

The Multisensory Handbook: A Guide for Children and Adults with Sensory Learning Disabilities

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Paul Pagliano (2012). Routledge.

The Multisensory Handbook: A guide for children and adults with sensory learning disabilities, while not specifically written for our field, is a relevant resource that provides an in depth perspective on the importance of multisensory development. Dr. Pagliano, the author, has experience working with individuals with vision impairments and provides several examples specifically related to vision impairment throughout the book. The main focus is on individuals with significant sensory disabilities such as individuals with multiple challenges who need structured intervention. Refreshingly, however, Dr. Pagliano does not present a deficit model, but rather encourages collaboration and thoughtful intervention to build upon an individual's sensory strengths. The book is organised into two parts, each with six chapters. Part I lays the foundation for multisensory stimulation, and Part II applies this theory to the presentation of a unified approach for working with individuals with sensory learning disabilities within a structured multisensory environment.

Part I: Multisensory stimulation

From the perspective of orientation and mobility (O&M), Part I of the book is an enriching read that enhances how we think about the interaction of the senses to gain and use information. Part I is theory and information based that the O&M specialist will need to consider how to apply to h/er practice. However, the chapters provide a more intricate understanding of the senses and their relationship to learning than is typically discussed. Dr. Pagliano goes beyond an isolated surface level discussion of the senses, and he structures the chapters in a way that keeps reminding the reader of the main points from the previous chapter and how they connect to the upcoming information. This style is useful in helping the reader to meaningfully absorb the density of the information and consider its application to practice.

Neuroplasticity and early sensory development, sensory processing, sensory thresholds, multisensory communication, and avoiding learned helplessness are among the many topics with related examples presented in the chapters that are relevant to enhancing our work as O&M professionals. The discussion of sensory thresholds in Chapter 2 was particularly

interesting for me as an O&M specialist, highlighting that there are levels that lead to an individual's ability to gather information from the senses: one might detect sensory input, then recognise what it is, then be able to differentiate its qualities from other input. This is a concept we apply to collecting functional vision information, but I was reminded by reading this book about how it applies to all senses and how strong of an impact it can have on a person's O&M skills. What our clients/students will perceive and understand in their travel environments is linked to the concepts they have built through an ability to use multisensory information at a differentiation level. When we are working with a client or student to select a travel route, build concepts, or understand and explore a new environment, Part I serves as a valuable read in that it reminds us of the importance of taking the sensory perspective of the individual and provides an opportunity to more deeply think about how theory related to multisensory stimulation can improve and enhance O&M outcomes.

Part II: A unified approach

In Part II, Dr. Pagliano introduces a unified approach for working with individuals with sensory learning disabilities in a structured multisensory environment (e.g., Snoezelen room). By interlacing what was learned in Part I, he introduces the reader to working collaboratively, establishing a caring relationship, conducting assessments that will provide a starting point for multisensory stimulation interventions, creating an environment that meets the needs of the individual, and then using this environment to start a sensory conversation and move the individual forward. While harder to directly apply this part of the book to the type of instruction O&M specialists generally do in less controlled everyday environments, aspects and concepts of Part II can still be very useful.

First, for O&M professionals working with students who have multiple exceptionalities, this section is very pertinent since the starting point for developing concepts for O&M begins with finding sensory thresholds, which for individuals with significant sensory learning disabilities will need to be explored initially in a controlled environment. O&M professionals may be working in teams to provide input into what a multisensory environment should include and might benefit by working with students in such environments themselves. Part II gives the reader a perspective on what these environments can provide and considerations to make them as effective as possible. In addition, I found the forms provided in Chapter 8 on assessment to be a great reference for collecting sensory information and understanding an individual holistically. This holistic perspective on the client or student can help to guide O&M instruction and initial goals. Finally, the author highlights in this part of the book the importance of establishing a caring relationship and gives practical considerations for doing so. This concept extends beyond the walls of a multisensory stimulation environment and is something of which all practitioners should be mindful.

Overall Resource

Overall, I would recommend this book to O&M specialists as a way to re-establish a deep understanding about multisensory stimulation - a topic in general very applicable to

our profession. As a reader with an O&M perspective, I was excited about the connections I made while reading and the ideas they inspired. A perfect “sequel” from my perspective would bridge the practical application of working in a multisensory structured environment to effectively transitioning to a more fluid environment where clients and students are beginning to develop O&M travel skills.

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