

U. S. Deaf Education Teacher Preparation Programs: A Look at the Present and a Vision for the Future

Prepared for the Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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COPSSE research is focused on the preparation of special education professionals and its impact on beginning teacher quality and student outcomes. Our research is intended to inform scholars and policymakers about advantages and disadvantages of preparation alternatives and the effective use of public funds in addressing personnel shortages.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a growing recognition that the ability of deaf or hard-of-hearing (D/HH) students to achieve academic success is tied to the instructional effectiveness of teachers. Developments in D/HH education include: (a) a shift toward educating students in local public schools, (b) a conceptual reorientation toward establishing effective learning environments, and (c) a critical, nationwide shortage of qualified teachers. The result has been a growing acceptance of the need to examine and redesign the way we prepare teachers. Historic disagreements about the most appropriate way to communicate with D/HH students have served to divert attention from one underlying reality: in spite of our efforts, the majority of D/HH students graduate from high school substantially undereducated. While most D/HH students possess normal intelligence, their average reading grade level remains consistently and substantially below that of their hearing peers, and 60% of D/HH high school graduates are considered inadequately prepared for college.

This paper examines key redesign issues, addressing four questions:

- What are the key concepts that can be used to guide the redesign of deaf education?
- How many teachers of D/HH students are needed and what are the instructional demands those teachers must be prepared to address?
- To what extent can state and national certification/licensure standards be used to provide guidance and oversight for the preparation of effective teachers of D/HH students?
- How are individuals now prepared to become teachers of D/HH students and how can that preparation be enhanced?

CRITICAL CONCEPTS

Two basic concepts as guides of the redesign of deaf education are proposed—critical mass and teachers/students as learners.

Critical Mass

Educators of D/HH students have traditionally attempted to establish school settings with a critical mass of students, teachers, instructional resources, and learning opportunities. Historically, such settings were at state or private, residential or day schools for D/HH students. Gradually, large public school programs clustered significant numbers of D/HH students from several school systems into one. Unfortunately, this educational design was disrupted by an unforeseen impact of the 1991 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), which has accelerated a shift from the residential, day, or public school cluster program to inclusive placements within neighborhood schools.

This new reality requires new strategies from the field of deaf education. First, the field must find strategies to maintain and strengthen the settings in which D/HH students have been educated traditionally. Second, the field must achieve critical masses of D/HH students, teachers, instructional resources, and learning opportunities, including effective instruction for gifted, ethnically diverse, and multi-handicapped (MH) D/HH students.

This is a time of unprecedented technological opportunities for education. Virtual critical mass (e.g., computer-based, Internet-linked learning communities) is technically possible within the nation's schools. The field of deaf education could use such virtual learning communities: (a) to enable D/HH students, teachers, and parents to interact effectively and efficiently with peers, (b) to share resources, (c) to increase learning opportunities, and (d) to offer unique educational programs for subpopulations of D/HH students. The virtual learning communities could enhance

the preparation of new teachers of D/HH students by: (a) grounding preparation in the proven instructional strategies of practicing teachers and (b) providing additional professional development opportunities for practicing teachers.

Teachers and Students as Learners

Teachers teach and students learn—a simple formula that has served as the basic mantra of U. S. schools for centuries. Within this model, teachers direct and evaluate students' work as they progress through a linear array of curricular materials allocated to each grade level. Although the appropriateness of this model of teaching and learning can be argued, one fact is inescapable for the field of deaf education—in spite of our efforts, we must finally accept that it is impossible to teach our D/HH students everything that they need to know. Although the situation is indeed bleak for many teachers and their D/HH students, it does not have to remain so.

In an alternative to the teachers-teach/students-learn model, teachers function as master learners who help their students move from novice learners to mature learners. A critical component of this model involves teachers and students collaboratively working as part of a larger community of learners to construct new knowledge. This knowledge is shared with other members of the networked learning community, adding value to the students' work and increasing the resources available to the community. During this process, teachers use the resources of the networked learning community to: (a) build on their students' interests, (b) match their students with both actual and virtual peers sharing their interests, (c) provide students with authentic learning opportunities that give them reasons to learn what school/society expects of them, (d) model and explain how their students can become more independent and effective learners, and (e) give their students increasing responsibility to track and present their growing knowledge base and learning competence. The same network can be used effectively and efficiently to enhance the preparation of new teachers, while supporting the professional development of practicing teachers. In this scenario, D/HH students have both the opportunity and the rationale for learning what society expects of them. This model bridges the realities gap between institutions of higher education (IHEs) that prepare teachers of D/HH students and the instructional settings in which graduates must teach. This paper proposes that deaf education redesign should focus on the establishment and use of a collaborative network in which students and teachers become increasingly effective learners.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Number of D/HH Students

