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**LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF ITINERANT
TEACHERS OF THE HEARING IMPAIRED LOCATED IN THE
MIDWEST: SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL IN EDUCATION**

By

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**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, M.A.Ed. Independent Study Advisor**

Abstract: The role and responsibilities of an itinerant teacher of students who are deaf or hard of hearing were investigated to create a database of information about the effective traits of successful itinerant teachers.

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Introduction

Historically, if a child was diagnosed with a hearing loss, they were most often sent to a residential state school for the deaf located far from their family's hometown in order to be educated by specialized teachers. In the twenty-first century, there are a variety of alternative educational choices compared to the past. Whether students who are deaf or hard of hearing receive direct instruction initially at private schools or not, they have the opportunity now, more than ever, to enroll in their home school districts and be included in the general education setting. The change in history is largely due to the United States' special education law enacted by Congress in 1975 called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This law addressed special education in a new way and the primary goal was to make sure that children with disabilities had the opportunity to receive a free and appropriate public education. IDEA has been revised and updated many times since 1975 and today continues to provide inclusion for children with a hearing loss in the least restrictive environment in a general education setting.

An influx in the population of students who are deaf or hard of hearing educated in general education classrooms has led to a higher demand for the position of an itinerant teacher of the deaf. Itinerant teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing are among a team of professionals who support and maintain the student's needs in the general education setting. Itinerant teachers travel from school to school, providing instruction to students who are deaf or hard of hearing, as well as consulting with families and school personnel. According to a study conducted in 1994 about itinerancy, "teachers in an itinerant position are typically responsible for scheduling and

providing services to students on their case loads based primarily on their geographic locations” (Luckner & Miller, 1994).

According to the Annual Survey of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children and Youth conducted in 2000, “many jobs in the field of deaf education are itinerant because many students who are deaf or hard of hearing are being served in their home schools.” As a result of improved, rapidly-changing technology of assistive listening devices, such as high-digital hearing aids and cochlear implants, the face of students who are deaf or hard of hearing that are being placed in their home school districts in a general education setting has changed. One might question how these students gain a healthy dose of independence and succeed in such a fast-paced, general education setting despite their degree of hearing loss. A large part of their success is usually related to the essential support itinerant teachers of the deaf provide for students who are deaf or hard of hearing in the general education setting.

Purpose

The current study investigated the role and responsibilities of an itinerant teacher of students who are deaf or hard of hearing and one of the primary goals was to discover the effective traits of a successful itinerant teacher. Through a review of current literature about itinerant teaching, a compilation of questionnaires sent to current itinerant teachers of the deaf for valuable feedback, and shadowing experiences; a database of information about this position was created.

Review of Related Literature

Many research studies have investigated the position of an itinerant teacher of students who are deaf or hard of hearing in which analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the service delivery model of itinerant teaching have been considered. Because there has been a “shift in placement for students who are deaf or hard of hearing into more mainstream settings, there has been a specific increase in the number of itinerant teachers and a comparable decrease in the number of self-contained classroom teachers” (Miller, 2000).

Studies concerning the changing field of deaf education have explored why many job opportunities for future deaf educators include the itinerant teaching position. In research done by Luckner and Muir in 2001, they concluded that “several factors suggest that, in the future, the majority of students who are deaf or hard of hearing will continue to receive educational services in general education settings with the support of an itinerant teacher of the deaf. These factors include: (a) FDA regulated newborn hearing screening, (b) the closing of several state schools for the deaf, (c) the increase in the number of children receiving cochlear implants, and (d) federal legislation containing provisions directed at providing granted access to the general education curriculum to students with disabilities” (Luckner & Muir, 2001). For this reason, many researchers are interested in learning more about the triumphs and challenges itinerant teachers face and how their role to support deaf or hard of hearing students in the general education setting increases the success rate in grade-level assessments.

In each of the articles reviewed, similar themes were noted throughout the results of the studies conducted. Most of the research studies included details about the itinerant

experience through interviews and shadowing experiences in an effort to examine the position with great precision. The following outlines the combined contributions of itinerant teachers' thoughts and beliefs about their responsibilities in the itinerant position.

Advantages of the Itinerant Position

Several itinerant teachers conveyed that they liked the variety, autonomy and independence in scheduling their position offered. They felt that the broad spectrum of schools, the diverse group of students, the changes in their daily schedules and the wide range of student ages was a positive attribute of the itinerant position (Yarger & Luckner, 1999). Another component that some itinerants view is the traveling involved in their position. Many of the itinerants interviewed, however, said that the driving time between schools allowed them to take a break, to regroup their thoughts and to work on "relaxing and mentally preparing for the students at the next location" (Luckner & Miller, 1994).

Service Delivery Models Provided by an Itinerant Teacher

The majority of the itinerant teachers expressed that they believed providing direct service, in which they worked with a student one-on-one, was their most important role in this position (Luckner & Miller, 1994). There are two main methods itinerants use to carry out the service delivery model of itinerant teaching: the "pull-out approach" or the "push-in approach", which is also referred to as "collaborative teaching". The "pull-out approach" occurs when the itinerant teacher removes the student from the general education classroom and provides services to the student one-to-one in a separate

setting (Luckner & Miller, 1994). This service delivery model is widely used by itinerants because it allows time in a quieter setting to talk with the student about what is going on in the regular education setting and support them with what they need.

Others believe that most of the one-on-one work done outside of the classroom could be done by the teacher of the deaf in the general education classroom with the student and a few of the student's peers, who also would benefit from the additional attention and assistance. Those who advocate this "collaborative teaching" approach consider that it offers more opportunities for the student who needs services from an itinerant to stay in the classroom and be able to interact with peers while being a part of what is being done in the curriculum of the regular education classroom (Luckner & Miller, 1994). Most of the time, the service delivery model used is one that is based on the individual needs of the students served. Regardless of the model used, there are more important topics of discussion about the responsibilities of an itinerant.

Communication, Consultation, and Collaboration

Itinerant teaching involves a great deal of time commitment and communication with not only the student who is receiving services, but also the student's families and educational team. Most of the itinerants conveyed that consultation and collaboration with the general education staff and families was a vital part of their job responsibilities. When itinerant teachers are not providing direct service for students, they "devote a large percentage of their time serving as a resource to the general education staff and parents, obtaining and adapting materials, consulting about each student on their caseload and conducting in-service workshops in order to prepare professionals working with the

students for the necessary accommodations and hearing device training” (Yarger & Luckner, 1999).

