Practical Strategies for Visiting Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing

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Five Key points

- The typical classroom environment produces barriers to learning for the student with hearing loss due to decreased access as compared with typical peers (Anderson, 2001).
- For students with hearing loss to be able to keep pace with their peers in the academic environment of the classroom it is necessary for their level of access to classroom communication be estimated (Anderson, 2014).
- To be competitive in the classroom, students must be able to fully participate. This means being able to access verbal instruction, classroom discussion, and peer-to-peer learning, necessitating skill building in areas such as communication repair, self-advocacy and independence with hearing devices (Anderson & Arnoldi, 2011).
- A recent study indicated the need for teachers of the deaf/hard of hearing to be aware of a range of formal and informal assessments to define current learning needs and how to relate these findings to specific goal development (Brown & Byrnes, 2014).
- Assessment for the purpose of identifying student needs, present level of performance, establishing goals and monitoring progress in skill building is necessary if services to students with hearing loss are to be evidence-based (Anderson & Price, 2015).

Identifying Access Needs and Building Skills Toward Full-Participation in the Classroom

Due to the access barriers caused by the hearing loss, students require specific skill building and appropriate accommodations if they are to progress at the same rate as class peers. The more we reduce the access barriers experienced due to hearing loss, the more the student will learn within the context of the general education environment and the less that specialized services will be needed to address gaps. Teachers of the deaf/hard of hearing need to be well versed in identifying each student's communication barriers in the classroom as this will allow them to anticipate subtle deficits in foundational areas of development. Identifying precision listening and functional listening skills assist in estimating access to classroom communication. Communication access issues also apply to students who are visual communicators.

Even with early identification of hearing loss, provision of high quality amplification and intensive early intervention services, students who are deaf or hard of hearing have vulnerable areas of development that require consideration as we identify needs, write goals and monitor progress in skill building. A link between appropriate assessments and service delivery should be clear.

As most students with hearing loss primarily learn through their hearing and supplemental visual supports, precision listening is required as a primary building block for learning. The 'missing fragments' due to incomplete access to verbal instruction impact other foundational learning skills such as auditory skill development. Auditory skill weaknesses

can have a direct impact on academic learning and conversational interactions. The specific level of auditory development should be identified for each student who is hard of hearing.

Phonological awareness also is based on precision listening and the ability to differentiate between similar speech sounds and speech sound combinations. Whole word learning approaches to reading and vocabulary development will not allow a student to keep pace with decoding and comprehension as academic material becomes more linguistically complex. Strategies for teaching phonological awareness to auditory and visual communicators need to be applied. This is often appropriate even for students who are performing well academically in the early grades.

To be successful, students must be able to fully participate in the classroom. Due to reduced access, they will naturally miss more information than their typically hearing class peers during instruction and as a part of social interaction. Students with hearing loss are often observed to behave less maturely as a communicating member of his or her peer group. Social interaction skills have multiple components, all of which are impacted by hearing loss. The skill areas of social cognition, theory of mind and pragmatic language combine into social interaction skills. It is not unusual for the student with hearing loss to be several years delayed in pragmatic language. Assessment will lead to specific, targeted goal development to improve the student's basic communication competence, all of which is predicated on having a good self-concept. It is important to involve families in improving social language competence.

It is not uncommon for students to begin to reject their hearing aids and/or FM devices as they reach the tween/teen years. The teacher of the deaf/hard of hearing benefits from understanding the foundations of why students feel isolated in the mainstream, which can lead them to reject their hearing devices. Teachers can help studentswork through issues of identity, belonging and peer acceptance. Cognitive reframing and the differences between adolescent and adult brains can be used as a basis for strategies to help the student through challenging periods with feelings of non-acceptance.

Hearing aids and assistive hearing devices do not restore typical hearing. Similarly, teacher accommodations cannot provide for all of the gaps that the student will experience from communication challenges. Students with hearing loss will always have to expend more effort to listen (decode what is said) which reduces the amount of cognitive resources available for the student to take what is heard and apply it to their knowledge base, and even fewer resources to put the information into memory. Requiring clarification and repetition is needed and students must learn *why* the current listening challenge is occurring, *what* can he or she can do to improve their understanding of missed communication, and *how* they can respond or make requests when communication challenges occur. Without specific training in communication repair strategies our students frequently experience 'nevermind' responses to their requests, which leaves them feeling marginalized and not a welcome member in the communication situation.

To increase the level of participation in the classroom and conversationally, students need to learn specific strategies for building self-advocacy skills. Age-anchored skill hierarchies can be used as the basis for examining skill development. As a part of self-advocacy, it also is of benefit for the student to become his or her own 'technology specialist'. It is only the student, with training, who can identify when there are changes in hearing/device function. It is most beneficial to train the student to be able to monitor their devices, instruct others in use and benefit, and respond appropriately when a problem occurs.

Identifying needs via assessment and planning for skill building to support full participation are critical activities for children who are deaf or hard of hearing being educated in the regular education classroom.

References

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