The Deaf Mentor Program: A New Generation

STACY ABRAMS

JODEE CRACE

PAULA PITTMAN

Historical Perspective

▶ Schools for the deaf or hard of hearing began in the early 1800's, and individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing have been employed by many of these schools over the years, but involvement of deaf or hard of hearing adults in early intervention was minimal before the 1990's

▶ At the first National EHDI Conference, which was held in 2002, there were about 400 participants…2 of whom were deaf or hard of hearing

▶ With the start of the Deaf Mentor Program at the SKI-HI Institute at Utah State University in 1991, we began to intentionally involve adults who are deaf in early intervention services

Joint Committee on Infant Hearing. 2007 Position statement: Principle and Guidelines for Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Programs (2013 supplement paper)

- ▶ Goal 2: All children who are D/HH and their families experience access to service coordinators who have specialized knowledge and skills related to working with deaf/hh children (Developmental Specialists Certifications).

- ▶ Goal 3A: Intervention services to teach ASL will be provided by professionals who have native or fluent skills and are trained to teach families/children.

- ▶ Goal 7: All children who are identified with hearing loss of any kind receive appropriate intervention services. (Unilateral, Auditory Neuropathy, Microtia Atresia).

- ▶ Goal 9: All families will have access to other families with deaf children with similar backgrounds for support. (Family events).

Deaf Mentors are an integral part in shaping the next generation

Deaf adults must be included

▶ Goal 10: Deaf adults should be an integral part of the EHDI system. *Because the support of language and communication of infants is intended to be the heart of EHDI systems,* it is critical to include D/HH adults in these systems.

▶ Goal 11: All families to have access to receive support, mentorship and guidance from deaf adults. The more interactions that families have with adults who are D/HH the better they may envision their own child's future, including developing goals and dreams that are not limited by misunderstandings about the lives of people who are D/HH. The goal of the system is to value infants/children who are D/HH for who they are.

Historical Perspective

▶ The original Deaf Mentor Project was funded in 1991 through a grant from the US Department of Education an Experimental Project that had a Model-Demonstration Project requirement combined

The hope of the program was multi-faceted, but three of the primary goals include:

▶ To provide a feasible way for families to learn and use ASL effectively in their daily routines and in their natural environments with their child

▶ To provide parents with access to adults who are deaf or hard of hearing so they could learn about living life as a person who is deaf or hard of hearing

▶ To provided children with a fluent ASL language model and to connect the child with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing

** The project became a national program model in 1994 and outreach services are still provided today

Prior to the Deaf Mentor Program

▶ Many individuals in the field of Early Childhood Deaf Education felt that hearing parents could not learn ASL

▶ Some professionals in the field felt that parents could not handle meeting adults who were deaf or hard of hearing when their children were small

▶ Many professionals in the field felt that exposing infants, toddlers and young children to ASL early on would prevent them from being able to learn spoken English and would damage their potential to learn written English in the future, or would cause the confusion

Experimental & Control Groups

Utah Experimental Group	Tennessee Control Group
• Deaf Mentors	
• Hearing Parent Advisors	• Hearing Parent Advisors
• 18 Children and Families	• 18 Children and Families
• American Sign Language (ASL) and signed English	• Spoken English/Signed English
• Deaf Culture and Hearing Culture	• Hearing Culture/Hearing Culture
Bilingual-Bicultural	*English-Hearing Culture Group*

Services Provided to Families in the Experimental Group:

- ▶ Parent Advisor made weekly visits to the home sharing SKI-HI programming and materials

- ▶ Manually coded English was used simultaneously with spoken English throughout daily routines with the child and family

- ▶ Deaf Mentor made weekly visits to the family

- ▶ Deaf Mentor interacted with the child using ASL

- ▶ Deaf Mentor showed family members how to use ASL in daily routines and activities

- ▶ Deaf Mentor helps the family understand Deaf culture and get involved with the Deaf community

Children in the Study Were Matched:

▶ Average Hearing Status (97.4 dB – range of 85-120 dB)

▶ Average Age of Project Start (27.2 months)

▶ Average Amount of SKI-HI Programming Prior to Deaf Mentor Project (14 months)

▶ Average Pretest Developmental Rate (.75)

Results

- Children in the Experimental Deaf Mentor Group made 1.1 months of gain for every month of intervention

- Children who were involved in the Deaf Mentor Project performed better on tests of English than children who had exposure to only spoken or signed English

- Children in the Experimental group had greater skills in ASL than in English, even though their parents were not native ASL users

- Parents in the program reported using 5 times more signs than parents in the control group who were also using sign language to communicate with their children (both mothers and fathers)

What Have We Confirmed Since the Deaf Mentor Program Began in 1991?

