**From the BLENNZ Curriculum**

Learning and Teaching in the Expanded Core Curriculum

Ākonga who are blind, deafblind or have low vision require a curriculum that is responsive to their unique learning needs.

This section explores key areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum:

* communication
* sensory efficiency
* physical abilities
* orientation and mobility
* social skills
* life skills
* assistive technology
* career and future planning.

# Communication

## What is communication about?

Communication is interaction between people enabling them to relate to others and to participate and contribute in their whānau and community. Effective communication is dependent on expressive and receptive modes with a mutual understanding between participants.

## Why is it important?

Communication is one of the ways we receive information about our environment and the means by which we interact with or respond to our environment. For all ākonga to be connected, included, heard and respected they need to express themselves in a variety of ways, through language, behaviours, creative expression, gesture, movement, voice, touch, hands, or facial expression. Communication encompasses social skills and concept development.

## What are the components of communication?

Communication may be verbal and non-verbal and may include:

* oral language/vocalisation
* written language
* braille, large print
* sign language
* manual alphabet
* body signs
* body language
* physical indicators such as:
  + breathing
  + gesture
  + facial expression
* object communication (tangible symbols/tactile communication)
* picture / tactile communication (Picture Exchange Communication - PECs; Tactile
* Exchange Communication - TECs)
* symbolic representation
* augmentative devices/systems
* electronic devices/systems.

## Learning and teaching:

BLENNZ ākonga will:

* engage in an appropriate literacy programme.
* be in an environment that effectively supports their individual learning.
* be able to express themselves effectively in a range of contexts, verbally or nonverbally as listed above.
* have access to appropriate technology and/or resources to support the development of their communication skills.

BLENNZ teachers will have the knowledge and skills to:

* assess and identify the most appropriate learning media for the ākonga’ specific needs
* teach literacy through tactual modes including braille
* support the literacy development of ākonga who have low vision
* facilitate the creation of the learning environment to best support individual learning
* support the assessment and provision of the appropriate technology and/or resources to support the development of communication skills.

# Sensory Efficiency Skills

## What Is Sensory Efficiency?

Sensory efficiency is

* Using multisensory integration:
  + to complete a task as effectively and efficiently as possible using vision, hearing, gustatory, olfactory, tactual, movement (proprioceptive and vestibular)
  + for concept development, learning, and accessing the environment.

It includes learning how to use optical devices, hearing aids, and augmentative communication devices. Learning how to integrate all remaining senses to counter the impact of any missing or impaired sense is integral to sensory efficiency. Sensory efficiency skills are valuable life-long tools. All ākonga who are low vision, blind, or deafblind need to learn how to use their auditory, tactual, and/or visual senses to maximize their access to the environment.

# Why are Sensory Efficiency Skills important?

Ākonga who are low vision, blind, or deafblind need to develop sensory efficiency skills to maximise:

* effective and efficient access to the environment
* use of auditory and tactual information in order to make sense of the world and access learning
* the use of any vision capability through meaningful activities
* efficient use of able senses to provide increased access to the environment as well as increased independence and development of identified skills.

# What are the components of Sensory Efficiency?

Instruction and skills in:

* use of optical, hearing, and augmentative communication devices e.g. using a range of devices such as a monocular telescope to identify distant information for ākonga who are low vision
* using the sense of touch to learn about a wide variety of objects and materials for ākonga who are blind. These tactile skills are necessary to develop concepts which are prerequisites to using braille and tactile graphics
* integration of all senses to compensate for the impact of any missing or impaired sense e.g. tactual, gustatory, olfactory, hearing, to identify one’s personal possessions, or to identify familiar people without visual cues.

# Learning and Teaching:

BLENNZ ākonga will:

* use their most appropriate mode for learning relevant to the context
* acquire sensory skills to access a range of stimulating and relevant learning environments
* problem solve potential challenges in accessing information.

BLENNZ teachers will have knowledge and skills to:

* assess ākonga using a range of processes and tools, such as:
  + functional vision observation and assessment
  + tactual observation and assessment
  + learning Media Assessment
* assess and identify the most appropriate learning medium for the ākonga’s specific needs and to support learning in this medium
* support sensory skill development across a range of environments
* assess and develop learning environments to meet ākonga need
* foster the development of ākonga advocacy to manage their learning environment.

