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## The social difficulties children encounter transitioning from a self-contained deaf education program into a general education program

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**THE SOCIAL DIFFICULTIES CHILDREN  
ENCOUNTER TRANSITIONING FROM A  
SELF-CONTAINED DEAF EDUCATION  
PROGRAM INTO A GENERAL  
EDUCATION PROGRAM**

**by**

**Gina Marie Martino**

**An Independent Study  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of:**

**Master of Science in Deaf Education**

**Washington University School of Medicine  
Program in Audiology and Communication Sciences**

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**Approved by:  
Barb Lanfer, MAEd, CED, Independent Study Advisor**

*Abstract: This study examines the difficulties, particularly social, a child who is deaf/hard of hearing encounters transitioning from a self-contained program into the general education setting. The information gathered was used to create a children's story as a helpful tool.*

## Introduction

Since the implementation of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (PL 94-142) or IDEA, the number of “special need” children in public schools has been on the rise. The purpose of IDEA is to ensure a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, allowing student’s with disabilities to learn alongside peers of the same age without any disabilities (Luckner & Muir, 2002, p. 435). Specifically, the population of deaf/hearing-impaired students in the public school setting has increased. The passing of IDEA and the advances in technology have brought this low incidence disability into the mainstream setting.

Despite the major advances in technology, deaf individuals do not hear and will not hear like their normal hearing peers. Deafness is a disability that is highly misunderstood in the general education world. Schools, administrators, teachers, and students are not well informed about the complexity of deafness. Therefore, when a deaf child transitions from a self-contained deaf education setting to a mainstream setting, he or she faces many obstacles. Potentially, the most difficult obstacle of this transition is social and pragmatic issues he or she will encounter.

In the following pages, the purpose of this paper will be explained, the rationale discussed, and a literature review of pertinent information will be included.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study is two fold. First, it will examine the difficulties, particularly socially, a deaf child encounters in the transition from a self-contained deaf education program into a mainstream setting. Secondly, the information gathered through research will be used to create a children’s book as a helpful tool for children

during this transitional period. The book will be a useful guide for both deaf children and their hearing peers.

### Rationale

Deafness is often highly overlooked and forgotten as a disability. Many uninformed individuals believe that a hearing aids or cochlear implants restore normal hearing or “fix the problem.” Sadly, some of these people may be teachers or administrators in a public school. Moreover, young students in a public school are usually unaware of the concept of deafness. As a result, the deaf student enters this setting feeling isolated and the hearing peers see the deaf child as “different.” Because more deaf students are entering the mainstream setting, it is vital that all individuals dealing with a deaf student become well informed.

This paper will not only be a scholarly tool, but a practical tool as well. The information gathered will be compiled and made into a children’s book. This book will address deafness and make the social transition period easier for both hearing and deaf students. Using this book will allow stereotypes to be broken and misconceptions to be corrected to ultimately enlighten people and make this difficult transition easier.

### Literature Review

Klein (1998) stated that early childhood education provides the initial building blocks to developing friendships, appropriate behavior, and the love of learning (p. 3). Because the number of students who are deaf/hard of hearing (D/HH) in self-contained classrooms has decreased over the years and the number of students who are D/HH receiving most instruction in a general education setting has increased, it is vital for schools to provide these students with the necessary tools to succeed (Schildroth & Hotto,

1996, p. 68). The transition for a D/HH child into a mainstream setting is difficult for a variety of reasons. This literature review will discuss the social challenges Students who are D/HH encounter after mainstreaming into the general education setting.

### Language and Social Competence

Interpersonal communication is primarily accomplished through the use of language. Gallagher (1993) stated that language is the means to form relationships, socialize, and form self-concepts (p. 199). In order for a person to attain social competence, one needs to possess the ability to utilize language effectively. Research has indicated that normally hearing children acquire these skills by the age of eight (Jeanes et. al, 200, p. 237). Therefore, social competence is initially tested as a child enters school. The ability to form and maintain relationships with peers is critical at this time. Peer relationships are essential in the social growth and development of children (Gallagher, 1993, p. 199).

The concept of friendship usually emerges when a child enters preschool. At this time, children's concepts of friendship are most often classified as egocentric. The overall theme in this stage of friendship is to "maximize excitement, entertainment, and affect levels of play" (Parker & Gottman, 1989, p. 104). There are different levels of play that children achieve; each requiring different levels of language competence. Fantasy play is the highest and most rewarding level of play. It is very demanding verbally and requires clear communication by each child (Gallagher, 1993, p. 201). This type of play is usually naturally achieved in a hierarchical manner in children with normal language development. However, children who have a language delay (i.e. children who

are D/HH) struggle to attain this type of play behavior and the same social competence as their hearing peers.