The in-services, consultation and collaboration itinerants provide ensure that “general education teachers will understand and develop skills to meet the needs of the students who are deaf or hard of hearing in their classrooms” (Luckner & Miller, 1994). An itinerant’s goal is to monitor the student’s “function in the general education classroom” and also to write and track progress on the student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP)” (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004).

The consultation and collaboration itinerants have with the general education staff involves valuing the contributions of others and building a network of mutual support to reinforce the success of the student. Some examples of the large number of people itinerants are in contact with include, but are not limited to: families, general education teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, audiologists, educational interpreters, occupational and physical therapists, agencies and others involved in delivering service to the student. When an itinerant encourages a team approach, “each member is able to contribute expertise in some facet of the student’s education” (Yarger & Luckner, 1999). Many itinerants shared that they were able to establish support and camaraderie with members of the team by employing active listening skills to elicit the perspectives of parents and educators (Luckner & Miller, 1994).

One itinerant explained that she and the general education teacher had a dialogue journal in addition to talking for a few minutes before the student was pulled for direct service in an attempt to achieve open communication (Yarger & Luckner, 1999). Clearly, most of the itinerants interviewed conveyed that a good, working relationship

with the student's educational team members is vital to keeping the student successful in a general education setting. One itinerant summed it up nicely when she said that "the more you connect with the teachers and support them, the more the students can have an easier time in the classroom and having the skills to do a really good consultation can have a powerful impact on the students" (Luckner & Howell, 2002).

The notion of good communication and collaboration is also extended to the families and one teacher noted, "I think one of the most important aspects of my job is to keep my 'customers' happy. That is, my students, the parents, the teachers and the staff that work with the students" (Luckner & Miller, 1994). Many itinerants explained that they called parents and caregivers on their "personal time during evening and weekends and encouraged parents to call them during those times, as needed," in order to keep up to speed about any concerns they may have or issues that are going on at home (Luckner & Miller, 1994).

Flexibility

Another significant characteristic of the itinerant teaching position is the need for flexibility. One teacher went as far to say that, "flexibility in all things is the hallmark of the itinerant and the effective itinerant has to have more than one way to accomplish everything" (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004). Because itinerants are a support for the student in the regular education setting, they usually "have little influence over what will be taught; daily lesson plans are determined by the general education curriculum and teachers" and an itinerant must be flexible with a changing schedule she does not have much control over (Smith, 1997). Itinerants, as mentioned before, must also plan on

working with a variety of people with diverse personalities and professional responsibilities. As one itinerant teacher said, “You need to be prepared for a lot of different situations with a lot of different people” and in that, flexibility is vital (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004).

Adapting to Individual School Politics and Rules

Along with being flexible, an itinerant teacher must be able to successfully immerse herself in each school or school district’s world. Itinerants serve students in many schools and they are most likely all unique in both structure and organization. Every school has its own set of rules and ways of doing things. According to one itinerant, “navigating the politics in so many settings in order to effectively advocate for students’ needs is like walking on egg shells at times” (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004). An itinerant must be able to adapt to each school she sets foot in and “make sure that she politically handles situations in a very specific way according to the school policies” for the best possible outcome (Yarger & Luckner, 1999).

Changes in Modes of Communication

An additional valid concern of the traveling itinerant teacher is that she must be able to communicate in many modes to facilitate the accommodations necessary for each deaf or hard of hearing student in need of her support. It would be ideal if every deaf educator was trained in all modes of communication that are available to deaf and hard of hearing individuals, but that is not usually the case. Many of the itinerants interviewed were in rural areas in which they had seen many students come through their

geographical area using various manual and oral communication modes. Sometimes, the limitations of language and mode of communication became a barrier for the itinerant teachers in the studies. One itinerant expressed her own constraint in the use of sign language, for example, when it was needed for communication and her lack of experience working with a diverse range of students across all modes of communication became a major obstacle. She said, “It is difficult for me because I am not proficient in American Sign Language (ASL) but I am an English syntax signer”. It would be a professional goal for her to become comfortable with both so that she would be able to offer whatever communication system is needed for the family and the student” (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004).

Time Constraints and Scheduling

The time constraints and scheduling issues itinerants experience are considerable points of interest unique to their position. They must adhere to a strict time schedule when traveling among schools in order to meet with as many students as possible. Scheduling difficulties generally arise as a result of unplanned travel situations. Many respondents said that they often struggled finding time to meet with parents and other professionals because “they traveled between countless buildings and districts on tight schedules, and often were unable to connect with many teachers during their preparation times” (Luckner & Miller, 1994). One itinerant interviewed said, “It’s frustrating because you might not have enough time to talk to teachers if there’s a concern because you’re watching the clock to get to the next school and feeling the crunch of the time limits” (Luckner & Miller, 1994). The demands on an itinerant’s time are very real and

one itinerant agreed, reporting that she felt there is “not enough time to coordinate with the regular education teacher” in regard to planning lessons and all of the modifications necessary to accommodate the deaf or hard of hearing student (Guteng, 2005).

The amount of students on an itinerant’s caseload varies year to year, but there are often many schools to visit within a short amount of time and itinerants need to find time to physically sit down with a student and get work done. In that regard, the more visits the itinerants had during the week, the more they reported a higher incidence of interacting with the adults in the system but less time with the student. In many cases, the students with the least amount of interaction with the itinerant tended to be those with less severe hearing losses and the “role of the itinerant moved toward the monitor/consult responsibility to see that the student was receiving services as specified in their IEP goals and that there were no problems” (Guteng, 2005).

There are also other noteworthy issues related to time constraints that many itinerant teachers experience. One itinerant talked about how helpless she felt when a critical situation arose with one of her students in which she needed to stay at the site until it was resolved. This took time away from her other scheduled students at different sites and she felt stuck (Yarger & Luckner, 1999). Also, other itinerants mentioned that time had a “major impact on putting practices into action because they often missed sessions with students due to special events and schedule changes they did not know about” (Reed, 2003). This often becomes a problem because itinerant teachers serve students in a wide variety of settings including: home, elementary, middle, and high school sites, as well as special education centers and their time is valuable to physically meet with all of the students on their caseloads.

The scheduling difficulties itinerant teachers encounter are also directly linked to time. As one would imagine, when itinerants construct their schedules, they try their best to create realistic time and driving arrangements according to the geography of the schools they visit. It comes down to which sites they can be at and when, but “itinerant teachers with high school students tend to schedule them first since those students often have the most restricted individual schedules” (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004). Otherwise, they try to make it work as best as they can with the intention to serve the most students possible in a reasonable manner.