▶ Hearing parents and family members can and do learn to use ASL effectively and fluently, but only if they are given support to do so

▶ Parents who are hearing want to meet adults who are deaf or hard of hearing, whether they want to learn and use ASL or not

▶ The development of spoken language and ASL do not have to be mutually exclusive of one another; in fact, the development of one language scaffolds the development of the other (Watkins, Pittman, & Walden, 1998; Kovelman, Shalinsky, Berens, & Pettito, 2013)

▶ Children who are deaf who have cochlear implants whose parents are deaf who are ASL users had better spoken language skills in a recent study than children who are deaf who have cochlear implants whose parents are hearing, indicating that fears about the influence of sign language on spoken language development are unfounded

Families Who Want to Learn and Use ASL Benefit From Having a Deaf Mentor

New Technology and Advancements in Our Profession Have Sparked Changes in the Deaf Mentor Program

Updates to the Deaf Mentor Curriculum

The Original Deaf Mentor Program Curriculum Had Three Primary Sections

▶ ASL For Families – A series of 37 topics to help families learn ASL that they could use with their child in everyday environments and routines

▶ Early Visual Communication Program – A series of 18 topics that summarize strategies that Deaf parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing use somewhat intuitively to take advantage of the child's visual environment in order to help draw attention to language and help the child acquire language

▶ Deaf Culture Program – This program is divided into three sections, 1) Deaf Culture; 2) Deaf History; 3) Famous Deaf People, designed to introduce families to Deaf Culture and the Deaf Community

Revisions To ASL For Families

▶ Terminology will be changed within topics to match linguistics terminology for ASL today, such as Fingerspelled Loan Signs will be changed to Lexicalized Fingerspelling

▶ ASL Topics will be available to Deaf Mentors online once they have received SKI-HI Deaf Mentor Training so they can read the topics in English, then see the topic in ASL

▶ Vocabulary will be updated in the print version and will be made accessible to families online and on an app

▶ Receptive fingerspelling practice online for the whole family

Revisions to Early Visual Communication Program:

▶ Topic added that provide developmental milestones for the acquisition of ASL in infants, toddlers and young children

▶ Topic added that provide new research information on the infant brain and language development

▶ Terminology updated from bilingual-bicultural to bimodal or ASL/English

▶ New research shared regarding the impact of bilingual development in infants, toddlers and young children

▶ Video clips provided online that will show each of the early visual techniques/strategies being used by a parent and child

▶ Topic information shared in ASL to support the printed English topic

Revisions to Deaf Culture Program

▶ Update topics on technology to include texting, video phone technology, instant message, apps, twitter and social networking and how individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing use these and other technological advances

▶ Add new history to the history topics and links online to read more about historical facts and the Deaf Community

▶ Provide online pictures and links to learn more about the famous deaf people featured in the curriculum, as well as links to learn about other famous people who are deaf or hard of hearing

Other Program Additions

▶ Guidebook for adults who are deaf or hard of hearing who will be working with families who do not want to learn ASL but do want to meet and talk with adults who are deaf. Topics include:

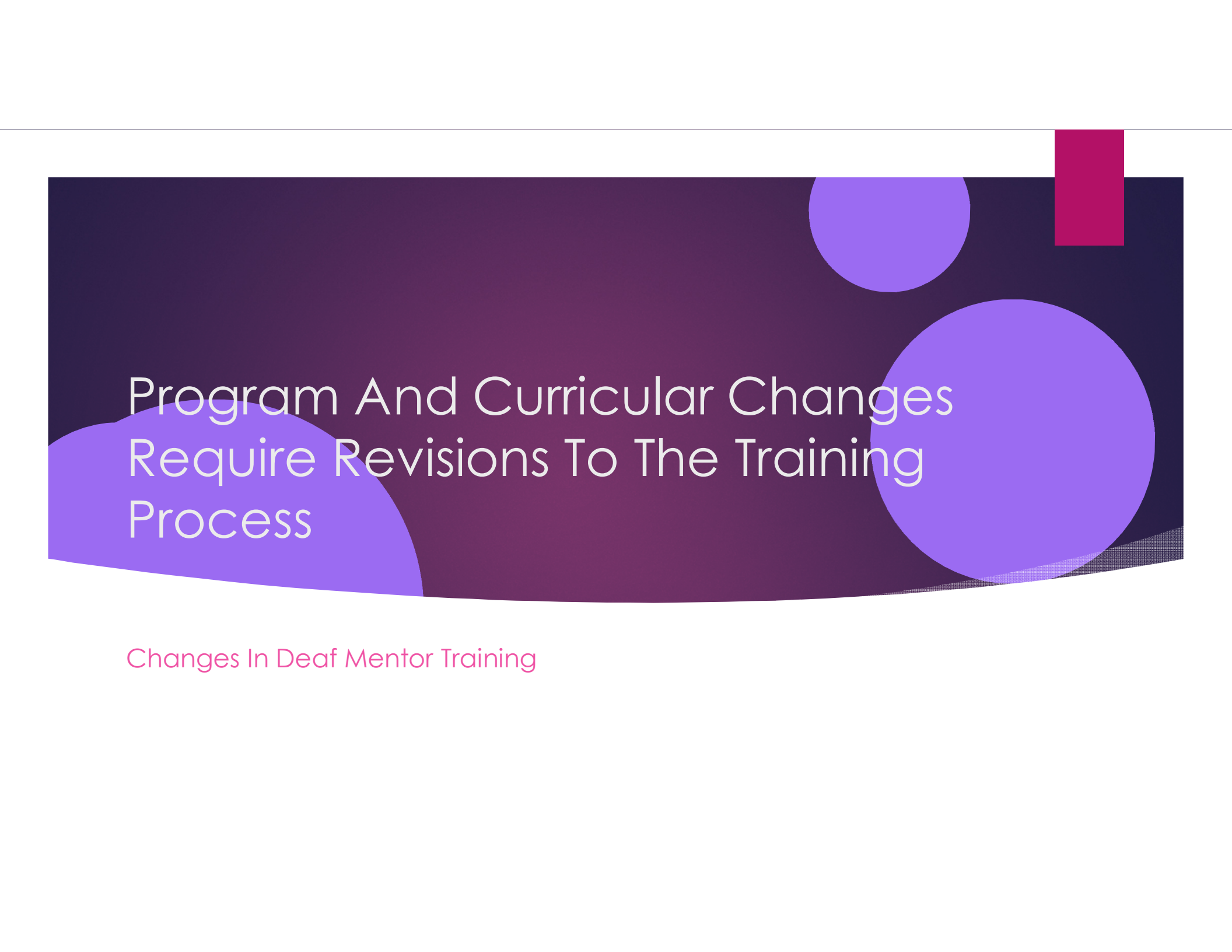Technology – the good the bad and the ugly

A day in the life of a person who is deaf or hard of hearing

What hearing parents want to know

Resources available nationally and locally

Visual needs for deaf and hard of hearing people who don't sign

And more…

Program And Curricular Changes Require Revisions To The Training Process

Changes In Deaf Mentor Training

New National Training Team

▶ Jodee Crace –Stacy Abrams –Paula Pittman –

New National Training Team

Jodee Crace

Jodie is a SKI-HI and Deaf Mentor State Trainer, has been active in a role as both a Parent Advisor and Deaf Mentor in Indiana, was the coordinator of the SKI-HI and Deaf Mentor Programs in her state for 4 years (in addition to being a PA for 11 years and DM for several years. She is a graduate of Gallaudet University with a background in school counseling and early education development. She is the past president of the American Society for Deaf Children (ASDC) and is the parent of two Deaf sons and two DeafBlind sons.

Stacy Abrams

Stacy has been the coordinator of the Deaf Mentor Program at the New Mexico School for the Deaf for 6 years, and also works as a Deaf Mentor providing direct services to families. She is a graduate of Gallaudet University, and University of California at Santa Barbara with a background in Special Education/Disabilities and Risk Emphasis . She is the parent of two deaf children, one boy and one girl .

Paula Pittman

Paula is one of the developers of the original Deaf Mentor Project and has been the director of Deaf Mentor Outreach since the program's inception. She has worked as an early interventionist working with children who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families for over 30 years. She is the director of the Parent Infant Program for the Deaf at the Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind, coordinating both Parent Advisors and Deaf Mentors in that program.

Training Updates

▶ New research on early ASL development

▶ Description of multi-modal approaches, what they might be and valuing/supporting them

▶ New research on infant brain development and visual language

▶ More in-depth training on early child development

▶ Effective strategies for teaching hearing family members ASL

▶ Overview ASL assessments appropriate for infants, toddlers and young children

▶ Understanding family dynamics and providing support and encouragement to all family members

Training Updates

▶ Working with children who have cochlear implants

▶ Training specifically for LSL Deaf Mentors

▶ Use of distance education in Deaf Mentor Programs

When Will Revisions Be Available?

▶ Goal is for all curriculum revisions to be completed in December, 2015

▶ New topics pages can be purchased and will simply replace pages in the current Deaf Mentor Curriculum binder

▶ New training package will be available by September, 2015