# Physical Abilities

## What are physical abilities about?

Physical abilities refer to how a person moves their body, or parts of their body, in space. Being able to practise and develop quality movements from a young age, such as with reflex integration, trunk stability and early limb strength, assists in developing more refined physical abilities (such as appropriate posture gait and balance). This in turn provides ease of movement, and confidence in the use of body strength, endurance, flexibility, balance and coordination. This enables ākonga to gain increasing motor and manipulative control and gain confidence in the use of their bodies, across all environments.

## Why are they important?

Physical abilities, including the physical, mental and emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of hauora are important for the health and wellbeing of people of all ages. Movement can be enjoyable, contribute to self-confidence and improve health and fitness. Poor physical abilities can result in increased energy to use movement, and stressors and strains are more likely.

At an early age, the development of refined physical abilities can be influenced by a lack of visual stimuli and the opportunity to imitate the movement of others. Vision gives motivation for self-initiated physical activity which in turn promotes the optimum development of such things as: Body awareness, posture, sensory integration, motor skills and mobility. Encouraging development in the area of physical ability, therefore, has positive impacts for all areas of development, including the future fitness and health and wellbeing of the ākonga. (Rosen, 1977; Ferrell, 1995; Strickling and Progrund 2002)

## What are the components of physical abilities?

Our physical abilities are all the factors that influence our refinement of movement i.e. how we move our bodies:

* Body awareness
* Spatial awareness
* Functional abilities
* Postural control / balance
* Locomotors abilities
* Strength and endurance
* Gross and fine motor skills
* Coordination
* Agility
* Endurance

## Expectations for ākonga.

BLENNZ ākonga will:

* be active across a range of environments throughout their lives, starting from birth
* move confidently according to their own potential
* continue to acquire new skills
* have access to appropriate equipment /or resources to support their physical requirements.

## BLENNZ teachers will have skills and knowledge to:

* understand the development of movement
* understand the respective roles of movement specialists including DOMS, Physiotherapists, Occupational therapists, visiting neurodevelopmental therapists.
* encourage active motor play across a range of movement areas from birth
* identify and support adapted and modified activities:
  + use of light, sound, colour
  + goal ball
* be proficient at using descriptive and directional words.

# Developmental Orientation and Mobility

## What is Developmental Orientation and Mobility about?

The emphasis is on ākonga developing skills to become efficient in movement and an understanding of the environments in which they will travel. Therefore, Developmental Orientation and Mobility (DOM) primarily focuses on optimising purposeful movement (Daly & Moore, 1998).

Orientation is the understanding, or cognitive component, of where you are and what is around you. It encompasses the use of language, concept development and an awareness of self, and involves the use of the senses to establish position in space and relationships with other significant objects in the environment. Mobility is knowing how to move purposefully in the environment. It is the physical part of moving from one place to another.

## Why is it important?

The DOM curriculum covers a number of subject areas to support BLENNZ ākonga to develop efficient movement skills as well as their self-motivated travel in a range of environments. DOM, being able to move and travel when vision impairment is present, impacts directly on a ākonga's ability to contribute positively in society and, in doing so, builds self-esteem, promotes the benefits of all physical activity, and enables social connections and friendships. It involves the development of an awareness of self, an understanding of the environment and its landmarks, and is an essential element of all relationships with others.

## What are the components of Developmental Orientation and Mobility?

Orientation skills include:

* concept development and acquiring knowledge
* sensory development
* environmental and community awareness
* formal orientation skills, for example alignment techniques and searching techniques.

## Mobility skills include:

* guiding techniques
* self-protective and positional techniques
* use of mobility devices
* cane skills
* travel skills in known and unknown environments.

## Learning and teaching:

BLENNZ ākonga will:

* develop orientation and mobility skills to access their environments.
* develop problem solving skills to support their Orientation and Mobility
* develop the skills to identify and advocate for their learning needs
* continue to acquire new Orientation and Mobility skills as they gain independence.

