important for the adult to be patient and wait for the child to take his turn without trying to persuade him to act. Simply be quiet and still. If the child is trying to complete a motor skill that he has not yet mastered but matches his motor development, the adult can say, “You can help me.” If the child will use his hands, the adult needs to provide every opportunity for the child to familiarize himself with the activity and participate, and to complete the moment when he wants to do it. If the child will not use his hands, the adult can model the activity as close to the child's hands as the child will allow. This allows the child to have control of his hands, and he can withdraw them when he needs a break. Lilli also cautions us to stop playing the game with the child while the play is still enjoyable. If it goes on longer than the child enjoys, the child may be unwilling to continue to interact with us. Another point Lilli makes is about the adult giving the child “presents.” Say “I put milk in your cup,” instead of “There is milk in your cup.” The whole notion of “yours versus mine” helps promote the child's self-identity. Use a phrase like, “Your toys are on your shelf and my toys are on my shelf.” The adult also prepares the child when it is almost

time for the interaction to come to an end so that the child does not see the adult as rejecting him.

Purpose:

- To help the child to learn sound dependency on one or several people.
- To help the child to initiate interactions.
- To enhance the child's development of self-identity.
- To give the child the basis for social development.

Points Lilli Emphasizes at this Level:

- Focus in on "you to me and me to you" games.
- If the child becomes interested in something he wants to explore on his own, this should be respected. Wait patiently for a blind child to use his fingers to "look" at the object.
- It is important always to wait for the child to initiate his part of the game.
- Complete an action that may be too complex for the child to do, but at the same time tell the child he can "help" with the action.
- Move at a slow pace. Know when the child "has enough to consider for a while."
- Tell the child before you come to the end of the activity that you will be leaving and that you are going on to a new activity. He may continue to play on his own if he chooses to.
- If the child begins to say "more" or "again," names the adults, or seeks out adult attention, he is ready for Phase IV while continuing with Phases I-III.

Phase IV: Technique of Sharing the Work

Children at this Level

The purpose of using the techniques of phase I, II, and III focuses on the child's emotional development. It is done by establishing "an exchange and balance between periods of interaction and sound self-activity, between dependence and independence." In the next phase, the child is at a place where he is ready to learn that taking action and interacting with others does not mean that he has to do everything or do it perfectly. The child exhibits confidence in performing some actions or activities. He has some beginning understanding of time and a sequence of events. He may appear threatened when familiar activities are changed slightly.

The Role of the Adult

Set up environments and activities that give the child tasks to do that are based on the things the child has experienced success in doing. In the beginning the tasks can be completed in a few seconds up to a few minutes without any consideration for how perfectly the child can complete them. The adult needs to let the child know which part of the tasks he will complete and which part the adult will complete. If the child is reluctant to do the task after being asked several times, the adult can suggest they do it together. The adult must make sure to give the child plenty of time to complete the task, but if he still won't do it, consider if the task is too hard. In complex tasks the adult may need to use various techniques (e.g. offering, imitation, etc.) for different parts. Let the child know how long the task will last and what will follow. This is when you can begin to teach time concepts like yesterday, today, tomorrow, now and next. It is important to have an established schedule.

Purpose:

- To increase the child's experience of success.
- To involve the child in new social relationships.
- To increase the child's interest in acquiring new abilities.

Points Lilli emphasizes at this level:

- Help the child learn that to be the one who does something does not necessarily mean that one has to do everything or do it perfectly.
- The abilities the child has been successful with in previous phases form the basis for deciding which activities can be used for the technique of sharing work.
- Keep tasks short (few seconds or minutes) initially, accept whatever the child does as correct.
- Explain each time which parts of the activity the adult will perform and what the child will do.
- Give plenty of time for the child to initiate the task and wait silently and calmly — be neutral.
- Let the child know how long the activity is supposed to last.
- Try to keep the environment the same or only make gradual changes.
- Before going to more complicated and longer lasting activities the choice of technique for every part of the activity should be given careful consideration.

Phase V: Technique of Consequence

Children at this Level

Before using techniques at this level the child needs to have an emotional age of two years. This is when the child is ready to learn that his own actions have consequences. The child must show some confidence in what he can do and feel secure interacting with others generally. He may still have some difficulty initially in handling changes, but begins to show more coping skills at this level.

The Role of the Adult

The adult needs to model how consequences work for the child through a discussion of the adult's actions. By this I mean things like saying, "I have to stop playing and cook dinner, or you will not have anything to eat." Or, "I need to ask you to wait; I need to find a clean shirt for you." Then after a time the adult begins to set up situations where the child can experience the consequences of his actions. For example, "If you want me to pour more milk, you must put your glass on the table." The adult may accept a less than perfect response from the child, and may need to offer encouragement either through prompting or modeling. For example, "See you can put your glass here." The child begins to understand choice-making.

Purpose:

- To help the child to endure meeting demands.
- To help the child to endure changes in life.

- To help the child to feel self-confident, which is fundamental to the ability to make decisions about his own life.
- To establish the basis for the sense of responsibility.

Points Lilli Emphasizes at this Level:

- When the child feels secure and confident in performing different activities and has received information about the consequences involved in activities, it should be possible to let the child experience consequences. BUT only through activities the child is able to perform.
- As the child is able to fulfill more and more requests he may demand more attention — don't overly praise but rather act as if it is the most natural thing in the world that he can do something.
- As independence increases the child may be able to tolerate that he sometimes is unable to succeed in what he intends to do. He will become better able emotionally to accept significant changes in his life. As he moves higher, he will be able to make friends with other people, decide when faced with situations that he has a choice.

Conclusion

Are You Blind? is a book that offers a great deal of guidance in working with a child who is at an emotional developmental age under age three for a typical child. By using the five phases of educational treatment Dr. Nielsen outlines in this book, we can help the child grow emotionally. When the child reaches the emotional age of three, then new approaches to learning may be available to him. We can begin to consider incorporating other more traditional ways of teaching into our plans with these children beyond simply learning by doing.



Figure 1 IDEAs that Work logo.

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