Children who are D/HH are at risk for not developing or acquiring social behaviors similar to their hearing peers (Antia & Kreimeyer, 1997, p. 59). Marschark (1993) stated that a deaf individual's social development is closely related to language and social development. Therefore, deaf children "inevitably" have different relationships socially with hearing peers than hearing peers have with each other (Bat-Chava & Deignan, 2001, p. 186). Hulsing et. al. (1995) believes that conversational practice is directly correlated to conversational competence. They stated that the competence children who are D/HH possess in conversation is associated with the amount of practice the child has in interpersonal situations (p. 47). Furthermore, a hearing loss can severely limit a child's ability for incidental learning, which is a key component in acquiring social behaviors. If a child does not overhear social exchanges between adults or peers, they do not become familiar with the "rules" of social exchange. Thus, when they are in a social environment, they do not convey social competence. Improving the child's opportunity to hear will help facilitate and improve social relationships with hearing peers (Chava & Deignan, 2001, p. 187).

Antia and Kreimeyer (1997) stated that children who are D/HH might have fewer opportunities than their hearing peers to participate in meaningful interaction and play with peers who can communicate with them. They feel that early intervention programs concentrate more on interactions with parents and teachers and less on peer interaction, thus impeding social development (p.59). It becomes a double edge sword because the children who are D/HH need the one-on-one practice with a speech and language

emphasis to attempt to reach the level of their hearing peers, but that compromises time that may be spent in play or group time.

There is no clear trend in the social behavior of children who are D/HH. This may be true due to the different variables that can affect this behavior such as degree of hearing loss, mode of communication, or school placement. Some children who are D/HH attain a social competence level similar to their hearing peers. On the other hand there are many children who are D/HH who do not. For example, Vandell and George (1981) found through observations that preschool aged children who are D/HH did not interact as frequently or as long as their hearing peers (p. 631). These finding can be attributed to a number of factors. The hearing children may not have been aware of the children who are D/HH's hearing loss, the teacher may not have been successful in promoting an integrated environment, or the set-up of the classroom may not have been conducive for the D/HH to learn and socialize. Whatever the reason may be, with the number of children who are D/HH mainstreaming into general education schools has made it imperative for school districts, teachers, and parents to do everything possible to ensure the success of these children.

### Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming is bringing disabled children into regular school programs with children who are not disabled (Gallaudet University, 1991, p.3). The implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (PL 94-142) or IDEA, has made mainstreaming children who are D/HH more commonplace. Although every child adjusts to the mainstream setting differently, children who are D/HH often face academic and social difficulties.

The transition is difficult for children who are D/HH because they need to adjust to being integrated with hearing peers and the teaching style is drastically different. While a self-contained deaf education program has its primary focus on speech, language, and auditory skills, a public school does not. Luckner (1991) stated that general education schools present the majority of the information with the belief that all students can clearly hear and understand the teacher (p. 302). Furthermore, Berg as states in Luckner (1991) reported that regular education settings have students engaged in listening activities at least forty-five percent of the school day (p. 302). Not only will a D/HH child struggle with the pace and complexity of the language throughout the school day, they will also have to overcome potentially poor classroom acoustics. Therefore, public schools need to be cognizant of teaching style and the classroom environment in order to promote success for the students who are D/HH.

#### Classroom Acoustics

The classroom environment is one of the most important, yet overlooked keys to academic success for a student. It is in this environment that students are exposed to vital knowledge that enables them to learn academic and social skills. Spoken language is the largest facilitator of these skills and a classroom that does not provide an appropriate acoustical environment will, in turn, not provide an adequate learning environment. Previous research has shown the negative effects poor acoustics can have on a student's learning. In addition, national standards have been written in an attempt to provide children with an optimal learning environment.

Classrooms tend to be very noisy. Background noise is a distraction for anyone, especially those who have a disability such as hearing loss. The American Speech and



Hearing Association (ASHA) has reported that classrooms that have poor acoustics and thus will be detrimental to a student's overall performance in a classroom. Furthermore, a student with a hearing loss or any type of learning disability will have even greater difficulty in a classroom with an inadequate acoustical environment (ASHA, 1995). There are many factors that perpetuate a poor acoustical environment, the foremost being signal-to-noise ratio and reverberation.

The effects of children with hearing loss in the classroom can be enormous. The early school years are the time when the children are developing language. If a student with a hearing loss is attempting to learn in a poor acoustical environment, a language delay is even more likely.

Children with a hearing loss already begin at a disadvantage. They do not receive all of the auditory cues that children with normal hearing receive. Often, these children cannot differentiate between subtle differences in sound production and struggle with such skills as phonemic awareness (Kaderavek & Pakulski, 2002). If background noise and poor acoustics is present in a hearing impaired child's learning environment, the disadvantage becomes even greater. Chute and Nevins (2003) stated that children with mild hearing loss might miss 25%--40% of speech signals in a classroom. This is a staggering number that will only increase as the degree of hearing loss increases.