BLENNZ teachers will have knowledge and skills to:

* assess ākonga need
* confidently use Orientation & Mobility techniques to support O&M programmes
* model orientation and mobility techniques to peers, parents, whānau, paraprofessionals and others as appropriate
* undertake an initial assessment of learning environment, particularly at transition times
* work collaboratively with the BLENNZ and BF DOM as appropriate
* implement planned programmes in collaboration with educational team and family/whānau
* promote the development of problem solving and self-advocacy skills.

# Social Skills

## What are social skills about?

A social skill is any skill facilitating interaction and communication with others. Social values and behaviours are created and communicated verbally and nonverbally with family and whānau.

## Why are they important?

Social skills are integral to all aspects of life in a community including the home, education settings, work and leisure environments. Through the development of social skills, ākonga may be able to take responsibility for themselves and relate well to others. Social skills provide ākonga with the means to make and maintain relationships which will enrich their lives.

As some social skills may not be automatically acquired through imitation and modelling these may need to be directly taught.

## What are the components of social skills?

The acquisition of social skills begins at birth and continues through life. Skills include:

Behaviours which enable ākonga to participate in social situations include the acquisition and understanding of:

Social communication

* Body language
* Communication
* Cooperation

Interpersonal relationships

* Interaction with others
* Sustaining relationships

Awareness of self and others

* Self-identity
* Self-advocacy
* Interpreting social situations
* Reciprocal social interaction

## Learning and teaching:

BLENNZ ākonga will:

* be active social participants in a range of contexts throughout their lives
* engage appropriately in a range of contexts by
  + receiving and interpreting social information and
  + being able to express themselves effectively
* have access to peers and age appropriate role models
* develop positive self-esteem and self-identity
* develop the skills of self-advocacy.

BLENNZ teachers will have the knowledge and skills to:

* understand social skills development and that they are the foundation of all behaviour
* interpret the communicative intent of behaviour
* understand the impact of vision impairment on social skills development
* understand and recognise the multisensory aspect of receiving and interpreting social information
* work as part of a team to foster the development of social skills starting with the parents and whānau and others depending on context promote positive social inclusion which may include: modelling; facilitating social interaction with peers within the ākonga community and across BLENNZ promote the development of environments to foster self-esteem, self-identity and self-advocacy.

# Life Skills

## What are life skills?

Life skills comprise all the tasks and functions people perform in order to lead their lives as independently or interdependently as needed. Assessment and teaching of life skills are best carried out within the natural time and place of activities.

## Why are they important?

Competence in life skills increases ākonga’ sense of self-worth and autonomy, and contributes to independent living, employment and community participation.

What are the components of life skills?

* Organisational skills:
  + Time management
  + Developing systems
  + Labelling, marking and storage
  + Environmental considerations
  + Use of reference points
* Food and nutrition:
  + Feeding and eating
  + Planning, preparing and cooking food
  + Food safety
  + Safe use of equipment
* Financial management:
  + Basic numeracy and measurement
  + Handling money
  + Budgeting
  + Legal responsibilities and rights
* Personal care and safety:
  + Hygiene
  + Personal presentation
  + Shopping for personal items
  + Awareness of personal health needs
  + Keeping yourself safe
* Contributing to a household:
  + Responsibilities within the family, Whanau and group
  + Responsibilities as an individual
* Living in the community:
  + Knowledge of community resources
  + Self-advocacy

## Learning and teaching:

BLENNZ ākonga will:

* acquire skills that enable them to function at their highest level of independence and interdependence
* effectively use resources and equipment that support their independence
* develop problem solving strategies to support their independence.

BLENNZ teachers will have knowledge and skills to:

* understand the impact of vision loss on the development of life skills
* assess ākonga need
* confidently use basic techniques to promote the development of life skills
* model techniques to peers, parents, whānau, paraprofessionals and others as appropriate
* work collaboratively with the BLENNZ DOM and BF ILSS as appropriate
* implement planned programmes in collaboration with educational team and family/whānau
* access appropriate resources and equipment
* promote the development of problem solving and self-advocacy skills.

