Proposal: an enhanced reading program for young deaf/HH students

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Proposal

An Enhanced Reading Program
For Young Deaf/HH Students

Master's Project

Submitted to the Faculty
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of Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

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By

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I. Abstract

Educators of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing face a tough challenge when it comes to the development of reading skills in young deaf children. Every classroom with deaf students has the potential to include a diversity of students with various linguistic backgrounds/abilities. Every deaf child’s individual exposure to language has a direct effect on his/her literacy development. It then becomes the teacher’s responsibility to assess each student’s experience with language and linguistic ability and create a reading program suitable to the needs of the students in her classroom.

After much research and some experience in the field, it is my conclusion that a successful reading program for young Deaf/HH students must include five major components. These components are: A curriculum-based guided reading program; ASL storytelling (in support of the guided reading program); parental involvement/support; speech support; and opportunities for cross-curricular support. This project discusses each major component, why each is important to deaf students, how each integrates into an overall reading program for the deaf classroom, and how each is organized to create a general frame for the actual reading program that I want to implement in my classroom.

II. Introduction

Statement of the Problem

When literacy issues are discussed among professionals in the field of Deaf Education, it is a well-known statistic that the average deaf person graduates from high school with a fourth-grade reading level. The average person who knows nothing about the education of deaf students could look at that statistic and infer that it is simply a matter of teachers who are not devoting enough time to reading instruction. However, anyone who teaches deaf students knows that that assumption couldn’t be farther from the truth. In fact, when a deaf student graduates from high school, more than half of their academic career has been devoted to reading and writing. With that said, it is crucial for teachers of deaf students, especially at the elementary level, to reevaluate the reading programs they are currently using in their classroom and decide which components are benefiting their students and which components are not.
Importance of the Problem

As stated above, at least half (if not more) of every deaf student's school day is devoted to reading. This also means that teachers of deaf students devote half of their school day to reading instruction. With all the time devoted to reading and reading instruction, why are the reading abilities of so many deaf students so poor? Furthermore, what can educators of the Deaf do to better enhance the reading programs they're implementing so that each student in the classroom is receiving the best possible reading instruction? There is no single method to reading instruction that will work for every student in a given classroom due to the diverse language backgrounds and experiences they enter with. There are however, basic components of reading programs that are proven to be important to the reading instruction of deaf students.

Project Overview and Objectives

The product of this project will be an example unit of an enhanced reading program designed for young Deaf/HH students. This reading program will include five components that are critical in the reading instruction of Deaf/HH students. These five components include: A curriculum-based guided reading program; ASL storytelling (in support of the guided reading program); parental involvement/support; speech support; and opportunities for cross-curricular support. The example unit I design will serve as a framework for other teachers wanting to enhance the reading programs they currently implement. It is important I stress that the structure of my example unit is not as important as the content. Every teacher will need to structure her program in a way that best fits her own class schedule. My objective is that teachers reevaluate their reading instruction practices in order to make certain it includes the components listed above.
A review of the literature discusses the five components I’ve outlined. It goes into detail why each component is important to deaf students and the role each component plays in the literacy instruction of deaf and hard of hearing students. Both the support of the literature and my own experience teaching third-grade Deaf/HH students, led me to the development of this enhanced reading program. Following the literature review, I will discuss the activities I plan to use for the implementation of the five program components.

III. Literature Review

Introduction:

As a teacher of deaf students, I know my students will face specific challenges in regards to the acquisition of literacy skills. Because my students will be arriving in my class with a variety of different communication/linguistic backgrounds, it is most likely that they will each perform better using different strategies when learning to read. It is important to remember that although there is no single strategy to reading instruction that is successful for all children who are deaf or hard of hearing, there are basic components of a reading program that are proven to be beneficial to deaf and hard of hearing students despite their experience with language. This review of the literature will outline five basic components that should serve as a framework for the planning of reading instruction programs for the Deaf/HH. These five components include: A curriculum based guided reading program; ASL storytelling (in support of the guided reading program); parental involvement/support; speech support; and opportunities for cross-curricular support. Programs that contain these components may not guarantee every
deaf student literacy success, however, the existence of these five components will ultimately allow deaf students to experience instructional strategies that are diverse enough to provide them with optimal learning potential.

