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Feature

Planning for Success: Supporting Students with Hearing Loss who are Listening and Speaking in the Mainstream Classroom

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Over the past two decades, the education of students who are deaf and hard of hearing has seen tremendous changes due largely to improved technology in hearing aids, cochlear implants as well as FM systems, giving the majority of children access to sound through which they then can acquire spoken language. As a result, greater numbers of children are able to attend schools within their communities alongside their peers who have typical hearing.

Inclusive education and inclusive schools promote the participation of all students by creating opportunities for children and parents to be actively involved in all aspects of the school with expert guidance and support from well-qualified professionals. Schools are auditory-verbal (AV) environments, where students listen for periods of time and then interact verbally with teachers and peers.

Brophy et al, (2006) identified key facilitators for successful inclusion of deaf and hard of hearing students into schools. Itinerant teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing, classroom teachers, students, parents and administrators who work collaboratively ensure that a positive and productive approach is employed throughout the school years for each student.

Although technology and early intervention services have seen major development and improvements, students who have a hearing loss continue to experience many challenges in the fast paced, noisy classroom environment. Many children who are deaf and hard of hearing are now entering kindergarten speaking with ease. This accomplishment, largely due to newborn screening, early intervention and advances in hearing technology, does not ensure academic success. Support services must be in place to assist the student to transition from the sheltered, quiet home environment to the busy and noisier demands of a classroom. Audition is a foundation skill upon which auditory memory, auditory processing, speech articulation, language, literacy, and academic skills are built. To ensure success and full inclusion in the mainstream school, the student with a hearing loss requires the support of a teacher of the deaf who is a listening and spoken language specialist.

Although the amount of support a student requires to ensure success in school varies depending on a particular child's needs; some degree of support must be provided throughout the student's time in the school program.

Factors that Affect a Child's Performance in School

1. Auditory skills and verbal ability
2. Reading and math readiness skills
3. Learning style: behaviour, attention span, etc.
4. Use of assistive listening devices (FM systems)
5. Availability of learning support services – Itinerant Listening and Language Specialists (Cert AVTs or Cert AVEs), Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Speech-Language Pathologists, Teaching Assistants, Educational Audiologists, Special Education Teachers, Psychologists, Social Workers, Occupational and Physical Therapists, etc.

How Much Service Does a Student Require?

Teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing are best equipped to overseeing the process of inclusion for students with a hearing loss. The level of service to all students is based on needs and is supported by the documentation of tests and observations, consultation and discussion with the classroom teacher and school personnel.

Some students may require a great deal of support in the early years but that need may lessen later on; whereas some students in the senior years of school may benefit from an increase in service due to the academic demands of the high school years.

Needs must be evidenced based and measurable. The amount of intervention must be based on results of standardized tests which address the students' needs, to ensure access to the curriculum. Changes to the amount of service by an itinerant teacher of the deaf would be based on the measurable progress observed over the school year.

The teacher of the deaf performs standardized diagnostic assessments in order to determine levels of performance in the areas of audition, speech, vocabulary, language, and academic skills. Goals based on informal and formal assessments are set and developed following the expected developmental patterns of children who can hear. Additionally, the itinerant teacher of the deaf routinely checks hearing aids, cochlear implants, and FM systems to ensure the devices are in optimal working order. Critical to the role of the itinerant is the ongoing guidance and coaching provided to the student's parents, classroom teachers, and teaching assistants. In using an approach that is diagnostic and developmental, the itinerant guides the team towards a positive and successful experience for the professionals and specifically for the students and their families.

Transitioning to the Community School

A variety of services for students who are deaf or hard of hearing exist across Canada, within the same province and even between different school boards within the same city.

Proposed Supports to Ensure Success for the Student with Hearing Loss

1. Support services based on needs not on level of hearing loss
2. Needs assessment based on information gathered in collaboration with the team of professionals supporting the student with hearing loss – evidence from standardized test as well as informal assessment in the areas of audition, speech, language, literacy, cognition, and academics
3. Evidence-based goals with measurable progress, supported by documented tests, observations and discussions with school team and parents
4. Standardized diagnostic assessments to determine levels of performance in audition, speech, vocabulary, language, and academic skills
5. Team of professionals which would include classroom teacher, teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing, professionals with specialization in listening and spoken language development (certified A-V educators), educational audiologist to provide technological supports, learning resource, and other professionals as required

Frequency of Service – Suggested Protocol

Four to Five Times Weekly – One or More of the Following

- Vocabulary and other language scores more than two to three years behind those of normally-hearing children of same age
- Significant academic issues
- Student is new Canadian and has no spoken English skills
- Child is newly implanted

Three Times Weekly – One or More of the Following

- Vocabulary and other language scores up to but not more than two years behind those of normally-hearing children of same age
- Academic concerns
- Needy kindergarten student

Twice weekly – One or More of the Following

- Communicating well, but requires support
- Transitioning to school from early intervention program
- Speech, listening or spoken language concerns, as well as some written language or academic issues

Weekly

- Typically doing well – age-appropriate listening, speech and language
- May require active monitoring for: academic support; social skills; or equipment issues

Equipment Monitoring

- Clearly demonstrated performance in all areas typical of normally-hearing classmates