According to the U. S. Department of Education, during the 1990-1991 school year, 59,211 D/HH students, aged 6-21, were identified as receiving educational services in the nation's K-12 schools; this number grew to 65,039 in 1993-1994 and to 71,671 in 1999-2000. During this 10-year period, there was an increase of 12,460 D/HH students, aged 6-21, receiving educational services in K-12 schools. Even this significant increase may fail to capture the actual number of D/HH students who are now receiving educational services. Services for early-identified children (i.e., younger than 6 months) have included effective family services, appropriate amplification (including cochlear implants), and dynamic language stimulation (both spoken and signed). The children who have benefited from this early identification and services are now beginning to enter the nation's schools in significant numbers. It is very likely that more D/HH children will begin their educations with a language skill level at or near that of their hearing peers

Demographic Characteristics of D/HH Students

Twenty years of demographic data from an annual survey by the Gallaudet Research Institute has provided a profile of the D/HH students who are now or who will shortly be in our nation's schools.

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- Students will continue to be predominantly male, while the primary ethnicity of students will no longer be White.
 - *Unknown* will continue to be recorded as the most common cause of the students' hearing loss. Most hearing losses will be classified as having occurred at birth or shortly thereafter, and between 20%, and 40% of the students will display a secondary disability.
 - The number of students who receive their education in residential or day schools will continue to decline, while the number of students who receive their education in their local public schools will continue to increase.
 - As more students with mild to moderate hearing loss are identified and provided educational services, speech alone—rather than speech and sign—will become the predominant communication modality.
 - The use of sign alone will continue to increase, but it will never be used with more than a small minority of students at a dwindling number of residential and day schools.

Current Demand for Teachers of D/HH Students

There is a persistent, nationwide shortage of teachers who are prepared to teach D/HH students, according to USDOE. Although there has been a significant increase in the number of D/HH students in the nation's schools, the number of teachers being prepared to teach D/HH students has remained the same. The shortage of teachers for D/HH students is one of both quantity and diversity, and some teachers do not have appropriate certification or licensure. It is increasingly difficult to gather sufficient educational resources to meet the needs of widely dispersed, ethnically diverse, frequently mentally handicapped D/HH students.

CERTIFICATION AND LICENSURE

Although a comprehensive, state-by-state analysis of U. S. deaf education teacher certification/licensure standards has not been published, many federally sponsored reports, research studies, and position papers on the knowledge, competencies, and skills needed by teachers of D/HH students are available. The paper details the recommendations, standards, and guidelines from significant reports in deaf education since the mid-1960s.

Teacher competencies, as reflected by state and national certification/licensure requirements, should insure that newly prepared teachers are ready to address the essential learning needs of their students. Although Council on the Education of the Deaf (CED) standards have been routinely recommended to serve as the standard by which all teachers of D/HH students should be prepared, no information is available on state compliance with this recommendation.

Most states certify teachers of D/HH students to teach not at the early childhood, elementary, or secondary level specifically, but at all levels (K-12th grades). Given the long-standing focus on how to communicate with D/HH students relative to what to teach or how to create effective learning environments, it should not be surprising that education of D/HH students continues to be unsatisfactory.

Because it is impossible to predict all of the information and skills that teachers of D/HH students will need during the course of their professional careers, dynamic learning opportunities that reflect teachers' actual and changing needs for knowledge, instructional strategies, and curricular resources must be provided. Given the increasing geographic dispersal of D/HH students and their teachers, combined with the uneven geographic availability of deaf education teacher preparation programs, traditional face-to-face learning opportunities (e.g., college/university courses, summer institutes, workshops, conferences) are not a viable option for many of the nation's teachers of D/HH students.

In the design of enhanced licensure and certification standards and protocols for the field of deaf education, virtual learning opportunities (i.e., distance education) must be established. In this way, a virtual critical mass of teachers and resources may be achieved. Once established, the networked learning community of deaf education teachers can be used to: (a) share information and develop expertise, (b) dynamically and collaboratively address the day-to-day learning needs of D/HH students, and (c) simultaneously recognize and share teachers' proven instructional skills and resources. The network would serve the needs of inservice and preservice teachers alike.

PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION

Current Design

Programs. According to *American Annals of the Deaf*, 70 U. S. institutions of higher education (IHEs), in 34 states, offer either undergraduate or graduate programs that prepare teachers of D/HH students. Graduates from 62% of the programs are eligible to receive both state and CED licensure. Graduates from 38% of those programs are eligible only to receive their single state K-12 license to teach D/HH students. In contrast to state licensure, CED specifies the particular age/grade level and type of D/HH student that an individual is licensed to teach. CED licensure analysis indicates that the vast majority (95%) of deaf education teacher preparation programs prepare their graduates to work with elementary D/HH students, followed by secondary (57%), early childhood (45%), multiple handicapped (18%), and early intervention/parent-infant (9%) students. Most CED-endorsed programs offer one (25%), two (30%), or three (35%) levels of endorsement; only a few programs offer either four (9%) or all five (2%) levels of CED endorsement.

Faculty. According to recent studies, faculties in deaf education teacher preparation programs were primarily made up of women (66%) with tenure (68%), averaging 10 years of teaching experience with D/HH students, and 13 years working at the university level. Their average age was 43. Most of the programs were staffed by one or two faculty (58%), a minority of programs had three (24%) or four (9%) faculty, with the remaining programs having five or more faculty (9%). Unfortunately, within the next 10 years, 44% of the respondents planned to retire. Given the critical lack of qualified individuals available to accept positions in university deaf education teacher preparation programs and the preponderance of one- and two- faculty programs, this retirement data appear to predict the possible demise of a substantial number of programs.

Preservice Teachers. Data are not available on the number or characteristics of individuals who are now in preparation to become teachers of D/HH students. Unfortunately, data are also unavailable on how many of the graduates go on to teach D/HH students, how long they stay in the field of deaf education, and how effective they are at enhancing the educational performance of their students. Until such questions can be effectively addressed, the teacher preparation programs will not have the feedback needed to evaluate program success or failure.

Call for Reform

The call for reform in the field of deaf education has been consistent and largely unheeded. Significant redesign efforts are once again being carried out on state, regional, and national levels. A pattern of recommendations has begun to emerge in relation to the preparation of individuals to become teachers of D/HH students. Those recommendations are based on a growing consensus that many beginning teachers of the D/HH lack sufficient curricular knowledge and instructional skills to implement new instructional designs. Surprisingly, the root cause for this lack of knowledge and skills may not simply be due to an insufficient number or diversity of teacher preparation courses.

Current Deficiencies

Research has shown that teachers of D/HH students need to take additional course work in general education curricular areas and instructional strategies. The field needs to: (a) better prepare

preservice teachers to work with increasingly ethnically diverse D/HH students; (b) differentiate the preparation of elementary and secondary teachers; (c) incorporate the effective use of technologies to enhance teaching and learning; and (d) prepare teachers for work with students who have additional disabilities. Finally, the literature suggests that efforts to enhance ASL skills of new teachers may have resulted in inadequate preparation for the increasing number of hard-of-hearing students. Demographic trends of the last 20 years suggest that the number of hard-of-hearing students in educational programs for D/HH students may increase due to the greater prevalence of infant screening and the success of early intervention programs.

An Alternative Model for Teacher Preparation Reform

Teacher preparation programs include: (a) prerequisite courses for background knowledge, (b) major courses of instructional skills and curricular knowledge, and (c) student teaching as an opportunity for the preservice teacher's initial mastery of expected skills. The better the match between what preservice teachers learn in their courses and what their cooperating teachers model during student teaching, the more likely the teacher preparation program will graduate innovative novice teachers. A redesign of deaf education teacher preparation must also include a student teacher placement support system enabling faculty to place preservice teachers with the nation's most effective innovative teachers of D/HH students.

In the model proposed in this paper, teachers actively assist their students to progress from novice to mature learners via the use of a worldwide virtual learning community that gives students additional resources, reasons to learn, and opportunities to share. Teachers assign their students authentic learning tasks that add value to the students' work as it is shared with and used by other individuals in a virtual learning community. In this way, students serve as information workers who add to the knowledge base of the community while simultaneously being required to take increasing responsibility for the documentation of their own learning. Such a model may sound like a pipe dream; however, it is in fact a current reality in many of the nation's deaf education teacher preparation programs.

In May 2000, a \$2.1 million grant (Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers to Use Technology [PT3] Catalyst Grant) was awarded to the Association of College Educators–Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing (ACE-D/HH). The basic design of the ACE-D/HH grant was to create a virtual community of learners in which preservice teachers serve as information workers for existing teachers, students, and parents of D/HH children. The ACE-D/HH Catalyst Grant—through the use of faculty choices, technologically facilitated collaborative activities, preservice teachers as information workers, and a nationwide virtual learning community—has the potential to enhance deaf education teacher preparation. This will recognize, share, and build on the best work of our faculty, preservice teachers, existing teachers, parents, administrators, D/HH adults, and support personnel.