**Curriculum-Based Guided Reading Programs:**
In elementary classrooms today, reading programs or curriculums are, for the most part, centered on some form of guided reading program. Most likely, an elementary school, or even a school district, will pick graded/leveled instructional materials from a commercial educational publisher to serve as the framework for their literacy instruction. The National Council of Teachers of English (1989) found that at least 90 percent of elementary school classrooms currently use some form of guided reading curriculum that uses grade/age leveled books for the purpose of targeting specific skills such as: spelling; grammar; writing; phonics; word-identification skills; and comprehension skills. In addition to the designated lessons, which focus on these specific skills, these guided reading curriculums also include manuals that inform teachers how to approach the specific skill lessons, workbooks and reproducible worksheets for students to complete, and suggestions for assessing the reading ability of students.

Many critics of these guided reading programs are concerned that they are too inclusive and comprehensive and result in a lack of freedom for a teacher to choose the topics/lessons that she deems as important. There is great concern that if a teacher uses only the guided reading program as the main source of reading instruction, students will miss out on other opportunities for reading exposure. This is a valid concern because we’ve already established that there is no single instruction method that results in every
student in the classroom becoming a successful reader. Teachers who are presented with these materials need to choose how they will use them within the constructs of their own reading program that they develop for their students. Teachers can choose to use the manuals as mere guidance systems while using the workbooks and reproducible worksheets as supplements to their own developed program. They can also make the decision to use the materials as the only form of classroom reading instruction, or at the opposite end of the spectrum, ignore the given materials altogether (Robinson, McKenna & Wedman, 2000, p.154).

My belief is that the commercial guided reading materials chosen by a school or district should only be used as a backbone to a teacher’s own enhanced reading program. Teachers can take relief in the fact that structured materials can take away a lot of the frustrating guesswork a teacher faces when trying to decide what skills are important to teach beginning readers. When using guided reading materials, the teacher has the opportunity to actually guide her students through a book that may be a bit too difficult to read independently. The teacher can focus on vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, story structure, and theme. Through guided reading, children have the opportunity to consciously gain the skills they need to "attack" an unknown text because teachers are provided with materials that help them to skillfully plan reading lessons, which build their students’ skills and confidence (Fernandes, 1999). At the same time, teachers can allow themselves to be creative in their choice of what they want to teach and how they want to present the lessons that will develop the skills required of students who are learning how to read. Thus, it becomes clear that the use of guided reading instruction materials needs to be done in balance with other types of reading instruction.
deaf students, during guided reading instruction, the teacher can use the designated weekly stories to show students different reading strategies within the constructs of one shared text. Most often, these strategies focus on the use of ASL to break down English words and to decipher meaning from the text. Teachers can use the grade/scope-leveled books to show students how to read for meaning and not simply to match a sign for each word in the text. Through guided reading, students are exposed to a variety of forms of literature and writing that they might not select on their own; they become more confident and interested in various themes, writing styles, and opinions (Fernandes, 1999).

**ASL Storytelling:**

Countless research has focused on the challenges and difficulties that deaf children experience in the acquisition of literacy skills, the primary reason being that they cannot physically hear the sounds of the language they are attempting to read. Despite this physical barrier, many deaf or hard of hearing children (mostly those who have deaf or hard of hearing parents), are performing within or above average range for reading and other literacy measures (Lartz & Lestina, 1995). It is therefore important for teachers to take a closer, more comprehensive look at the ways in which deaf adults interact with deaf children during literacy promoting activities, so that everyone who is involved in the development of a deaf child's ability to read, can become more aware of the successful strategies deaf adults use in order to engage deaf children in the overall reading process. During ASL storytelling or ASL-based reading activities, specific strategies that are necessary to engage deaf children in a story/text are used.
One initial strategy outlined in a study by Akamatsu and Andrews (1993) is the ability of the adult reader to be able to establish a visual reading environment for the deaf child who is learning to read. When first introducing a new story or book, a deaf adult might do this by translating passages of text to ASL and relaying the story in this manner first, instead of reading the text word for word. The reason for doing this is because “with a deaf child, there is a practical difficulty of signing and holding the book at the same time. Also the child must shift focus to watch the adult signing and look to the pictures on the page and the printed words” (Akamatsu & Andrews, 1993).

