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SOCIAL SKILLS ISSUES OF MAINSTREAMING
HEARING-IMPAIRED CHILDREN

by

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Introduction

This literature review will discuss social skills challenges of mainstreaming hearing-impaired children with their hearing peers. It will cover the social skills that are appropriate for proper social development. These skills include: listening skills and conversational turn taking, expressing emotions, and building a child's self-esteem and confidence.

In reviewing the literature it is important to define the term "socialization" and to know why it is important in the development of all children. Socialization is a child's effectiveness in influencing a peer's social behavior and appropriateness given a specific setting, context, and/or culture. Interactions with peers help children build stronger, more mature social interactions for adult life. Children who learn to gain access to materials in a successful and appropriate manner, to build mutual trust, develop humor, manage their emotional response, resolve conflict, and respond to aggression in an appropriate way grow to become effective, well-adjusted adults (Odom, McConnel, and McEvoy, 1992). Keeping these skills in mind one appreciates why it is important for hearing-impaired children to learn to socialize with both hearing as well as hearing-impaired peers.

What do we mean by "social skills"?

"Social skills" is a term used to describe a child's knowledge of, and ability to use, a variety of social behaviors that are appropriate to a given interpersonal situation and that are pleasing to others in each situation. The capacity to inhibit egocentric, impulsive, or negative social behavior is also a reflection of a child's social skills (Bierman). There are many different social skills used by both hearing and hearing-impaired children. They are used in situations throughout the child's day. Children begin to learn social skills early in life. They are constantly watching and imitating the actions of their parents, family and friends. A hearing-impaired

child's ability to develop social skills will depend upon his or her degree of hearing loss, maturity and age of diagnosis, treatment, and personality along with experiences they have faced. In addition, their exposure to a variety of situations with hearing peers is also a consideration of social skill development.

Some of the social skills that children develop include: making friends, being a friend, turn-taking, asking for help, initiating conversation, joining social groups, appropriate expression of feelings, and recognizing and choosing appropriate behaviors. These skills can be taught by model, role-play, social skills exercises, games, stories, and written worksheets. With hearing-impaired students it is particularly important to include visual clues, manipulatives, verbal practice, repetition and review (Todd and McLaughlin, 2002).

The development of social skills is so important that for some children it is included in their IFSP'S or their IEP'S. In these plans they are referred to as social integration goals and objectives. An example of an objective of a three year old might be: work or play with at least one hearing partner for at least five minutes each day. An objective for a third grader might include: providing two ideas during a cooperative learning activity with hearing peers.

Social skill development

Studies have shown that skills such as offering greetings, extending and responding to invitations to join peer activities, as well as cooperating and assisting others are important social skills for young children (Antia and Kreimeyer, 1996). Social skills may include applying effective skills to participate in a game, cooperating (turn-taking and sharing materials), communicating (talking and listening), and validating or supporting others (giving attention or helping others) (Oden and Asher, 1997). Asking questions and responding to questions asked by

others are necessary skills for some play interactions. Asking questions about other people's interests, maintaining an extended conversation by taking turns to comment on the topic of the conversation and giving verbal and nonverbal compliments and positive feedback are also important to play exchanges (Antia et al, 1996).

Language has an impact on socialization, but does language development get in the way of social skill development? Some researchers report that communication deficits do interfere with young hearing-impaired children's normal play development. Cooperative play and make-believe play, as well as sophisticated peer interactions may be affected because verbal exchanges are necessary to sustain this type of play. Due to this communication delay, hearing-impaired children engage in less complex and less social play than do hearing children (Esposito, 1989).

In some play situations, formal language is not necessary and does not occur between hearing-impaired children and their hearing peers. Gestures, mime, and facial expressions are frequently used as an alternative communication system for children who were linguistically delayed. Peer initiation for play may be affected by the communication intelligibility of the hearing-impaired child. However, some research indicates the lack of oral skills may not necessarily hinder interaction with hearing peers. The lack of knowledge of social communication strategies, such as initiating play interactions, may be the greater roadblock to interaction between these two groups (Antia, 1985). Young children appear to be less affected by the hearing-impaired child's limited language proficiency, given that much of their interaction can be nonlinguistic. Older children, during the latter preschool years and beyond, are more affected by a lack of expressive language skills and may find play, especially dramatic play, more difficult to maintain (Antia et al, 1994).

