

Position Statement on Structured Discovery Training

National Blindness Professional Certification Board
(NBPCB)

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Overview

The National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NBPCB) holds the trademark Structured Discovery Cane Travel (SDCT) (®) and any associated use of the phrase Structured Discovery Training ((™). No individual or blindness adjustment training program can legally state that they are using Structured Discovery (SD) training unless they are certified or recognized by NBPCB.

The term “qualified” will be used throughout this document to designate those individuals and training centers who have been certified or otherwise recognized by NBPCB as legitimately employing SD methods and principles in the rehabilitation adjustment training of their consumers.

In keeping with our long-held use of the term blind or blindness, this document uses these phrases to refer to individuals who must devise alternative techniques to do efficiently those things which they would do if they had normal vision. In addition, although the word blindfold or blindfolds is used here, we recognize that they are also sometimes referred to as sleepshades, learning shades, or simply shades.

This white paper articulates the core beliefs on which SD training is based, its foundational tenets and methodology, and summarizes empirical research demonstrating that SD training produces superior outcomes in self-confidence, skill mastery, and employment. This document is intended as a guiding framework for practitioners, rehabilitation administrators, and other policymakers.

I. Structured Discovery Core Values and Beliefs

The National Blindness Professional Certification Board advocates Structured Discovery as the most effective, evidence-based model for blindness rehabilitation adjustment training, including for the development of skills in Orientation and Mobility, Braille, Access Technology, Independent Home Management, and other vocational-focused skills.

- Qualified professionals and programs are committed to facilitating the personal, economic, and social independence of individuals who are blind. In fulfilling this commitment, Qualified professionals recognize diversity and embrace a cultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of all individuals within their social and cultural context. They look to professional values as an important way of living out an ethical commitment. The primary values that serve as a foundation for this Code include a commitment to the Tenets of Structured Discovery Methodology; Beneficence; Nonmaleficence; Privacy and Confidentiality; Duties; Justice; Veracity; and Fidelity.
- Qualified professionals and programs are aware that all individuals exist in a variety of contexts and understand the influence of these contexts on an individual's behavior. Qualified Professionals are aware of the continuing evolution of the field, changes in society at large, and the different needs of individuals in social, political, historical, environmental and economic contexts. The commitment involves providing respectful and timely communication, taking appropriate action when cultural diversity issues occur, and being accountable for the outcomes as they affect people of all races, ethnicities, genders, national origins, religions, sexual orientations, or other cultural group identities.
- Qualified professionals and programs operate from an understanding that persons who are blind are normal people who cannot see, and that blindness is a normal characteristic like the hundreds of others which, taken together, mold each person into a unique human being. Based upon this fundamental truth, Qualified professionals provide services with the high expectation that the blind consumer, or potential consumer, will be able to do what sighted people do, upon completion of proper blindness training and services. Personal empowerment and complete integration into the broader society are the aspirational goals and objectives for consumers of SD Professionals' services. The Qualified professionals strive at all times to help the blind consumer, or potential consumer, achieve these objectives.
- Qualified professionals and programs understand that persons who are blind are members of a visible and identifiable minority and that, therefore, the primary problem faced by

persons who are blind is attitudinal rather than physical—that is, there are widespread public misconceptions and misunderstandings about blindness which lead to beliefs and feelings of inferiority. While these public attitudes about blindness are socially constructed rather than factual, they are prominent in our society and in the emotions of consumers of services for the blind. Therefore, each of the blindness services which are provided by Qualified professionals must be designed and intended to teach consumers of services a new and constructive set of attitudes, based upon an understanding that the prevailing views about blindness are wrong and harmful.

- Qualified professionals and programs understand that the overarching objective of the services which are being provided is to enable blind consumers to come emotionally—not just intellectually—to understand that they are normal people who can be truly independent and self-sufficient.
- Qualified professionals and Programs understand that quality training in the skills or alternative techniques of blindness is essential to freedom and independence for persons who are blind and that the skills should not merely be introduced—they should be mastered by the consumer. Qualified professionals also understand, however, that the simple skills of blindness such as Braille or cane travel are not ends unto themselves but are merely small parts of a larger objective—helping the consumer adjust fully to blindness.
- Qualified professionals and programs understand that the blind consumer must learn to cope calmly and unemotionally with the unusual or demeaning things other people will do or say because of the public’s misconceptions about blindness. Therefore, discussions concerning prevailing misunderstandings and misconceptions and the consumer’s responses to them should appropriately and conscientiously be intertwined throughout classes or training sessions.

