

How Should I Teach My Students Who are Deaf with a Learning Disability?

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Introduction

According to the Gallaudet Research Institute, 40% of deaf or hard of hearing students have an additional disability. These conditions include but are not limited to: Mental Retardation (8.7%), Specific Learning Disability (LD) (8.3%), Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD/ADHD) (5.6%), Visual Impairment or Blindness (5.4%), and Developmental Delay (4.8%). One of the greatest challenges is assessment. Hearing babies and children are daily exposed to spoken language; it may be direct or indirect. They learn to copy then use it for communication. Those that cannot hear are not exposed. Another issue is that most school districts do not have adequate training in identification, assessment, and intervention in Deafness and Learning Disabilities (Soukup, & Feinstein, 2007). Teachers can find interventions, teaching strategies, and learning environment that will be best suited for the student (Mauk & Mauk, 1998). One great resource for Deaf and hard of hearing students is the Interdisciplinary team. This team is made of different professionals that work together in educating these students. There are different instruction styles that are good to teach these students. Although instruction is important the classroom environment can encourage or discourage learning. The overall most important strategy is support and encouragement (Pollack, 1997).

What is Learning Disabilities

When addressing Learning Disabilities among deaf and hard of hearing students, it is important to determine what Learning Disabilities are. IDEA 2004 explains LD can be determined by an inconsistency between the student's potential and achievement. It can be in any of the academic disciplines. It can be specific to one subject or could apply to many subjects. Also, other disabilities, i.e. ADD/ADHD affect those with LD.

Research

Ewing and Jones provide 4 assumptions for an effective program for Deaf and hard of hearing students with LD. First, believing that every child had the ability to learn. With this belief the teacher provides a positive learning environment that will support and encourage the student. Second, students strive for peer acceptance and social interactions. The teacher should encourage these interactions. Also, peer tutoring and mentoring can support peers in learning to accept each other and have social interactions. The third assumption is family support. Students typically spend more time with their families. The families can work on educational goals with the school and provide insight on the student that the teacher might miss. Fourth, the interdisciplinary team should work together to support the needs of the student. These 4 areas are important for deaf students with LD (269).

Deaf students and especially those with a Learning Disability should receive individualized education. It is important for helping these students succeed in school. Students with a hearing loss and learning disabilities are very different from each other and therefore it is hard to establish common strategies that will work for all (Pollack, 1997). For each student, different strategies and interventions should be implemented until the student demonstrates progress. This will ensure that the strategy is helping the student. An example is that most deaf with LD do not have a large vocabulary and struggle with grammar. Vocabulary words with pictures and signs can help with vocabulary building.

How can a regular education teacher learn about these strategies? During the 2007-2008 school year the Gallaudet Research Institute reported 55.4% of deaf and hard of hearing students were in a regular public school classroom. 38.8% of these students received services from an Itinerant teacher. Itinerant teachers of the deaf have a variety of job duties. They teach the student one-on-one by pulling them out of the regular classroom. Also, they write the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), train the regular education teachers, check the amplification devices (hearing aids and FM transmitters), and coordinate other support services (Foster, & Cue, 2008).

In addition to the regular education and Itinerant teachers there are other support services. The professionals that provide these other services are School Psychologists, Speech Pathologists, Audiologists, Physical and Occupational Therapists, and any other professional that is needed for the student. This makes a team that can determine the appropriate strategies and supports for the student. The different team members work one-on-one with the student using the “pull out” model. This team is called an Interdisciplinary Team (Ewing & Jones, 2003).

One way to provide individualized instruction to different students is by using differentiated instruction (DI). This type of instruction modifies the content, process, and product of the lesson. For students who are below grade-level readers, modifying how they receive the content will allow them to still learn it even though they cannot understand the reading. During the process phase the student takes in the information and makes it personal for them. Using collaboration through discussion groups, jigsaw groups, and peer tutoring is helpful in making the information personal. Products are used to demonstrate knowing or understanding the content. There are many ways to show this. Answering questions, graphic organizers, charts, presentations, visual representation, and other products can be used. Choosing different products or quantities of products will allow the students to effectively show their understanding without frustration. By using DI the students will have meaningful learning experiences (Broderick, Mehta-Parekh, & Reid, 2005).