Another common strategy seen in adults reading to deaf children is the act of signing directly on the book. For example, if the story involves a girl strolling down the sidewalk, the reader could use her index finger to classify a person and then move it along the picture of the sidewalk in the book. “This allows the child to connect the pictured information with verbal information without having to shift eye gaze from one to the other” (Akamatsu & Andrews, 1993). Furthermore, this simple process establishes a structural base from which pronoun usage in ASL is beginning to be understood by the child. By using the index finger as a classifier for a girl, the reader could point to the index finger with her other hand as if to refer back to the girl in pronoun form (i.e. *she*).

The most important strategy discussed in the Akamatsu and Andrews (1993) study, is the dialogue shared between the deaf adult and child during reading activities. The talk surrounding reading included the adult or child making comments about the picture, the adult relating what was going on in the picture to the child’s experience, the child relating his own experience to a picture or content of text,
and the adult reading word for word in English and explaining it in ASL

Establishing an active dialogue during the reading process allows the adult to monitor the child’s understanding, not only of the story itself but also of broad literacy tasks in general. The strategy of using active dialogue during ASL storytelling allows adults to see not only what the child has learned from his/her reading experience, but also what the child’s potential is for future learning. This concept is also known as the “zone of proximal development” or ZPD. Vygotsky, a social constructivist and leading theorist of the way children develop language, literacy, and cognitive skills, maintains that, “teaching is successful only if it is done within the learner’s ZPD” (Akamatsu & Andrews, 1993). The adults, who interact with deaf and hard of hearing children through daily reading activities and continue to have ongoing dialogues with the children about these activities, are in the best position to monitor this type of learning and then structure or “scaffold” future reading activities/dialogues as they see fit for each individual child.

To take a closer look at strategies used during ASL storytelling, it is important to assess some of the strategies used by deaf parents while reading to their deaf children. A study by Lartz and Lestina (1995) focuses on six major strategies deaf mothers use while reading to their deaf children. These strategies are listed and defined as follows:

1. Sign Placement- Mother signs certain words or phrases on the picture or uses the book itself as part of the sign.

2. Text Paired with Signed Demonstration- Mother clarifies the text or picture by demonstrating the action pictured or represented in the text.
3. **Real World Connection Between Text and Child’s Experience** - Mother signs an example of an event or experience in the child’s life, which relates to the story text.

4. **Attention Maintenance** - Mother physically secures the child’s attention to her signing or to a picture in a book.

5. **Physical Demonstration of Character Changes** - Mother uses facial expressions and body posture to signal different characters in the book.


For deaf and hard of hearing adults, these reading strategies are for the most part natural and automatic in their reading activities with deaf children. For many hearing teachers of deaf children, who most likely developed literacy skills in a predominantly auditory reading environment, using these strategies for reading to their deaf students will not come naturally. That is why it is important for teachers to either learn and implement the strategies themselves, or take advantage of the deaf professionals in their school or community who can implement these strategies in the classroom on a regular basis.

If future research replicates a consistent set of strategies which deaf mothers use during early reading, perhaps interventions can be developed, based on these strategies, to help hearing parents of deaf or hard of hearing children [and hearing teachers of deaf or hard of hearing children] engage in meaningful and comfortable literacy experiences (Lartz & Lestina, 1995, p. 362).

Another study by Andrews and Taylor (1987) on book sharing between a mother and her deaf son outlined similar strategies. These strategies included: (1) confirmation of the
child’s understanding; (2) focusing attention on the book and its content; (3) specific language input; and (4) concept development. More important in this study was the way the mother used “scaffolding” techniques with her son, in order to help him participate in the reading process. By this, I mean that she supported her son by leading him in ways that were necessary to promote her son’s understanding of the text. In turn, her son was able to reciprocate interactive dialogue consisting of questions and discussions about ideas in the book (Andrews & Taylor, 1987).

In every study I have read thus far regarding strategies used in the reading of books to deaf children, one strategy is discussed consistently. It is the act of keeping the child’s attention focused on the reading activity that is taking place. This predominantly happens through the act of asking questions. One particularly important strategy, which appears to establish the child’s role in the book-reading process, is questioning (Lartz & McCollum, 1990). In a study by Lartz and McCollum (1990), four specific types of questions, which a mother used with her deaf son, were outlined and discussed. The question types are as follows:

1. *Conventional Test Questions*- signed or vocalized requests by the mother intended to test or display the child’s linguistic or cognitive abilities. The mother knows the answer (i.e. While pointing to a picture, mother asks, “What’s this?”).