II. Foundational Tenets of Structured Discovery Methodology

NBPCB maintains that Structured Discovery is a comprehensive approach to providing meaningful and life-altering training to those who seek effective alternative skills in their ability to function with insufficient sight in meeting everyday requirements. The SD model is firmly rooted in the following twelve essential core tenets:

1. SD Training is a model that is based on fundamental practices and policies that convey the clear belief that blind individuals are a cross-section of society who are normal persons who simply happen to be blind. Additionally, it recognizes that its function is to provide a culture infused with positive and hopeful energy. It is also based on important aspects such as the

mastery of non-visual techniques, the development of emotional adjustment to vision loss that emphasizes a defined philosophy of blindness, the ability to cope calmly with the misconceptions of others, and the ability to integrate into the broader society.

2. Qualified professionals understand the power of words and refer to all consumers as blind and do not use euphemisms such as legally blind, visually impaired, visually challenged, etc. This sets all consumers on an equal footing with one another regardless of visual acuity, but more importantly, it helps consumers to integrate their own personal identity as that of an individual who happens to be blind. It is imperative for consumers to understand that they have sought training because of their diminished sight and that while they can learn to function as highly trained blind individuals, they clearly cannot function successfully as though they were fully sighted. Ultimately, they must come to accept that it is respectable to be blind and that blindness is one of many characteristics that makes up each of us as an individual, but it does not define who they are or what they can accomplish.
3. Qualified professionals actively and consistently demonstrate the importance and efficacy of mastering blindness skills wherever sight is absent or ineffective. It is consistently communicated that these non-visual skills are equal to their sighted counterparts and are transferable across all environmental situations. With the development of these foundational techniques, blindness can be reduced to a mere nuisance rather than be considered a debilitating condition. SD Training embraces the notion that given the proper training and opportunity, the average blind person can do average life activities just as well as a sighted person similarly situated.
4. Qualified professionals actively and consistently demonstrate the importance of a positive personal philosophy regarding blindness. Every aspect of skill training is in support of fostering positive attitudes, self-esteem, and hope. All consumers initially begin training with a set of beliefs and expectations for themselves formed by singular experiences or pervasive public misconceptions regarding blindness which have some erroneous elements, and it is these restrictive and limiting notions that must be stripped away through the training provided by SD professionals and replaced with the belief in the normality and respectability of blindness.
5. Qualified professionals recognize from experience that a typical consumer requires a minimum of six to nine months of continuous, full-time, and active residential training to maximize blindness skills and self-confidence. A residential component is crucial in that it removes a consumer from a potentially overprotective or unhealthy situation. It is also a critical factor for providing a consumer with a supportive and consistent environment which actively encourages high expectations and self-reliance. Such an environment enables the consistent development of meaningful skills along with a strong positive personal philosophy surrounding blindness. Although consumers begin and end center training at different levels from one another given individual capacity and motivation, each must be offered the opportunity to fully develop the skills and attitudes that allow for a fulfilling life and

obtainment of personal satisfaction without the restrictions and limitations that are oftentimes erroneously attributed to blindness.