Availability of Meeting Places

In conjunction with itinerant teachers’ apprehension about time constraints, they face a lack of appropriate and private places to meet with their students from time to time and also stumble upon difficulties obtaining resources and materials to support them. One respondent said that “being an itinerant does not automatically guarantee that a teacher has the necessary resources at each location and the burden of acquiring the space to meet with the students falls on the shoulders of the itinerant” (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004). Some examples of spaces itinerants have met with students range from “a conference room in the renovated school library that is well-equipped with computer terminals” to “overcrowded and loud libraries where many students gather and there is no privacy” (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004). This is unfortunate because many itinerants described the “challenge” of finding a place to meet and how the lack of space provided by the school usually results in less instructional time with the student (Guteng, 2005).

Availability of Materials and Organizational Skills

The issue of poor access to resources and materials is a hefty one for itinerants. One itinerant expressed that resources were scarce in one building and that she was “expected to share a box of materials with other itinerants giving various services to the students at her school” (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004). Across sites, many itinerants devise their own organizational plans for having as many resources as they can for working with each of the students on their caseload, such as “having a binder for each student that held all of the students’ personal information as well as the records for the past year.” These binders were also “divided into sections including audiograms, IEP information, copies of e-mails regarding specific decisions about a student and the most recent notes or papers the itinerant had been working on with the student” (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004).

Due to the lack of resources available to most itinerants, good organizational skills are a necessity in this position. One itinerant offered her viewpoint about how to manage all of the materials if they must be carried from school to school. “Successful itinerants are highly organized in terms of materials and activities, using bags and folders for each student, group, or school” (Reed, 2003).

Isolation

A different topic of concern that many itinerants felt was important to mention was about experiencing isolation in their position. Many of them described that they suffered feeling “disconnected from any school or group of faculty members because of the many schools visited” (Yarger & Luckner, 1999). A lot of itinerants described a

sense of feeling completely on their own, without a home base or home school for support. Unless an itinerant is very outgoing and sociable, one mentioned that it can “take a long time to be a part of a school when you’re not there every day” and many of these traveling teachers believe “if you are only there once a week or even once a month, it takes a really long time for everyone to know what you do and for you to know what everyone else does” (Yarger and Luckner, 1999).

The majority of respondents recommended being aware of the isolation factor in this position and maintaining human contact to avoid isolation at all costs. The researchers found that well-adjusted itinerants were those who had frequent contact with the people in the buildings they visited, regardless of the individual’s status. An itinerant who engaged in social contact with the staff at the schools at which they worked kept “the wheels turning for the students they served” (Yarger Luckner 99).

Suggestions for Future Itinerant Teachers

Most of the current literature about itinerant teachers also provides suggestions from itinerants themselves about effective traits to be successful in this position. One traveling teacher of the deaf shared that “effective itinerants are ones who, through a personality trait, extensive experience, or a specific value system can generate a positive composite image of their role as itinerants” (Kluwin, Morris, and Clifford, 2004). It is clear that attitude can affect the positivity or negativity involved in the day-to-day grind of different career paths and many itinerants believe that valuing a positive approach toward the role of itinerancy has made them more successful.

A lot of the itinerants interviewed said they have had a personally satisfying experience through itinerant teaching in many ways. Researchers found that the itinerant participants who felt personal satisfaction considered that it came from two sources. One was a personality type or value system that appreciated in the independence and challenge of teaching in this way. The other was the unanticipated rewards they found while doing this job (Kluwin, Morris, and Clifford, 2004).

Possess Excellent Communication Skills

Also, a large part of being successful in an itinerant teaching position boils down to possessing excellent communication skills. Numerous itinerants shared that it was critical to be able to communicate effectively with many people: other professionals, families, and students with whom they have regular contact (Yarger & Luckner, 1999). One itinerant's insight about dealing with parents or teachers going through many emotions made her realize that her communication skills played a vital role in the relationships she had with her students and those affiliated with them. She shared that "you really have to be able to handle yourself when it comes to communicating" (Yarger & Luckner, 1999).

Maintain Credibility and Promote Advocacy

Another central goal of itinerant teaching in which respondents felt needed to be addressed was their role of enhancing credibility and empowering advocacy for their students. One teacher enlightened the researchers with her viewpoint about her responsibilities in which she said that "the itinerant creates her job by being positive and

forceful about the needs of the students” and “this is accomplished through continuous demonstrations of expertise in the area of the student’s condition and through firmness in the face of noncompliance” (Yarger & Luckner, 1999). An effective itinerant is not confrontational, but is responsible for the student’s rights and needs through any necessary accommodations in the general education setting. Another note about advocacy awareness relates to how a great number of itinerants feel strongly about helping their students understand their hearing loss when working with them and aiding in developing their self-advocacy skills (Luckner & Howell, 2002).

Create Effective Sessions with Time Constraints

As for the direct teaching time itinerants have with students, there were many suggestions concerning ways to make the short amount of time they worked with students meaningful. Given that the goal of the itinerant teacher of the deaf is to teach the student what they need to know in order to keep up with the general education curriculum, one teacher shared that when working one-to-one with a student, that it was important to “clearly identify the instructional goal, make sure that the goal is appropriate to the actual needs of the child, and then engage in the most fitting way to provide instruction and keep trying something different if the first strategy fails” (Kluwin, Morris, and Clifford, 2004).

Develop a Broad Base of Knowledge

Also when teaching the students, many itinerants advised developing a broad base of knowledge and having skills in a range of teaching methods to meet the diverse needs

of students with whom they worked. (Kluwin, Morris, and Clifford, 2004). Specifically, many teachers said that itinerants need to know the psychological foundations of social, emotional and language development to have an edge when working with students (Yarger & Luckner, 1999). In addition, many believed that a great deal of experience with and knowledge about the general education curriculum and standards, as well as special education laws and the IEP process were crucial to fully support and prepare the students for success in a general education setting (Luckner & Howell, 2002).

Keep up with Changing Technology

As in any professional domain affected by rapidly changing technology, deaf educators must be knowledgeable about and skilled with hearing devices, such as with hearing aids, cochlear implants and frequency modulation (FM) systems (Luckner & Howell, 2002). Many itinerants suggested that teachers in this position should constantly be involved in continuing educational opportunities by way of attending workshops and conferences, as well as being in touch with many professionals interrelated to the field of deaf education.

Incorporate Observations of the Students

A final suggestion the itinerants in the studies wanted to share was about doing observations of the students included in their case loads. Many of them felt that, sometimes, instead of meeting one-on-one with students, observing them in the general education setting would be beneficial. “An on-site visit of the student’s classroom allows the itinerant to observe all aspects of academic, social and communication demands that

are present as they interact in a spontaneous situation” (Luckner & Miller, 1994). Also, this allows the itinerant to determine the students’ degree of participation as active members of that community. This helps the itinerant understand the level of skills the students have as they see them in a one-on-one setting.