2. *Gestural Test Questions*- non-linguistic requests intended to display the child’s linguistic and cognitive abilities. The mother uses only facial expression and pointing as a means of asking a question (i.e. Mother points to picture in a book and crooks her eyebrows).
3. *Requests for Information*—sincere requests. The mother does not know the answer (i.e. “Are you hungry?”).

4. *Verification of Communication*—questions intended to verify that the child understood the mother’s communication (i.e. “OK?”).

In a follow-up study on mothers and the questions they use while reading to deaf children by Lartz (1993), five more question types were identified and added onto the above list. The additional five question types that were identified are as follows:

1. *Repair Questions*—requests for whole or partial repetition of the child’s previous communication, usually occurring when a mother misunderstands her child’s utterance (i.e. If a child signed “I run fast.” the mother may ask, “You what?”).

2. *Reflective Questions*—questions that repeat, reflect, or rephrase the child’s previous utterance or that describe or acknowledge the child’s activity, without adding new information (i.e. A child signs, “Dogs eat bones.” To this a mother may reply, “Dogs eat bones? Are you sure?”).

3. *Expansion Questions*—questions that expand on the child’s previous utterance (i.e. child signs, “hot” and mother may reply, “That pot is hot, isn’t it?”).

4. *Report Questions*—questions that inform the child of a fact she or he may not be aware of, and thus provide new information to the child (i.e. Mother points to a picture of a boy with a cast and asks, “He broke his arm, didn’t he?”).

5. *Indirect Commands*—requests for action by the child (i.e. questions like, “Can you turn the page?”[nontext related] “Can you dance like her?”[text related] “Can you say cat?”[speech related]).
Both studies, (Lartz & McCollum, 1990; Lartz, 1993), plea for all who are involved in a deaf child’s reading experience, to be more aware of the rich interchange that question induced dialogue creates during literacy enriching activities. Again, questioning strategies that may come naturally to deaf adults during their reading activities with deaf children, most likely will not come as easily to hearing teachers of deaf students. As a teacher of the deaf who is hearing, I see it as my job to understand the benefits of learning the strategies deaf adults use with deaf children during literacy enriching activities. I also see it as my responsibility to implement these strategies in my students’ reading program in order to help facilitate my students’ ability to read. Children at the receiving end of these literacy-developing strategies have been shown to acquire distinct levels of story knowledge. For example, a longitudinal study by Maxwell (1984) documented the levels of story knowledge attained by one deaf girl over a 4-5 year period, whose parents were both skilled in the strategies used to read to their deaf child. The levels of story knowledge Maxwell (1984) identified are:

1. Labeling, or naming pictures and signs;
2. Stating propositions and expressing continuity in terms of story information;
3. Reading pictures (i.e. making moral judgments about characters in the story);
4. Going beyond the pictures (i.e. experiencing complete stories in ASL without reference to the books and the ability to comment on the stories);
5. Projecting herself into the stories (thus making herself a character who is an integral part of the story); and
6. Reading independently for meaning.
As a teacher of the deaf, it would be ideal for each of my students to be able to establish these levels of story knowledge and reading ability in general. I gladly accept the responsibility of making certain that the strategies used during ASL-based reading activities are an integral component of my own reading program/curriculum. Regardless of any deaf students' individual language background, whether a student is deaf and uses manual communication, or deaf and uses oral communication, it is crucial that anyone involved in the literacy development of that student, knows how to implement or has the resources to implement the ASL-based strategies that can be used for reading instruction in the classroom.

Parental Involvement/Support:

There have been many different research studies that looked at the extent a parent should be involved in their child’s academics. Lack of parental involvement could very easily deter a student from striving for high academic achievement, while too much parental involvement can be stressful and overbearing, causing a child to withdraw from, rather than embrace academic excellence. This section focuses specifically on the positive effects parents have on the development of their child’s literacy skills and more specifically on the role parents of deaf children should take when it comes to developing literacy skills in a child who faces challenges in the acquisition and understanding of the English language in its written form.