6. Qualified professionals actively and consistently use blindfolds in all instructional environments, including core classes and confidence-building activities, as an integral element in the development of blindness techniques. This tool is crucial in combatting the concept of the hierarchy of sight—the idea that the level to which competency and success rises or falls is in direct proportion to the amount of residual sight a consumer may have. The use of blindfolds, therefore, evidence the efficacy of blindness skills. Consumers relying on faulty sight restrict their human experience, and by learning to incorporate appropriate blindness skills, limitations will not be determined by interests, but rather by desires, motivations, and resources. This integration of blindness skills and residual sight can only be truly achieved after the development of strong nonvisual skills has first been mastered. All relevant staff members should be able to effectively explain the use of blindfolds to consumers in training and to the general public.
7. Although Qualified professionals respect all consumers' preferences for mobility devices and the use of dog guides, it is expected that while receiving adjustment to blindness training from an SD training center (SDTC), consumers will use long, rigid, white canes during all core classes and confidence-building activities. The technical efficacy of the long white cane has been demonstratively proven in the development of travel skills. Furthermore, the long white cane is an indelible symbol of blindness essential in helping consumers reconcile their own fears and personal identity as a blind person.
8. Qualified professionals actively and consistently use confidence-building activities to provide novel experiences and learning opportunities where consumers can apply developing non-visual skills. All efforts are made to provide appropriate and diverse activities which support and challenge consumers to go beyond their comfort zone. While confidence-building activities can be recreational in nature, staff and consumers must understand the integral and necessary role these activities play in the development of a consumer's non-visual skills, positive philosophy of blindness, self-efficacy, and overall confidence. It is recognized that the more consumers are taught through activities that are outside their level of comfort, the more their confidence will allow them to engage in both routine and novel situations after training which might be uncomfortable, or which would have been avoided in the past because of stress or fear.
9. Qualified professionals actively and consistently promote role modeling as part of the rehabilitation process. Consumers are afforded the opportunity to engage with a wide variety of role models and mentors who demonstrate non-visual skills, positive attitudes regarding blindness, and effective self-advocacy. It will be these role models who will function as a support network once the training center experience is complete. Instructors, training peers, and blind community members can all serve as mentors. Sighted instructors also serve as role models by demonstrating non-visual skills with the use of blindfolds and by demonstrating

expectations of how sighted individuals should interact respectfully and equally with blind people. In a center, staff and advanced consumers are responsible for building a culture of caring, bringing energy to the training environment, and infusing a positive philosophy.

10. Qualified professionals actively and consistently promote training which provides the foundation necessary to successfully engage in critical problem solving—not only during the training but when consumers return to their home communities. Through the use of Socratic questioning, consumers in Certified SDTCS are taught to think logically and strategically. They are also taught to use creative problem-solving strategies whenever faced with novel or unique situations. This questioning approach is an important cornerstone of SD training. It involves the process of asking probing questions to prompt critical thinking and facilitate successful accomplishments. The instructor poses questions directed to consumers with the goal of eliciting observations and promoting the development of effective problem-solving strategies in lieu of relying on the instructor to provide information or answers. Therefore, the responsibility of gathering information and decision making is gradually, but continuously, transferred from the instructor to the consumer, and true independence becomes possible.
11. Qualified professionals actively and consistently communicate that public misconceptions and low expectations held by both the sighted public and blind people alike are the greatest barrier facing blind people. Well-meaning but often misguided members of families and the general public can significantly undermine the development of independence. The training environment must help consumers recognize and manage detrimental interactions. Only by learning to control these interactions can blind people be assured of obtaining the rights and responsibilities afforded to all citizens and successfully integrating back into their families and communities.
12. Qualified professionals actively and consistently communicate the concept of giving back or contributing in a meaningful way to the general community. Qualified professionals understand that this concept is equally as important as skills training, and that blind persons must be given opportunities to give of their time, unique talents, and heart to help others. Consumers must come to learn that if they are to be given equal respect and equal rights by the public, they must also be willing to engage in equal responsibility for the good of all.

NBPCB requires that all Structured Discovery training must be rooted in, and retain ALL of these core elements along with high expectations to remain effective and to fulfill its mission.

III. Empirical Evidence Supporting Structured Discovery Training

The Blind and Visually Impaired Adult Rehabilitation and Employment Survey (Bell & Mino, 2013) and Rehabilitation and Employment Outcomes for Adults Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired: An Updated Report (Bell, Silverman 2018) demonstrated that individuals trained in Structured Discovery programs were significantly more likely to be employed and earned higher wages than peers who were not. The study also found that regular Braille use and white cane travel—central SD skills—correlated strongly with competitive employment.