Children with hearing impairments have been found to "tune out" a speaker more than normal hearing children (Kaderavek & Pakulski, 2002). This may be because it takes so much concentration and effort to listen and try and discriminate sounds. It is grueling work to listen so intensely and eventually these children will give up. In order for a student with a hearing loss to have the opportunity for success, the classroom

acoustics need to be addressed. This is especially important to note when hearing impaired children enter the general education setting. These students are going to be severely affected by poor classroom acoustics and a teacher much be cognizant of this and provide the student with the necessary means to success. Otherwise the student will become frustrated and his/her academics will suffer.

### Conclusion

A hearing impairment can have an impact on language and communication development, which can “dramatically alter” social skill acquisition (Brackett, 1997, p. 355). It is easy to place a D/HH child in the mainstream classroom, but providing a conducive academic and social environment takes effort. Leigh (1999) stated, “Educators have to understand that schools do make and mold identity, self-perceptions, and perspectives on life...” (p. 244). If attention is not given to the special social needs of students who are D/HH, it is much more likely that they will feel socially isolated. Children are perceptive and will immediately pick up on the different between the children who are D/HH and the hearing children in the classroom, whether it be physically or socially. Thus, it is vital for classroom teachers working in inclusive classrooms to promote positive interactions through classroom activities (Stinson & Liu, 1999, p. 191).

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# *ISAAC'S NEW SCHOOL*

My name is Isaac and I have a secret. If you promise not to tell, I'll whisper it to you. My  
secret is...I am *very* scared to go to my new school today.

Most kids my age would think it's cool to go to a new school, but not me. I'm different.

Sometimes it's hard for kids who are different to make friends.

I'm different because I'm deaf. I have a cochlear implant in one ear and a hearing aid in the other ear to help me hear. If I don't use them I can't hear what people say to me. I can only hear very loud noises like an airplane or a dog barking without my device.



I used to go to a school where all the kids were deaf like me. They were all my best friends. But then the teachers and my mom and dad said that I did so well that I was ready to go to a new school with kids who can hear. At first it seemed like a cool idea, but then I began to get very nervous. I kept thinking of everything that could go wrong!

What if people don't want to be my friend? What if they talk too fast and I can't hear everything they say? What if the kids don't understand **ME**? I have to go to a speech teacher because some sounds are hard for me to say. The kids might not know what I am saying to them.

Well...we are leaving to drive to my new school now...wish me luck!

My mom, dad, and I just got to my new school. We came early so we could meet the teacher. The school is HUGE! I can't believe there are 22 kids in my class. At my old school there were only 4! I will be the only kid in class with a cochlear implant and hearing aid, but usually when I show people my cochlear implant they think it's really cool. I hope these kids think so too.

My teacher's name is Mrs. Murray. She seems nice. She keeps asking my parents questions about me. Maybe she is nervous to have a deaf kid in her class. I guess that's okay because I'm nervous too.

My parents made me answer a lot of Mrs. Murray's questions. They have always taught me to talk about my deafness. A lot of people don't know about deafness or cochlear implants or hearing aids, so I have to teach them. It was kind of neat to teach the teacher!

I was feeling a lot better. Mrs. Murray was so nice! Then I suddenly remembered that all the other kids would be coming soon. Mrs. Murray must have seen that I was nervous.

She told me the students knew that I was coming to their school and they were very excited to meet me. She asked if I would tell the kids about my cochlear implant and hearing aid. I told her I would.

The other kids began coming into the classroom. Mrs. Murray introduced me to the kids. I told them that I was deaf and I showed them my implant and hearing aid. They asked me some questions about how my devices work, if they hurt me, and if I know sign language. I answered all the questions and I was excited that a lot of them actually knew someone who was deaf or wore hearing aids. That made me feel a lot better.

It was time to say goodbye to my mom and dad. They told me I would do great and I was starting to think that I would. I went and sat at my desk. Two of the boys near me said hi and asked if I wanted to eat lunch with them. I told them I would. I was so relieved to make friends already!



The lunchroom was really noisy! There were so many kids and everyone was talking. Sometimes it's hard for me to hear people in loud rooms. I asked Matt and Wade if they would talk louder so I could hear them. I also asked if they would look at me when they talk because it helps when I can see their lips.

Matt and Wade didn't seem to mind and it really helped me understand what they were saying. We went outside and played basketball at recess. There were a couple times that I didn't hear Matt and Wade during our game, but I just asked them to repeat and they did! I think Matt, Wade, and I will be great friends.

The day is not even over yet and I already made two new friends. I can't believe I was so nervous this morning! Starting at my new school wasn't so scary after all.



This is a cochlear implant. People get cochlear implants when there is a problem with the inner ear and hearing aids do not help. It requires a surgery to get past the damaged inner ear. A cochlear implant does not fix or cure deafness, but it gives people the sensation of sound.



This is a hearing aid. It has a microphone that makes sounds louder. Hearing aids help people hear speech that they cannot hear with the hearing aid. It is not a cure for a hearing loss, but it is a helpful tool.