abstract

For students with dual sensory impairments, the development of communication and social skills is typically delayed. When nurturing a child with dual sensory impairments it is important that an instructor maintain a consistent one-on-one contact with the student. An instructor’s presence is especially significant in assuring that the child will develop healthy social skills (Correa-Torres 202). However, while communication and social exercises are performed by students in the classroom, deaf-blind individuals will, at some point in their lives, be expected to live independently. It is important to understand, first, that deaf-blind individuals relate to the built environment much differently than someone without these impairments do. Personal boundaries and physical human contact are particularly important for individuals with dual sensory impairment to be socially involved. Sensitive consideration to this unique group’s needs allows a designer to acknowledge that it becomes rather evident the built environment can have a considerable impact the development of communication and social skills in individuals with dual sensory impairments.

Many of the factors that must be considered in order to offer the student the best possible opportunities for peer interaction do not strongly differ from what is to be asked for any group of people. In general some factors may include: comfort, user control, and scale of space. Far too many spaces designed for students, of any capacity, heavily restrict the student’s control of their environment. It seems that it is social protocol to make decisions for students and to limit their influence on their environment. In a residential building intended specifically for these students, it is necessary that the environment which they inhabit truly belong to them. The concept of space itself for a developing child with dual sensory impairment is rather unique and an idea that those without the impairments will never understand. When considering mobility alone, the inability to see incredibly limits an individual’s ability to identify large numbers of obstacles in a rapid matter of time. To a young deaf-blind child space, in any amount, can be an intimidating and fearful concept. A young student will not be willing to freely explore their environment if they are overcome with anxiety (Mindel 78). What role can the built environment play to facilitate student interaction and involvement? An architectural scheme that strives to eliminate the fears and uncertainties of young students with dual sensory impairments will liberate apprehension and foster free communication between students and instructors.