Should parents be involved in their child’s academics, specifically when it comes to the development of their child’s literacy skills? Furthermore, is parental involvement necessary in order for children to acquire a certain level of reading skill? “A child’s
success in school literacy programs often depends on the experiences he or she faces at home; consequently, there have been many efforts to understand powerful home-school literacy connections" (Morrow & Young, 1997, p.736). While this statement seems to point out the obvious, some studies have yielded contradictory findings.

In a study completed by Morrow & Young (1997), students were separated into two groups. One of these groups received a home and school-based literacy program. The other group received a school-based literacy program only.

This study quite successfully revealed differences in literacy achievement on the part of the children involved in the family literacy program and suggests that the strong connection of the school and home program was the component for encouraging participation and success in literacy (Morrow & Young, 1997, p. 740-41).

Not only did the parents in this study realize the impact they have on their child’s literacy development, but teachers also realized that it is important for parents to play an active role in this development. Furthermore, it is up to the teachers to inform parents about the strategies they can use at home in order to achieve greater literacy success.

As a teacher, I realize how important it will be to encourage the parents of my students to be involved in their child’s academic growth. Knowing this importance, I also feel that it is important to recognize that just as my students learn and experience information at different levels, so do their parents. Parents will differ in their perceptions of what is important in regards to academic growth of their child. Spiegel, Fitzgerald, & Cunningham (1993) studied how parents perceive their preschoolers’ literacy skills. They found that “highly literate parents differ [from parents with lower literacy skills], in
their opinions of what is effective, thus implying that teachers should tailor their strategies for helping different parents help their children" (Spiegel, Fitzgerald, & Cunningham, 1993, p.74). It is imperative that when I inform parents of the strategies that will help their child gain greater literacy success that I also pay close attention to what they deem as being important. "Successful development of home-school partnerships must be based on an understanding of the parents’ perceptions of literacy development and their roles in their children’s literacy development" (Spiegel et al., 1993, p.78).

Another issue affecting parents’ perceptions of their children’s literacy is tied in with cultural diversity. I am fully aware that not all my students’ parents will know English as their first language. Also, because my students will be deaf, it is safe to say that for the most part, English is not their first language either. "Knowledge of differences among cultures may, indeed, help teachers gain a broader perspective on the influence of cultural background and its effects in the school context" (Zhang, Ollila, & Harvey, 1998, p.188). Although Zhang’s study focused on Chinese parents and their perceptions of their children’s literacy development, the study can easily be transferred to parents who are deaf and/or hearing, who may also come from various ethnic/linguistic backgrounds. The conclusions of Zhang’s study were based on the answers given by parents on a questionnaire. The answers centered around three parental perspectives that included: early memories parents had of their child’s literacy development; perceptions of differences of schooling [between parent and child]; and parents’ expectations about literacy (Zhang et al., 1998). I feel that as a teacher, I would benefit from the knowledge of these perspectives from all parents with whom I come in contact, so that I can get a
better feel for where they are coming from and what their expectations are for their children.

"Prelingually deaf children acquire reading knowledge by matching their existing knowledge of sign language constructs to print" (Andrews & Mason, 1986, p. 216). Children with a manual background in communication will thus benefit from teaching strategies that link manual modes of communication to printed form. Furthermore, deaf students fare better in their reading acquisition when parents are aware of the strategies that benefit their child as an individual and use these strategies in the home in order to continually develop their child’s literacy needs. Many studies of parental involvement in a deaf child’s academics point to higher levels of academic success on the deaf child’s part when the parent is involved. This includes the development of literacy skills and the important role a parent can play in fostering this development.

"Previous research has shown that if a child feels a lack of acceptance from their family, that child’s self-esteem suffers" (Desselle, 1994, p.322). Unfortunately, this happens all too often in the lives of deaf children. With ninety percent of deaf children having hearing parents, it is a sad fact that some of these parents have a hard time accepting their child’s deafness and therefore take a back seat when it comes to getting involved in their child’s education. Some parents leave academic instruction to the teachers who are better trained to communicate with children who are deaf. A study, which linked scores on self-esteem tests to communication/involvement of parents with their deaf children, and then further linked self-esteem to academic achievement, shows how important acceptance is to a child’s academic success.
It is shown that parents who are more able to converse in their deaf child’s language—sign language—the higher the self-esteem scores of the student. Likewise, the higher the student’s self-esteem, the higher the results of their reading level achievement (Desselle, 1994, p. 326-27).