# Assistive Technology

## What is assistive technology?

Assistive Technology is the use of tools, systems or equipment to enable and sustain independence and access to the curriculum. Technology supports learning and responds to all phases of individuals’ needs within prevailing environments and conditions.

Technology may be adapted to improve access to the curriculum depending on the specific needs of the ākonga.

## Why is it important?

Assistive Technology supports ākonga:

* by removing barriers to achievement and equipping them to meet individual learning goals
* to accomplish tasks accessible to sighted peers
* to function as active, purposeful participants across environments
* to access e-learning enabling:
  + communication
  + connection
  + generation of knowledge
  + creativity
* to be fully engaged and participate in learning.

## What are the components of assistive technology?

* full involvement in the trial and selection of assistive technology devices
* familiarisation with equipment
* skill development relevant to prioritised activities or tasks
* generalise use of the equipment across contexts and tasks
* increased independence in use and care of equipment as appropriate.

## Learning and teaching:

BLENNZ ākonga will:

* use the most appropriate assistive technology to support access and independence
* have the skills to effectively utilise their assistive technology
* problem solve when assistive technology or access to information is a challenge

BLENNZ teachers will have knowledge and skills to:

* match the best technology to suit the ākonga's needs through quality assessment using the SETT Framework.  (SETT Framework Joy Zabala. joyzabala.com)
  + Student (current abilities)
  + Environments (arrangement, support, materials and equipment commonly used by sighted peers)
  + Tasks (specific tasks which occur that enable progress towards ākonga goals and which are required for active involvement)
  + Tools (devices, services and strategies needed for active participation in identified environments)

This is best determined by a ākonga-centred team approach involving ākonga, family/whānau, educators and specialists

* develop effective use of equipment to access learning
* review and assess use of technology to ensure continued access to curriculum
* promote strategies that foster a problem solving approach to curriculum access.

# Career and Future Planning

## What is career and future planning?

Career development is a lifelong process of skill acquisition and building through a continuum of learning, development and mastery. This process enables people to be in charge of their own career, with enough focus and direction for stability and enough flexibility and adaptability for change along the way (Phillip S Jarvis. 2003. P7 – from P 5 ‘Career Education and Guidance in NZ schools).

## Why is it important?

Ākonga who are blind, deafblind or have low vision, need to:

* have the opportunity to investigate opportunities in learning and work, and relate them to themselves
* have the right to belong and to realize their potential as participating and contributing members of society through the world of work
* be aware of the technology and support options available to enable them to participate in the work environment
* develop the knowledge, understanding and skills to engage successfully in a 21st century environment.

## What are the components of career and future planning?

Awareness:

* Self-awareness, skills & values, interests & achievements
* Self-advocacy - overcoming barriers
* Personal goal setting – identifying strengths and skills, subject choices (keeping options open)
* Development and review of career plans.

Exploration:

* Seek guidance with vocational decisions
* Access mentoring - peer & adult mentors
* Undertake information research – skills required for particular courses and jobs, the labour market and job search strategies.

Preparation:

* CV development – application process
* Interview skills
* Life skills for the work environment
* Knowledge of support services & funding
* Awareness of technology options in work and study.

Placement

* Work experience:
  + Exposure to the world of work
  + Increased understanding of good work ethics
  + Opportunity to put skills into practice in a supported environment.

## Learning and teaching:

BLENNZ ākonga will:

* have a knowledge of the world of learning, work, recreation and community beyond school through e.g.:
  + - work exploration
    - access to role models
    - engagement in community based activities
  + be engaged in developing their individual plan for transition starting from their early teens, in partnership with their whānau
  + have input into decisions about the equipment and training they might require for successful transition to life beyond school
  + have knowledge of the range of community support and agencies that are available to them.

BLENNZ teachers will:

* have a working knowledge of the transition process and the range of community support and agencies available for ākonga
* provide opportunities for ākonga to develop realistic pathway plans by:
  + exploring community, career and study options
  + goal setting
  + developing individual plans
  + linking with positive role models
* foster ākonga self-awareness and self-advocacy
* ensure ākonga have input into selecting appropriate equipment and training to support successful transition to life beyond school.