Bell and Mino's research specifically demonstrated that:

- Obtaining comprehensive adjustment training was positively related to employment outcomes, with those being trained at Structured Discovery-based programs employed at a rate of 60%, earning on average \$49,300 in comparison to those trained at conventionally-based programs, who were employed at a rate of 47%, earning on average \$38,100. These more beneficial results confirm those of Aditya (2004).
- Recidivism (i.e., returning for retraining multiple times), was found to be negatively related to employment, with those who receive training four or more times being employed at a rate of 35% in comparison to those who seek training only once being employed at 57%. Those same individuals who require additional training earned on average \$13,000 less than those who were trained only once.
- Individuals who use a white cane for daily mobility are employed at a significantly higher rate and earn a significantly greater annualized salary than those who do not --\$6,851 more on average.
- Those who read Braille on a daily or weekly basis are employed at a significantly higher rate than those who do not, and Braille readers also earn on average \$11,000 more than non-Braille readers.

In addition, Merry-Noel Chamberlain's (2019) study compared 40 adults trained in either the more traditional Sequential Learning (SL) or SD models and found that SD graduates scored 32% higher in self-confidence, traveled more often and over greater distances, and required less retraining.

IV. The Critical Role of Sleepshade Training

Sleepshade use is one of the most distinctive and essential practices of SD. Salisbury (2017) documents that six to nine months of sleepshade-based training is typically required to make nonvisual skills automatic and dependable, freeing cognitive resources for problem-solving and fostering emotional adjustment to blindness. NBPCB-certified Structured Discovery centers require sleepshades eight hours a day, five days a week, because experience has demonstrated that this practice produces higher levels of independence and success. The efficacy of sustained sleepshade use has been documented for decades (Altman, 2012, Omvig, 2002, Mettler, 1995, Lauren, 1988, Olson, 1982). It has also been demonstrated that inconsistent or temporary use of blindfolds can have a detrimental effect on both skill development and attitudes about blindness (Silverman, 2015).

V. Understanding Informed Choice in Rehabilitation Training

NBPCB recognizes that the concept of Informed Choice under the Rehabilitation Act is often misapplied. As Schroeder (2004) explains, informed choice operates at the program level, not the component level. All rehabilitation clients and consumers must receive the benefit of comprehensive and Continual Inservice training including the autonomy to determine the best type of training program for them and an opportunity to learn about each of them (Omvig, 2002). Only in this way can consumers make a truly informed choice regarding their options for adjustment training. Therefore, the choice of alternative options is among whole programs with differing philosophies, practices, and outcomes, and not between the specific individual elements which comprise the training programs (Schroeder, 2004; Omvig, 2002). This means that informed choice provides consumers with the ability, opportunity, and responsibility to determine the program that meets their needs as it respects the consumer's interests in the Vocational Rehabilitation process. However, once an informed choice has been made regarding the type of training that the consumer is interested in, it is the responsibility of the training center and the consumer to uphold and abide by the curriculum, best practices, and standards within which the training program operates.

Informed choice provides consumers with the opportunity to select the program that they believe is right for them in their rehabilitation training. This means that consumers deciding to participate in any training center or program have made an informed choice to follow the curriculum, principles, and requirements of that individual training program. Those who have determined that a certified SDTC would best meet their needs, have knowingly made the commitment to pursue the Structured Discovery related training that these centers offer in both their approach and practice that reflect the tenets and values that comprise Structured Discovery-based rehabilitation training.

VI. Conclusion

No individual or program may credibly state that they are using Structured Discovery training unless they are certified or recognized by the NBPCB.

Structured Discovery is more than merely a training method: it is a paradigm of high expectations, self-efficacy, and full citizenship. The NBPCB's Tenets provide the foundation for its practice, and empirical research confirms its superiority in building confidence, independence, and employment outcomes. As the certifying body for Structured Discovery professionals and training centers, NBPCB strongly advocates that all of the tenets enumerated in this document should serve as the guiding framework for all blindness rehabilitation and SD professionals seeking to produce confident, independent, and fully participating blind adults. Disaggregating or separating any aspect of the core SD tenets is counterintuitive and counterproductive to comprehensive adjustment to blindness rehabilitation training.

We stand ready to assist any individual or blindness rehabilitation adjustment program to better understand Structured Discovery Methods and Principles and to develop training programs for qualified professionals.

For current information on NBPCB Certified Centers, visit this [Web page](#).

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