Preparation of Future Itinerant Deaf Educators

The researchers were also interested in how well-prepared the deaf educators in many of the studies felt they were for the position of itinerant teaching. Many of the current teachers indicated that they had gained most of their itinerant position training from observing other itinerant teachers or on the job. Some said that they “gained very little as a result of their undergraduate, graduate, or in-service training” (Luckner & Miller, 1994). This information suggests that there may need to be more preparation in deaf education programs concerning the position and familiarity with itinerant teaching. Most teacher-training programs continue to prepare teachers for positions in self-contained classrooms or residential settings only, resulting in beginning itinerant teachers feeling unprepared (Luckner & Howell, 2002; Schmidt & Sipe, 1991; Smith, 1997). It is also important for preparatory programs of deaf educators to provide some student teaching experience in the itinerant position. One teacher said, “It certainly would have helped me if I would have had some hands-on encounters in itinerant training before I actually became an itinerant teacher” (Luckner & Howell, 2002).

Methods

Six itinerant teachers were selected for this study based on their current employment as itinerant teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing and their willingness to fill out a study questionnaire or participate in a live interview with the researcher on the telephone. The participants were residents and itinerant teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing in school districts nearby the cities of St. Louis, Missouri and Iowa City, Iowa. The participants were employed as itinerant teachers in both rural and suburban areas in a variety of diverse settings including, but not limited to: home visits for children under the age of five, and the use of “pull-out services” for students in general education classrooms and special education self-contained or resource classrooms.

Procedures

A customized questionnaire (see Appendix A) was distributed along with a letter of instruction and explanation of the study. The questionnaire sent out was also used for the phone interviews and it consisted of two sections. The first section asked participants to give demographic information about themselves, including number of years teaching students who are deaf or hard of hearing, years working as an itinerant, the total span of distances traveled per day as itinerant teachers and the make-up of their student case loads. For the case load questions, the questionnaire focused on the number of students in their current case load, the ages, degrees of hearing loss, types of assistive listening devices students made use of, modes of communication, and if any additional disabilities were present.

The second section of the questionnaire concentrated on the characteristics of itinerant teaching and suggestions for future itinerant teachers. Respondents were asked about what types of services they provide as itinerant teachers, where they meet with the students, how they successfully consult and collaborate with the general education teachers and team of professionals who work with the students, what types of modalities they use to communicate with those individuals, how they act as team members in formulating the students' Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals with caregivers and the team of professionals involved, their personal beliefs concerning advantages and disadvantages of the position of itinerant teaching, whether they thought the itinerant method of service delivery was effective, and their recommendations for future itinerant teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students.

Results

Demographic and Case Load Information

Participants were asked about the length of time they had taught students who are deaf or hard of hearing and the duration ranged from 2 to 30 years, averaging 19 years of teaching experience. The length of time spent teaching on an itinerant basis was somewhat less, ranging from 2 to 25 years, averaging 15.3 years. The itinerant teachers surveyed also shared the distances they travel per day as a result of visiting many different schools and sites. The span of distances traveled ranged from 10 to 100 miles per day, averaging approximately 37 miles traveled between schools per day.

The participants had a similar number of students included in their current case loads and this ranged from 14 to 18 students, averaging 17 students for whom they

provided itinerant services. As a result of working with students ranging from all age populations, the general reporting of the students whom the itinerants provided educational assistance to ranged from 5 months old to 18 years old. This is a vast range of ages and the itinerant teachers conveyed in the questionnaires that they have willingly signed up to serve all ages because of the itinerant position.

The students in the participants' case loads also had a variety of degrees of hearing loss and amplification devices used, as well as different modes of communication methods they employed. The degree and types of hearing losses were uniform across the itinerant teachers' case loads. They ranged from unilateral or bilateral losses with the degree of mild to profound severity. Depending on the individual students' degrees of hearing loss, each of the itinerants provided information that all of the students utilize one or more of the following amplification devices: high digital hearing aids, cochlear implants and personal FM systems.

Concerning the modes of communication in which the students utilized, there were various types reported by the itinerant teachers. Most of the teachers indicated that they had many students who communicated through the auditory-oral method, and then some who used Total Communication (TC), and finally, those who primarily used manual, or signed, modes of communication including: Signed Exact English (SEE), Pidgin Signed English (PSE) and American Sign Language (ASL).

Corresponding with the high percentage of students with a hearing loss who face additional disabilities, each itinerant teacher described the make-up of their case loads concerning this issue. Every teacher had at least one student with additional disabilities

included in their case load and these included, but were not limited to: students with autism, vision impairments, mental retardation or physical impairments.

Characteristics of the Itinerant Services Provided

The results from the second section of the questionnaire summarized the educational services and accommodations the respondents provided for the students in their case loads and discussed how they do their job successfully. First, the participants were asked about the types of services as an itinerant teacher they provide in a general education setting. The most common options available to itinerant teachers are as follows: direct service meeting with the students one-to-one in a “pull-out” fashion from the classroom, service in which the itinerant utilizes the “push-in” approach and is available to the student in their general education classroom among their peers, or collaborative services with another general education or special education team teaching approach.

The respondents’ information about the types of service they provide was all across the board and one itinerant summed up the majority of the itinerant teachers’ beliefs about the type when she said, “We utilize all of those services and truly fit the services to the students’ needs. All of the students on our case loads receive consult services with staff and parents as well”. It is clear from the responses the itinerant teachers provided in the questionnaire that there is not one method in which they meet with the students on their case loads. Another teacher explained that most of the time she provides direct “pull-out” instruction for the students on her case load, but truly values the “push-in” experience because she can “figure out if the student participates, if they alert the teacher when something was not heard, if they alert the teacher when they do not understand, if they are hearing their peers and so on. I also then have the opportunity to see what is

currently going on in the classroom. I can see what topics and units they're working through and it helps me in my direct time with the students".

Other itinerant teachers shared their thoughts about what types of services they predominantly use when working with students on their case loads. One itinerant explained that "most of my services are direct one-to-one services in a pull-out manner. However, I also am in the classroom for some of my students taking notes and assisting with seat work and on-task behavior. The "pull-out" method seems to be a better fit most of the time because of the quiet setting and one-to-one intense instruction for 30 minutes or more".