Another study of deaf students with high and low academic performance in the area of reading comprehension indicated similar findings. Johnson (1986) wanted to investigate the differences in social-psychological family environments of students with high and low reading achievement.

The results indicate that deaf students who differ in their level of achievement do differ significantly in characteristics of their family environments. Also, across content areas, different family environment variables were found to discriminate high and low achievement. For reading, family practices that were primary discriminators were; adaptation to a child’s deafness, and press for child’s achievement. This study’s findings support the recommendation that the deaf child’s home and school should provide compatible and complimentary resources to his or her school learning (Johnson, 1986, p. 447-48).

Family environments can also be looked at from the perspective of the family setup itself. Instead of just looking at involvement, it also becomes important to look at who is involved. In many cases, one parent takes on the role of the involved parent when it comes to academic development of a deaf child. Most often it is the mother who takes on this role. A study conducted by Calderon & Low (1998) investigated families with and without fathers to determine the effect of paternal presence or absence on the social-emotional, language, and academic outcomes of children. “The findings of this study
provide important evidence for including fathers in the conceptual framework of intervention programs and viewing them as integral parts of the family unit” (Calderon & Low, 1998, p.233). It is important for educators to know not only the level in which parents are willing to get involved in their child’s academic achievement, but also who is willing or available to be involved.

Based on these studies, it is important that parents of deaf and hard of hearing children realize the importance of their involvement in their child’s education. All students need to believe in their ability to succeed, especially in academic areas that are challenging to them. When a deaf child learns to read, language availability in and out of the classroom is instrumental to his/her success. Parents, teachers, and community members can work together in making sure that deaf children are provided with appropriate strategies that help them to achieve their personal best in academic achievement and literacy development. More reading programs/curriculums should be created so that there is a bridge between school and home, so that a child’s literacy development does not begin and end in the classroom. Parents need to realize that by modeling appropriate reading behaviors to children, reading developments will occur more readily and naturally.

Speech Support:

In a classroom of deaf and hard of hearing students, more often than not, a teacher will have students who retain some form of residual hearing and can therefore benefit from amplification systems that are teamed with speech. One example may be a hearing teacher who speaks while using an FM amplification system that transmits to the
students' hearing aids. Another example may be a teacher who is deaf and sends her students to a Speech Language Professional (SLP) for speech/speech-reading support. In a well-designed bilingual program, speech-language specialists, work within the classroom to develop children's awareness of English phonology while specialists in American Sign Language (ASL) develop students' skills in the building blocks of ASL (Fernendes, 1999). For deaf and hard of hearing students who are orally educated, most studies find that they have superior reading skills to deaf students in other types of programs because of the relationship between spoken language and its direct encodability into print (Musselman, 2000).

In the area of the development of reading skills, speech support can support a Deaf/HH student by providing them with phonemic awareness. Experience with spoken language can provide students with an extensive vocabulary, considerable syntactic competence, and a rich semantic base (Waters & Doehring, 1990). This experience may be a visual recognition of the sound placement on the lips, tongue, and teeth, or it may be an auditory recognition of the sounds picked up by a student's residual hearing. If students who are severe to profoundly deaf can use their residual hearing and/or speech reading ability, they should also be able to use some of the aspects involved in a phonics approach to reading instruction (Paul, 1997).

In an enhanced reading program for Deaf/HH students, it is crucial to include some form of phonics approach. Most often, the phonics lessons included in commercial guided reading programs are not appropriate for deaf and hard of hearing students. They are usually in the form of an audiotape or computer CD Rom, which have activities that are not tailored to the needs of deaf students. When a teacher or SLP presents
speech/phonics related activities that coincide with the leveled reading books in the
guided reading program, the signed ASL stories, and the books being read at home, they
are providing students opportunity to recognize words in a meaningful context. Learning
to read takes place through a whole language approach and is no longer a series of
separately learned targeted skills.

**Cross-Curricular Support:**

Cross-curricular teaching is the support of an idea, topic, concept, or theme
throughout the lessons of various school subjects. Other terms for this type of instruction
are: curriculum integration; thematic teaching/planning; and curricular cohesion. In
recent years, this form of teaching has become popular among teachers throughout the
nation.

