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This mattered to me: "Helen Keller: a remembrance," by Berthold Lowenfeld

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[May-June 2016 JVIB This Mattered to Me]

<boxhd>This Mattered to Me

<h1>"Helen Keller: A Remembrance," by Berthold Lowenfeld, originally published in the May 1980 issue of the *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, Volume 74, Number 5, pp. 169–174.

<aa>Recommended by Simon Hayhoe

<text>I have not had time for real heroes for about 30 years now. However, as my hunger for heroes died out in adulthood, my need for influences from the world I inhabited did not. I think it is fair to say that it is part of our human condition to need guidance from others and to see ourselves in relation to others in our social groups. As humans, we need to create identities from our societies, and how we see our influences is an important element of these identities (Berger & Luckmann, 2016). Beyond acts of worship, the people who influence us become the stimuli of our contemporary thinking. This relationship is perhaps an appeal of being a researcher, writer, or teacher: it is the ideal of being an influence on others and therefore the social world we inhabit. It is also a legacy we leave for future societies.

Berthold Lowenfeld and his brother Viktor were two such influencers on my research and teaching on blindness. Viktor Lowenfeld, a trained sculptor, taught art in Vienna's school for the blind in the 1930s, using this experience to write influential works on this topic (Lowenfeld, 1934, 1951). He went on to become one of the most influential mainstream art educators in the United States after leaving Austria for England and the United States during the rise of National Socialism. As a professor of art education, Viktor Lowenfeld continued to draw reference from art by students with visual impairments (that is, blindness or low vision) in his influential book, *Creative and Mental Growth* (Lowenfeld, 1987). **[QUERY 1: In the previous sentence, we added the journal's standard definition of *visual impairment* which, despite *JVIB*'s full title, is defined as representing both blindness and low**

vision.] Yet, despite his important work, it was Berthold Lowenfeld that had a greater influence on the education of visually impaired students in the 20th century.

Berthold Lowenfeld was a teacher of visually impaired students. Like his brother, he also left Vienna for America during the rise of National Socialism. In Vienna, he trained as a teacher of students with visual impairments under some of the most influential philosophers of his time—something he discusses in the article I chose to highlight in this essay, "Helen Keller: A Remembrance," which was published in the *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness (JVIB)* in 1980. **[QUERY 2: Were we correct in assuming that the article referred to in the original version of this sentence was the JVIB one?]** From there, his life became dedicated to promoting, developing, and, most of all, understanding the educational potential of all visually impaired children. Unlike Viktor, he did not restrict himself to a single teaching topic or a single discipline of study. In his understanding of blindness, Berthold Lowenfeld always took a holistic approach. He understood that blindness was not just a physical condition, and that visually impaired people are not only influenced by the physical condition of their eyes. Consequently, his writing on blindness covered a spectrum of topics. These topics included the historical understanding of blindness, the social condition of visually impaired people, perceptual psychology, pedagogy, and the arts. He was also perhaps the most important writer to talk about the psychological and educational differences between early and late onset of visual impairment. In this way, his work has influenced my understanding of the psychology of blindness more than any other single writer. Moreover, his work has helped me understand the epistemology of all disabilities, not just blindness.

In the essay I have chosen, Berthold Lowenfeld concentrates little on the life and work of Helen Keller, the most influential autobiographer of deafblindness. Instead, he focuses on his friendship with Helen Keller after making her initial acquaintance whilst undertaking a Rockefeller Research Fellowship in New York. This friendship continued for

the rest of her life, and included his time as superintendent at the California School for the Blind. As superintendent, he gained permission to name the housing for deaf-blind children at the school after her, and describes her visit to dedicate these buildings. He also describes her political and religious influences and her intellectual study of German.

I think it would be fair to say that the work of Helen Keller created an image of deafness and blindness that influenced sighted people more than it did deaf, blind, or deafblind people. In fact, the writer [Georgine-Georgina Kleege](#) (2007), who is blind, found the image of Helen Keller held by sighted people had a negative influence on her own upbringing, since it distorted the image that others had of her. However, Helen Keller's iconic status and life is of significant importance for understanding the study and social condition of blind and deaf people, and a representation of blindness and deafness. Helen Keller's treatment, and the image of her impairment, tells us much about the epistemology of disability in the 19th and 20th centuries. In this respect, she still also remains a towering influence on my own understanding of blindness. Thus, Berthold Lowenfeld's essay on Helen Keller mattered to me, because it provides a rare nugget of social history as well as being highly entertaining.

<h2>References

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[QUERY 3: Please verify all information listed in the authors blurb, as we took the majority of it from your university's website.]

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