Availability of Meeting Places

The next important inquiry for the itinerant teachers relates to finding a place to meet with the students on their case loads. Because some students with a hearing loss may or may not benefit from quieter settings to learn in a classroom setting, most itinerants face the question of where they are going to meet with their students for the most effective learning environment. Many of the itinerant teachers noted that they meet in various settings and as one teacher explained, "the location we meet depends on the age of the student, tolerance of distractions, noise, and availability of space". Most of the teachers said they meet their students in the school libraries because it is almost always available to them, especially for elementary, middle, and high school students. Some schools allow the teachers to meet one-to-one with students in private conference rooms and one itinerant described how she is able to meet in the speech-language pathologist's office if they work out a schedule.

Successful Communication with General Education Teachers

Next, the itinerants were asked to explain how they successfully work and communicate with the students' general education teachers. It is vital to know how itinerant teachers for student with a hearing loss find time to meet or collaborate with general education teachers and learn more about the experiences the teachers have had in monitoring students' accommodations in a general education setting. One teacher described her beliefs about working with general education teachers when she said, "My key to success with working with classroom teachers is by being accommodating, being present, and by letting them know that I am there to not only help the student, but to help them as well". Most of the respondents also said the most effective means of communication with the general education staff is by e-mail because they have school access to an e-mail account and most have computers in their classrooms. E-mail is the most efficient way to communicate quickly because many of the itinerants said they feel there is "never enough time in the day to meet with all the teachers" of the students on their case loads. One itinerant explained, "I try my best to collaborate with the general education teachers. We e-mail, conference, leave notes and voicemail. If I am the support for an academic area, then I will try to arrange enough time with that specific teacher for more information about what is happening in the classroom".

As noted earlier, the respondents explained that they found e-mail to be the best mode of communication with general education teachers. One of the questions in this study was if they had access to a school e-mail account for each school and mailboxes in order to keep in touch with any of the general education staff members. Every itinerant respondent said they had school e-mail accounts with at least one of the schools on their

case load and most of them had their own mailbox at one or more of the schools they visited.

Access to e-mail communication with the general education staff is advantageous when attempting to successfully correspond with multiple teachers at many schools. On the other hand, one teacher described that she had so many e-mails to check because she visited many schools on her case load that it was “almost more of a burden to have seven e-mail accounts that parents, teachers, or other staff members may be trying to reach me during the day. If I do not have time to check my e-mail in between commutes between schools, then I may not receive important information about if a student is sick, if there is a field trip that day, or if there is any other pressing issue”.

General Education Teachers and Accommodations

One of the roles as an itinerant teacher is to verify that the general education teachers are following accommodations necessary for students with a hearing loss in their classroom. Itinerants responded with information about their experiences with management of those accommodations in the general education setting. All of the teachers described that they have seen both compliant and non-compliant general education teachers throughout their careers as itinerant teachers.

Most of the itinerant teachers said that the general education teachers and staff are “more than willing to do whatever it takes to learn about the different accommodations necessary to aid in the students’ success, such as keeping information visual, providing preferential seating, and learning how to use a frequency modulation (FM) system if the student benefits from one”. There were also itinerants that explained how some general

education teachers “need more reminders than others to wear the FM system” and to be aware of the students’ needs. Undoubtedly, the accommodations that are important for some students are not as important for others, and age and responsibility plays a part in how involved the general education teachers are expected to be for the students’ accommodations.

Individualized Education Plans: A Team Effort

Correlating with how itinerant teachers effectively communicate with general education staff members, the next question in this study relates specifically to their thoughts about how to act as a team member in formulating the students’ Individualized Education Plans (IEP) with caregivers, general education teachers, and other professionals involved in the process. All of the respondents in this study explained that for most of the students on their case loads, they are the case managers for their IEP goals. This means that they organize the IEP meetings, invite general education teachers, parents, and other professionals involved in the students’ education, conduct the meetings, and then fill out the paperwork that goes along with each IEP.

One itinerant shared that she is “responsible for scheduling and running the meetings and making sure all team members have input about the students’ present levels of functioning and if the goals are appropriate”. Another itinerant discussed the preparation that occurs when effectively organizing an IEP meeting. She said that she attempts to “meet as an educational team a few weeks prior to the IEP meeting or at least e-mail each other for input about the student from each team member involved”. In accordance with the success the itinerants have experienced with valuable communication strategies and collaboration with the general education throughout the

school year, the IEP is another event that takes a lot of organizing, planning, and communicating with multiple people to make it work.

Finally, some of the itinerants also pointed out that they are not always the case manager for some of the students on their case load. One itinerant said, “If I were not case manager, I would attend the meeting and provide the team with my relevant information regarding the student’s progress towards my goals in the IEP” in order to be accountable for the time she spends with the student.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Itinerant Teaching Position

This study aimed to compile information from current itinerant teachers for students who are deaf or hard of hearing about their beliefs of the advantages and disadvantages of being an itinerant teacher. Many of the teachers had a balance of pros and cons that they felt were a part of their everyday experience as an itinerant teacher.

Advantages

The advantages that the itinerants shared were bountiful and followed along the lines of the information found in previous studies about the triumphs and challenges of such a position. One itinerant described that she loved her role as a traveling teacher because it offered, “flexibility, independence, being able to see a child progress from year to year, working with various ages (infants-18 years old), helping families cope and being supportive of their child’s needs, teaching advocacy, seeing a child succeed academically and socially”.

Another itinerant shared a similar passion for the position and discussed how she “loves the consultative part of this job that allows me to be an advocate for my students by working closely with teachers, counselors, and parents” and many of the itinerants enjoy the opportunity to make their own schedules in order to see many different students and teachers every day. One more itinerant expressed her belief that it is “great to see students educated in their home school districts with family-siblings, peers, community” and that “language and academic models are provided with general education peers with this type of service delivery model”.

An additional advantage that one itinerant brought up was that she has seen “acceptance of student peers with differences” from the students in the general education setting and that some of the classrooms even “spend time to educate the whole class about what a hearing loss is and how different modes of communication and amplification devices can be used” to further understand how the student with a hearing loss can integrate into a general education setting.

Disadvantages

However, the itinerant teaching position also has many challenges that the respondents in this study were able to discuss. One itinerant talked about how it is “hard not to have the role of a classroom teacher. I miss having a group of “my kids” that I see all day, every day. I also miss doing fun, creative projects and lessons that are more appropriate when you have a class”. There is also the issue of travel time and time constraints that the itinerants inevitably face. Many of them shared that they feel they are “running around and late for the next place they need to be”. An itinerant spoke about

this when she said that “it’s hard having such a tight schedule because you cannot keep a student longer than normal because then you might be late for your student at the next school.