Teachers can play an important role in the social skill development of all children, but especially with interactions between hearing children and hearing-impaired children. Promoting one-to-one relationships through the structuring of the classroom activities may improve interactions in mainstreamed settings. Continued small group contact can encourage social skill improvement between peers of different hearing status, especially if children become familiar with each other by frequently working and playing together (Antia et al, 1994). Social skills may need to be taught through social interaction routines. Shared product routines, cooperative games, and role-plays can be used as opportunities to model social skills. After teacher modeling, children can interact with prompts from the teacher to direct them to interact in a desired manner.

A teacher-mediated social skills intervention program for young children with a hearing-impairment was developed to promote opportunities for interaction between peers (cooperative crafts, games and role plays) and to model and prompt specific skills (greeting, sharing, assisting, and conversing) (Antia et al, 1996). Other researchers used a system of teaching peers to establish eye contact or a joint focus of attention for improved socialization (Antia, 1985). They taught peers to describe their play and the play of others, to redirect play, and to attend to the hearing-impaired child's speech by repeating what was said. This method tended to generalize to non-trained peers. It was thought that this method motivated hearing children to play with their hearing-impaired peers.

The consequences of hearing impairment

If a hearing impairment is left untreated it can cause several secondary impairments. The degree of the hearing impairment and the age of the child at the onset, as well as his/her

intellectual potential, will influence the accumulation and the magnitude of the secondary problem. What begins as a sensory problem becomes; a perceptual problem, a speech problem, a communication problem, a cognitive problem, a social problem, an emotional problem, an educational problem, an intellectual problem, and a vocational problem. Each of these impairments relate to social development in one-way or another. The child ends up not only dealing with the hearing impairment but also these secondary problems that accompany it.

Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming can be difficult for hearing-impaired children for many reasons. The most apparent reason is their delay in development of social skills. For hearing-impaired children, the social component of school is as important as the academic aspect. Skills such as getting along with others, making friends, and developing a pleasant personality are life-long endeavors for many students. Some students have a great deal of difficulty following rules, remembering rules, and even being aware that rules exist in certain situations. Yet these are all part of fitting into society for all people, not just hearing-impaired students.

While most children may breeze through social situations with minimum of instruction, hearing-impaired children typically lack some of these skills. They are often the target of children who are intolerant, who tease, and who demonstrate poor social manners, training in appropriate school behavior, and compliance with expectations, but hearing-impaired children in particular may need the special, directed teaching to become aware of social skills and how to be a good member of society (Mannix 1993).

There are many ways teachers can help in the classroom to facilitate social skill development. Promoting one-to-one relationships through structuring of the classroom activities

may improve interactions in mainstreamed settings (Lederberg, A., Ryan, H., and Robbins, B., 1986). Continued small group contact can encourage social skill improvement between peers of different hearing status, especially if children become familiar with each other by frequently working and playing together (Antia, S., Kreimeyer, K., Eldredge, N., 1993). Social skills may need to be taught through social interaction routines. Shared product routines, cooperative games, and role-plays can be used as opportunities to model social skills. After teacher modeling, children can interact with prompts from the teacher to direct them to interact in a desired manner. Antia and Kreimeyer developed a teacher-mediated social skills intervention program for young children with a hearing impairment. It required teachers to promote opportunities for interaction between peers (cooperative crafts, games and role-plays) and to model and prompt specific skills (greeting, sharing, assisting, and conversing) (1993).

Free play should be an essential part of every preschool program. It is during this time that the equality of performance between normally hearing and hearing-impaired children can best be demonstrated. Helping toddlers with peer entry skills, sustaining play, recognition of a friendly peer bid and responding appropriately may help ward off inappropriate or inept patterns of social initiatives that could continue for some children into school age. Modeling may be one way that a teacher can create a climate for this learning. Comments like "You are giving Mary the flower pot. Thank you, Tom" may teach appropriate response to the positive social bid (Honig and Thompson, 1999).

There are many things that the children in the classroom can do to help the hearing-impaired child who has been mainstreamed. A book has been developed to assist the students in promoting appropriate social interaction with the hearing-impaired child. The book can be used

in the classroom as well as with the parents at home. This book allows the parents to know what is going on in the classroom and how to work with their child in developing these skills at home. It also can be helpful to children who may interact with the hearing-impaired child outside the school setting. This will allow for continuity of being socially appropriate with a hearing-impaired child.

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