The idea of connecting subject areas has considerable face validity, because it
seems like common sense. In the real world, people’s lives are not separated into
separate subjects; therefore, it seems only logical that subject areas should not be

When discussing reading instruction, the implementation of curricular integration is
especially important. Student reading activities do not end just because a forty-minute
block of reading instruction is over. Students are required to read in every school subject.
It is therefore highly beneficial for teachers to build a bridge across their curriculum so
that themes, topics, ideas, and concepts can be reinforced throughout a student’s day.
There are many advantages of curricular integration. These advantages include: helping
students to build deeper understandings; allowing students to see the “bigger picture”;
making the learning process more relevant to students; making connections across central concepts; and helping students to become more motivated and interested in learning (Czerniak et al., 1999).

The reinforcement of concepts across a curriculum is extremely important for all students, especially students requiring a specialized form of education. The understanding of basic concepts may not come as easily for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. The predominant reason for this is that they lack the incidental learning that takes place when one can overhear the sounds and conversations that take place in the environment surrounding them. Teachers of deaf students can better fill in these types of learning gaps by helping them to make connections between the prior knowledge in one subject and the relative new knowledge in another. In fact, the strongest complaint against a traditional separated curriculum is that it does not support societal and/or cultural issues that are relevant to the problems and issues students face today (Czerniak et al., 1999). When teachers integrate concepts across content areas, they allow their students a greater opportunity to think more critically about the issues and the world surrounding them.

Thematic teaching is also supported by research of the brain and the way it processes information (Cohen, 1995). Beane (1996) suggests that people process information through patterns and connections rather than through fragmented bits and pieces of information. Knowing the way the brain processes information and knowing that learning to read poses specific challenges to deaf students, it behooves teachers of deaf students to lessen these challenges by creating an enhanced reading program that integrates themes, ideas, and concepts into various subject matters.
Conclusions:

Through an extensive review of the literature, it has been demonstrated that deaf and hard of hearing students need to be provided with a reading program that offers diverse approaches to instruction. The five components that are discussed in this review are proven to be important to deaf students who struggle to make sense of the printed word. There are far too many teachers who have difficulty evaluating their own methods of teaching. It is an extremely difficult process to look inward and ask oneself, "Is there more that I could be doing?" I know that as a teacher, I will constantly have to reevaluate my methods and the way in which I present information to my students. I believe these five components to be crucial in the reading instruction of deaf and hard of hearing students. I am fully aware that the ways in which I choose to implement these components into my own enhanced reading program will differ from the ways other teachers of the Deaf/HH choose to do so. My plea is that all elementary teachers of deaf students check to make sure that they are guiding their students through a set reading curriculum, supporting the English words and concepts with ASL, involving parents in the reading activities of their children, taking advantage of the spoken word and its direct link to the written word, and supporting/reinforcing the learning across an integrated curriculum. There are no easy answers when it comes to teaching deaf students to read. There are however, strategies we as teachers can use to better our students' chances of becoming confident and competent readers.
IV. Activities

Basis for Unit

The goal of the unit I will be developing is to demonstrate to fellow colleagues in the field of Deaf Education, how to structure a unit based on the five literacy building components discussed in the review of the literature. I will start by choosing a commercially written guided reading program/curriculum that is currently being used at Rochester School for the Deaf throughout the elementary grades. This will serve as my guided reading program component. Following the guidance of that written curriculum, I will pick a unit story as the basis of my unit. I will then discuss the dictated lesson for that unit and discuss why it is or is not appropriate for deaf students as it is written. From that point, I will then tailor my unit/program to include an ASL storytelling component that will provide my students with reading strategies used when deaf adults engage in reading activities with deaf children. I will then go on to discuss my goals and objectives for the parents of my students and the extent to which I would like to see them involved in the development of their child’s reading skills. I will continue to present my plan for a Speech Language Professional to conduct a lesson that supports the focus of the previous components. Finally, I will demonstrate various ways in which I can use curricular integration in the planning of my unit, so that the learning in other subject areas reinforce the concept, idea, or theme of the unit story that is being read. I will stress that the program, which I am developing, is to be used as a guide or frame for other teachers as they will most likely be dealing with school/district dictated curriculum materials that are different from the materials used in my program. My goal is that teachers assess their own reading programs and work to include the components discussed in this project.
Resources