One itinerant teacher shared that she felt “scattered support” and that being an itinerant teacher means you are “on your own” frequently. Many of the itinerants agreed that it can “get lonely when you are rushing in and out of schools and don’t have time to talk to everyone as long as you would like to” and that “you have to work twice as hard to build good, working relationships with teachers and staff that you might only see once a week”.

In some of the more rural settings that itinerant teachers serve students, some of them mentioned that a disadvantage they have seen is that students on their case loads “do not have peers that can communicate with because they use a manual mode of communication and there aren’t many people that can understand issues related to deafness and Deaf culture”. As a result of the general unfamiliarity with deafness, these issues become a struggle for the itinerant teacher, as well, to successfully provide counseling, guidance, and support for the student while also teaching them.

A few additional disadvantages of the itinerant position relate to the responsibilities that need to be fulfilled as an itinerant. As mentioned earlier, most of the itinerants are the case managers for the students on their case loads and keeping track of all of their students’ paperwork, IEP goals, and the involvement of parents and teachers can “become overwhelming” at times.

Finally, as found in the recent literature about itinerant teaching, one teacher talked about how the materials she needs to work with some of the students on her case

load can be more of a burden because she does not have her own classroom to store them. She explained that, “it is exhausting having to carry all of my teaching supplies and materials from my car and staying organized so I have the correct equipment when I am working with each student. There have been many times I will have to have the student wait while I go back out to my car if there is vital paperwork or materials I forgot”.

Effectiveness of Itinerant Service Delivery Model

The next section of the questionnaire for this study was included to find out if the itinerants believe that the itinerant service delivery model for students who are deaf or hard of hearing is an effective model of education and why they felt the way they did. For this question, many of the itinerants had differing opinions about what it means to utilize the itinerant service delivery model as the only source of instruction time with a teacher of students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

One itinerant teacher shared that she believes the itinerant service delivery model is “very effective” and that “supporting students with a hearing loss who have the ability to learn in the classroom with their hearing peers is highly important and beneficial”. Another itinerant agreed that students strive to be in their home school districts and she pointed out that she thinks “giving the classroom teacher assistance, support, and training in an area that they are unfamiliar with (deafness) is one of the greatest ways to effectively aid in the success of the students”.

One itinerant talked about her belief that the service-delivery model is invaluable because it allows “individual students’ needs and communication skills targeted rather than group needs and many of the students are children of hearing parents who want to

meet their child's needs within a community and the general education setting allows flexibility and diversity in programming”.

Other itinerants approached this topic of discussion with a more flexible outlook about what is best for the student. One itinerant said, “It all depends on the student. Some students do fabulous with the itinerant model. However some students really need more contact with a teacher of the deaf”. Another itinerant felt similarly and shared that she thought the itinerant service delivery model was a good fit “most of the time, but the entire continuum needs to be reviewed/considered on a consistent basis as to what it best for each individual student and the benefits they are receiving from the contact with an itinerant teacher”.

One respondent in the study related her opinions to the reality of the types of programs that are actually out there and she said it is “hard to say what is best for every student because they are all so different. Some may benefit from seeing an itinerant teacher two times a week, but not all students”. This particular itinerant teacher strongly felt that “if a resource program for students who are deaf or hard of hearing exits, then some students may benefit from this model of service instead and may be more successful if they have daily contact with a teacher who works with students who are deaf or hard of hearing”.

Suggestions for Future Itinerant Teachers

The final section of the present study's questionnaire looked to future itinerant teachers for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The respondents were asked to give suggestions and provide tips for a deaf educator starting a position as an itinerant.

For this section, the participants had beneficial input for future itinerant deaf educators and many of them were passionate about educating others about the role of an itinerant teacher.

Remain Flexible

One teacher said that one of the most important things about being an itinerant is that you “have to be very flexible” and that in this position, “things happen and change every day that you will not expect”. Many of the itinerants shared similar ideas about the magnitude of being able to stay flexible as an itinerant because “it could stress you out if you are used to routine and order because seeing fifteen different students a week at all age levels is unpredictable every day”. Another itinerant described that scheduling, differing school calendars between schools, and absences of students is “hard to deal with if you are not flexible and you cannot let little changes frustrate you”.

Be an Effective Communicator

Another common theme found in the suggestions of all of the respondents was that an itinerant must be able to effectively communicate with many people. One itinerant shared that “the role of an itinerant is all about communication and first, you must be able to effectively work with all different ages of students and find out how to communicate with them to get to the point of building working relationships with your students”.

Another teacher suggested “making communication with all parties involved in the student’s education a priority because they are the ones who will aid you in making

the whole thing come together in order for the students to be successful”. One itinerant said that “working in ten different schools requires your people skills to be excellent” and shared that she is constantly promoting this facet of special education in order to educate others about the job she does.

Be an Advocate for the Students

A majority of the respondents described that one of their duties as an itinerant is to “be the very best advocate you can possibly be for each of the students on your case load”. This entails understanding the IEP process, general education setting requirements, and being familiar with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Some of the itinerants also explained that their job is to “be an advocate for the student initially, making sure they get what they need in the general education setting, but also to be able to teach the students how to advocate for themselves”. They suggested that a future itinerant should aid the student in learning how to advocate for themselves and knowing when to hand off the responsibility of how to receive the accommodations needed and being accountable for their strengths and weaknesses.

Work on Organizational Skills

Another suggestion that was given was how essential it is to be organized as an itinerant teacher. One itinerant said that it’s important to be “extremely organized to keep up with the paperwork involved in being a special education teacher” and other itinerants agreed that being organized is a necessary trait in order to efficiently work with so many different students, teachers, and parents.

Stay Current with Latest Technological Advances and Educational Laws

One respondent explained that it is important for teachers in the itinerant position to “stay abreast of technology” to provide the best services to the students. Many of the itinerants felt that their position required them take part in continuing education opportunities and stay up-to-date on the laws of special education, as well as the changing technology their students were facing with their devices and in the classroom.

Value of On-site Practicum Shadowing Experiences Prior to Itinerancy

Finally, based on the recent literature about itinerant teachers and the results of the current itinerants’ participation in the present study, it is clear that the job responsibilities and the role of an itinerant teacher are significantly different from those of other teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Almost all of the respondents believed that one of the greatest ways to prepare for an itinerant position and experience the role of an itinerant is to be able to get on-site training. Although this is not always possible in every deaf education training program, many of the itinerants said that “one of the best ways to understand what a day in the life looks and feels like for an itinerant teacher is to actually shadow her for a day”.