The classroom environment can encourage or inhibit the learning of a student with a disability. Using a Universal Design setup will not only help those with disabilities but also the regular students. A regular schedule helps the students know what is going to happen in the class. Using clear procedures and rules the class knows what to expect and how to act in the classroom. Also having materials ready and easy to access will help the students be able to complete their work and not have anxiety of how to get the supplies they need. The physical set up of the room can help everyone move easily through the classroom, not disturb those around them, and be safe. Having a well-designed classroom environment will help the day go smoothly (Trussell, 2008).

During a typical day in the classroom there are long periods of seatwork. Students with LD and other disabilities this provides a challenge. These students can easily become frustrated when attempting to do seat work. One way to keep this from happening is shortening the time of seatwork. Have short times of seatwork more often will allow a fresh start on the assignment. Students that are seated close together may become off task due to distracting each other. This can be minimized by thoughtfully placing the students with a distance between them and those who are typically off task near the teacher. Another way to encourage on task behavior is to provide work that is engaging, purposeful, and as real-life as possible. Seatwork that has a purpose and/or being real life will encourage the student to do the work by knowing that it is

important. Modifying seatwork will help students with LD have a better learning experience and not be as frustrated about work (Rock, & Thead, 2009).

Peer tutoring is a great support for students with LD. In many cases the teacher will strategically pair up a high and low performing student. In some classrooms the higher student will do the work or part of the work with the lower looking on. Then the lower will do theirs as the higher is looking on giving advice when needed. These 2 students will go to each other when they need help on their work. The peer will help them. In some cases the high performing student will need help and the lower will know how to do it and tutor them (Gersten et al., 2009).

There are different types of Mathematics instruction. Explicit, heuristic, verbalizing their reasoning, visuals, range and sequence, and other instruction methods are used. In a review of studies of Mathematics teachers who have students with LD, 42 met the criteria established to be in a meta-analysis. Explicit instruction was used by 11 of these studies and 12 used visuals. These were the 2 highest types of instruction. Explicit teaching is giving a specific method of solving the problem and asking the students to use this method. Visuals can be incorporated with this method are very helpful in teaching with LD (Gersten et al., 2009).

Discussion

Deaf and hard of hearing students are different from each other have and there is a higher prevalence of an additional disability than compared to their hearing peers. The most prevalent is Learning Disabilities. Students with LD have a gap between their ability and performance. Their teachers have to find a way to bridge this gap. Making classroom and instruction modifications and using Interdisciplinary teams can fill this gap. Also providing individualized education can help them overcome their disability. A major factor of increased learning for deaf with LD is a positive environment (Ewing & Jones, 2003).

Providing individualized education and using Differentiated instruction will ensure meeting the goals of the student. The Interdisciplinary team creates the IEP (Ewing & Jones, 2003). Each member of the team and the teacher works to meet the goals. If each member does not work toward the goals then the student will not be receiving the education they are supposed to by law. Working towards these goals and individualizing the education of the student can be difficult. A teacher should do their best to make sure the student receives what they are entitled to. There are supports that can help the teacher fulfill the needs of the student.

For regular education teachers an Itinerant teacher can be extremely helpful. Regular teachers typically have not received any training for teaching Deaf and hard of hearing students. They can work with the Itinerant teacher to create an instructional strategy that will best serve the student. Since the Itinerant teacher sees the student on a weekly basis, they can work on specific skills or content that the classroom teacher needs for the student (Foster, & Cue, 2008).

The classroom design and procedures can encourage learning. A well setup classroom with procedures and rules make it easy on the students and teachers (Trussell, 2008). The students are not easily distracted. They also know what to expect. When the procedures are successfully implemented the students are under less stress. Which means better learning.

Peer tutoring is another good strategy. More classrooms are implementing this kind of tutoring. This forms bonds between student and gives more one-on-one teaching to the student.

The students can receive more instruction than the teacher can provide. Therefore they can progress faster (Gersten et al., 2009).

There are other strategies out there. There are many ways to help these students. It is important to find the strategy that works for that student. A teacher may try many strategies before they find that one strategy that works for them.

Although there is a lot of information on deafness, there is one difficulty in finding these strategies. The research databases only have recent articles. Many Deaf articles are older than the databases hold. Therefore it is difficult to access the articles.

There could be more research done on how to set up a classroom for Deaf students. I know how to set up one but did not come across research on it. This research might be old and not on the databases that can be easily accessed. There could be more overall research done on deafness and Learning disabilities.

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