

IMPORTANCE OF DEAF MENTORS IN EHDI PROGRAMS

Debra Patkin
The National Association of the Deaf

The Need

- ◉ Majority of parents of deaf/HOH child have no experience with deafness
- ◉ Similarly, many lack understanding of early childhood education and especially importance of language acquisition

The Puzzle

- The puzzle of raising a deaf child has several parts
 - Education
 - Communication/Language
 - Technology/Aids
 - Culture and Communities
 - Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Development
- Each piece of puzzle has a Specialist



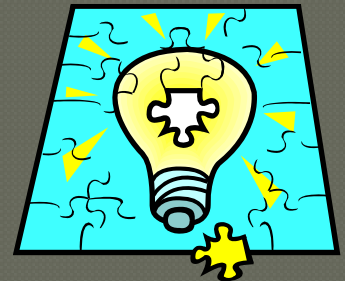
A Child is More Than a Sum of Parts

- “The whole is greater than the sum of the parts” – Gestalt Psychology
- A child is much more than his hearing status



Putting the Pieces Together: Deaf Mentors

- Deafness = not just a diagnosis; it is a life-long experience
 - “Deafness is a difference, not a deficit.” (Thomas, 1994, p. 553)
- The big picture – the deaf experience
 - How different aspects of a child’s life come together to create a unique person
 - E.g. education: based on communication



Study: Deaf Mentor Experimental Project

- SKI-HI Institute, Utah State University, Logan
- Three year project
- Measured effectiveness of deaf mentor services to young children 0-5 and families
 - Bilingual-bicultural model
- 2 groups: one receiving deaf mentor services, another not receiving such services
 - Deaf mentors: used ASL and Signed English with children and family
 - Children matched on hearing loss, age, pretest development
 - Both received parent advisers visits
 - Parent advisers used Signed English
- Diagnostic tests performed on children every 6 months
- Children

(Watkins, Pittman, and Walden, 1998)

Study: Deaf Mentor Experimental Project

○ Results:

- Children with deaf mentors showed greater gains in receptive and expressive language
 - Average language gain: 6 months
 - Performed better on other linguistic tests – including English grammar test
- Parents also benefitted from deaf mentors
 - Parents report less frustration re: communication
 - Perception on deafness more akin to deaf community

Deaf Mentor Program: An Overview

- ◉ Trained deaf/HOH mentors
- ◉ Regular (weekly) home visits
 - Deaf Mentor join the family during particular family events, happenings and routines within the context of the home
- ◉ Knowledge of language, culture, deafness shared and discussed

Characteristics of a Deaf Mentor

- ◉ Trained
- ◉ Experience as a deaf child
- ◉ Knowledge of various technologies and aids
- ◉ Local educational opportunities
- ◉ Communication methods
- ◉ Experience with self-esteem, socialization, identity, overcoming adversity and stereotypes
- ◉ Neutrality!

Advantages of Deaf Mentors

- Parents get to meet a deaf person – for the first time?
 - much better understanding of opportunities available for child
 - Siblings learn as well
- What it means to be deaf
 - Little nuisances, day-to-day occurrences, thought processes
 - Importance of visual information
 - Community involvement
- Show that deaf people can be successful and self-sufficient
 - Mentor can discuss success stories of other deaf adults
 - Parents feel more confident, reassured

Advantages of Deaf Mentors

- Enhance parents' self-efficacy
 - Parents receive hands-on training, practice with feedback – learn to identify learning opportunities for child
 - Encourages early invention
- Exposure to cultural/linguistics model when child very young:
 - Parents more relaxed, interact more freely
 - More optimistic about child's future
 - Promotes self-esteem, communication and language usage
 - Sense of identity for deaf child yet exposed to both culture

Advantages of Deaf Mentors

- Language acquisition
 - Shows family how to use ASL
 - Enable child to learn both ASL and English
 - Greater fluency in ASL → better English literacy
 - acquire language during critical period
 - If no language:
 - Child ends up with poor language skills
 - Communication at home seriously affected
 - Unprepared for school
 - No language to access curricular content
- In some cases, parents remain friends with mentor for a long time

Mentor Programs

- **COLORADO: Deaf and Hard of Hearing Connections**
 - Collaboration between Hands and Voices, Colorado Department of Education and CSDB
 - Diversity of mentors
 - Mentors share personal stories
 - Technology, education, interaction with family/friends
 - no advocacy for specific strategy
 - Panels/home visits

Mentor Programs

- **MINNESOTA: Deaf Mentor Project**
 - Dept. of Human Services
 - SKI-HI trained mentors
 - Deaf/HOH teachers undergo SKI-HI training too
 - Mentors work with teachers
 - Ongoing training

Training

- ◉ SKI-HI Institute, Utah State University, Logan
 - 586-page curriculum containing ASL lessons for families, and lessons about early visual communication and Deaf Culture
 - 8 states using SKI-HI Deaf Mentor Program
 - (not necessarily state-wide)
- ◉ Hands and Voices
- ◉ Gallaudet: select courses

Recommendations/ Next Steps

- Currently, not every state has a Deaf Mentor Program
 - Concerns include funding, administration/monitoring

Recommendations/ Next Steps

○ Keys to success

- Programs easily accessible
 - Price, application, flexible hours, ESL families
- Explain importance to parents
- Consistency
- Trained staff
 - All communication opportunities, parents' emotions, creative activity ideas, fluent in ASL and English
- Team with PIP/EI teacher
- Support groups

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