One respondent said that she felt she had to “learn how to be an itinerant on the job, which is difficult because without seeing someone else lead the way or show you how to do it, you feel even more lost in a sea of schools and people” and she strongly suggested that shadowing an itinerant is one of the most helpful ways to learn how to be an itinerant. Many of the teachers also discussed the importance of being able to “have a

mentor or someone who can be a support in the beginning” in order to learn how to become a successful itinerant teacher.

Shadowing Experiences

Description of Shadowing

Two participants in the present study were also shadowed during separate student teaching practicum rotations for three and six weeks, respectively. On-site practicum shadowing provided more information about the responsibilities of an itinerant teaching position. The goals of the shadowing aspect of the present study were to physically shadow an itinerant and work with the students on their case loads, document how an itinerant does her job in an effective and organized manner, and see firsthand how the role of an itinerant deaf educator affects students, teachers, and parents. Signing in at each school and getting to know each school and the students included in the itinerant teachers' case loads provided insight as to how the role of an itinerant is successfully executed. Another objective for the on-site shadowing experiences was to prepare impressionistic field notes based on observations of the itinerants' settings, informal conversations between itinerants and students or other professionals, and approach to the itinerant service-delivery model. The information compiled during the shadowing part of the present study is organized in a similar fashion to how the questionnaire was structured.

Shadowing Experience #1

The first on-site shadowing practicum was done with an itinerant teacher employed through Special School District in the St. Louis, Missouri area. The 16 students included in the itinerant's caseload ranged in age from 5-19 years old and all employed the use of the auditory-oral method of communication. The distance traveled between schools for this itinerant teacher averaged 45 miles and included the Rockwood and Parkway school districts.

Service-Delivery Models and Meeting Places

This itinerant primarily worked with students in a one-on-setting in which she utilized the "pull-out" method of service delivery. The itinerant explained that most of the students she provides services for are in a middle school or high school setting and it is beneficial for them to have one-on-one assistance in which the itinerant can work on vocabulary, language, and core concepts from their general education classes. However, there was one student on her case load who utilized both the "pull-out" method and a "push-in" approach to providing services. This was a middle school student who needed additional help in heavily language-based classes through the "pull-out" method, and then the itinerant "pushed in" during his math class. This was interesting because the itinerant explained that most students at the middle and high school level do not want a teacher of the deaf in the classroom with them because they do not want their peers to see that they are getting additional help from an adult. However, the student observed did not have a problem with the itinerant's presence and this was a cause for concern socially because the itinerant said he did not care about anything related to his peers.

The meeting places for this itinerant teacher were the same at every school when she utilized the “pull-out” method. Each elementary, middle, and high school the itinerant provided services at was only able to offer her and the student the school library to meet. This was unfortunate in some respect because most often, the school libraries were crowded, loud, and there was not very much privacy for the student to get the help they needed. The itinerant did not have a problem with it and adjusted her service delivery model to meet the needs of the students by trying to talk a bit quieter than usual and ignoring any distractions. Meeting in the libraries was advantageous in one aspect, though, because if the students had questions about anything related to their assignments or coursework and their general education teachers were too far away from the library, there were usually computers available in the libraries to use as a resource in conjunction with online coursework syllabi and the library was sometimes used as a workspace if needed.

Availability of Resources and Materials

As a result of having many middle and high school students on her case load, the itinerant did not bring many materials to work with the students. The itinerant was able to ask the student or the general education teacher for the books, materials, or assignments that were necessary for her to keep up with what the student needed to complete in their class work. She also did not have a problem with a lack of resources, even with her student who was in kindergarten, because she usually pulled short activities or “lessons” to practice skills that she felt the students needed to build. For example, with the student who was in kindergarten, the general education teacher had told the

itinerant that the student could not remember vital information about her telephone number, where she lived, and what to do if there was an emergency. The skills that the general education teacher wanted the student to work on were great for the itinerant to practice during her time with the student. The itinerant had the student pretend to dial numbers into a paper phone while memorizing her telephone number and also drilled her on asking what her address was many times.

Successful Communication Strategies

The itinerant teacher was able to share her methods of being able to successfully communicate with the general education teachers, parents, and other professionals who worked with the students on her case load. The itinerant corresponded with most teachers and parents through e-mail, but also checked her cell phone voicemail messages to see if anyone had tried to contact her via telephone throughout the day. She had three e-mail accounts that she checked throughout the day, as well, during breaks between meeting with students on her case load. It was important that she had access to computers at each school and that she found time between schools and meeting with students to check all three of the e-mail accounts. Finally, she also had a mailbox at each school that she was able to check every day to see if any staff members had left her any paperwork, assignments for the students, or notes about anything. All forms of communication were vital to the itinerant for keeping lines of communication open and being able to correspond with teachers, parents, and other professionals concerning information about the students.

It was also observed that the itinerant was able to briefly chat with some of the general education teachers before she took the students out of the classroom to find out how the student was performing with the concepts and collaborate on any future assignments that were to be given. Most of the general education teachers, especially those who worked very closely with the itinerant in the “push-in” setting, were more than willing to take a few minutes to discuss any issues and updates the itinerant wanted to know about. It was clear that the itinerant was well-liked in each of the schools and made an effort to build rapport with all of the teachers, staff members, and administrators.

General Education Teachers and Accommodations

The on-site shadowing experience allowed the observation of the itinerant’s responsibility of advocating for the students on her case load and making sure the accommodations in the IEP’s were being met in the general education setting. Most of the teachers were comfortable working with the students’ needs; including knowing how to use, troubleshoot, and make the sure the students’ devices were being worn in their classrooms. There were many eager teachers and staff members who wanted to learn more about how to clean hearing aids, how to effectively communicate with the students who had a hearing loss at their school, and talk with the itinerant about hearing loss and deafness.

The itinerant explained that she was fortunate that the teachers and other professionals involved in the many of the students’ educational goals and planning were present and helpful to her as the teacher of the deaf. She was able to informally conference with many of the general education teachers about how well the student was

using their amplification devices, if they were keeping up with their normal hearing peers with the content of the class, and if the needs of the students were being met in the general education setting.

It was also observed that the itinerant made sure she knew what types of services and resources were available both educationally and socially to the students on her case load when she was not physically at the school. With many of the middle and high school students on her case load, there were many times that the students knew they needed additional help from another teacher who was in the school full-time and would go to them for to help if necessary. This included educational and counseling assistance, which was beneficial to the students. It was often a common event to find one of the students on the itinerant's case load talking with another teacher, having a test read to them, or getting additional help in a resource room setting before the itinerant arrived at their meeting time.

Individualized Education Plans: A Team Effort

The itinerant in the St. Louis area was the case manager for most of the students on her case load, which meant that she collected data when working with her students, organized the IEP meetings, invited the IEP team to the meetings, which includes: general education teachers, parents, and other professionals, conducted the meetings, and then completed additional paperwork to bring an end to the process each year. It was observed that the itinerant measured progress toward the annual goals written in the student's IEP and progress reports were reported to parents throughout a school year.

The itinerant showed how many of the school districts now have online IEP's to cut down on some of the paperwork necessary for the process of working with an IEP. She was able to demonstrate how general education teachers or professionals involved in the students' IEP goals could log on to an online account and enter in the goals and progress of each of the students. This helped her keep all of the students on her case load organized and she said it was a great way to incorporate changing technology into the IEP process.

During this shadowing experience, the itinerant was able to set up an IEP meeting for one of her tenth grade students so it could be observed for the present study. The itinerant prepared for the IEP meeting months in advance in many ways. First, she kept in touch with all of the general education teachers and other professionals working with the particular student through e-mail or informal conversations to ensure they were evaluating and marking progress on individual objectives in accordance with the IEP in the domains in which they were responsible.

The itinerant was also in contact with other professionals who were included in the student's IEP, such as the speech-language pathologist, to facilitate open lines of communication and to stay informed about the domain of speech goals on the IEP. The itinerant left notes with tentative dates in each of the teachers and professionals' mailboxes who were invited to the IEP meeting. She corresponded with the student about when he thought him and his parents would be able to attend the meeting in the next few months and encouraged him to be responsible by having a hand in setting up the meeting. Shortly after, the itinerant followed up with the student's parents through telephone once a date had been agreed upon for all of the team members to attend.

The day of the IEP meeting, the itinerant waited until all team members were present and then began. She gave a brief history of the student and summarized his interests and how well he was doing socially and educationally at the high school. She explained his accommodations and opened the floor for individual teachers and professionals to briefly share their experiences with the team about how the student was doing in relation to his IEP goals in their particular domain. The parents were able to interject questions or concerns during each individual's description of the student in relation to his IEP goals and progress.

The flow of the meeting was monitored by the itinerant and she was able to smoothly transition into different areas of the IEP. She did a great job effectively communicating with all of the team members and was open to questions throughout the meeting. No revisions were made to the student's IEP and by the end of the meeting; some of the general education teachers and other professionals had to leave. However, the student's parents stayed until the end to meet with the itinerant in a smaller group. They were very excited to talk about their son's progress after hearing each of the educational team members' information and they conversed with the itinerant about their son's future goals. Once all of the individuals involved in the IEP meeting left, the itinerant shared that she thought it was a successful meeting and that she would follow-up with the final paperwork necessary to prove that the IEP was conducted and that no changes were made for the upcoming school year for the student. The itinerant's skills in organizing and conducting the meeting with multiple individuals were impressive and it was observed how IEP meetings are truly a team effort.

Shadowing Experience #2

The second on-site shadowing practicum was completed with an itinerant teacher employed through the Grant Wood Area Education Agency 10 for Special Education in Iowa City, Iowa. The 14 students included in the itinerant's caseload ranged in age from 3-15 years old and interacted through auditory-oral and manual modes of communication. The distance traveled between schools for this itinerant teacher averaged 60 miles and included many smaller school districts in rural towns. Services were provided in diverse settings including: home visits for children under the age of five, general education classrooms, and special education self-contained or resource classrooms. This itinerant had students on her case load with a broader range of abilities and about half of the students had additional disabilities. There were also two students on her case load that lived in an Amish community and the itinerant would travel to the one-room schoolhouse in the country to meet with the students in the school's basement.

Service- Delivery Models and Meeting Places

This itinerant also primarily worked with students in a one-on-setting in which she utilized the "pull-out" method of service delivery. The students on the itinerant's case load were in many different settings and it was usually most appropriate for each individual student to take them out of their classroom setting and meet with them individually. For example, one of the high school students on her case load had additional disabilities and was in a resource room all day long. The itinerant explained that it was vital to take him out of that setting because then she could work with him and

keep his attention better, as well as focus on the skills and activities she had planned to do with him.

In another situation, this itinerant had two students on her case load who were in the same first grade elementary school class. For most of the time she met with the two students, the itinerant utilized a “push-in” and collaborative approach to providing services. The itinerant had worked with the general education teaching with other students in previous years and they worked out a system in which the itinerant would take groups of students included with the two students with hearing losses. This way, the itinerant was able to give the general education teacher more time to focus on other groups and it was beneficial for the two students with hearing losses to see the models of their normal hearing peers. The itinerant explained that she liked the set-up because she could bounce ideas and skills off each of the children in order to help the two students who needed her services.

This itinerant teacher met with students in all kinds of places. As mentioned earlier, she had two children under the age of five on her case load and she clearly met them in their homes for sessions. For the older students, she was able to find the best possible place at each school and this included: libraries, quiet hallways with a desk and chair set-up, teacher offices connected to classrooms, an Amish one-room schoolhouse basement, and available conference rooms. The itinerant explained that some of the students did not want to be seen by any of their peers, and so she tried to keep the meeting places limited to areas of the school that were not very busy, loud, or close to common areas. The itinerant did not have many options for where she could meet with her students and she did express concern over some of the accommodations that were

available to her. However, she made the best of each of the situations she faced in relation to the meeting places with her students and provided services for them in whatever location she could find.

Availability of Resources and Materials

This itinerant had many younger students on her case load in comparison to the first itinerant shadowed. As a result of this, she carried around a lot of materials in her car. For example, every time she went on a home visit, she brought one or two bags in with her from her car which contained different games, toys, books, and additional materials to use with the children. She explained that with the younger children, it is a necessity to have many materials on hand when working with them because there are many skills to practice during the sessions. During one home session, she pulled out squishy toys and had the two-year old play with them and manipulate them by putting them into different containers. She also brought plastic farm animals and encouraged the child to say and sign the names of the animals and the sounds they make.

Even with the older students on her case load, this itinerant was notorious for carrying around two or three bags full of materials all of the time. She always wanted to make sure she brought a lot of workbooks, reading books, games, and manipulatives to work with once she started working with her students. She also utilized one of her elementary school classrooms as a place to store a traveling bin that contained materials to work with one of her third grade students. Every day, she knew it would be there when she went to pull him out of his class and she was able to keep workbooks and other

materials she used with him every session. This was beneficial because then she didn't have to bring in so many outside materials from her car.

Successful Communication Strategies

The itinerant teacher showed how she was able to effectively communicate with the general education teachers, parents, and other professionals who worked with the students on her case load. As many of the itinerants have noted, this teacher used e-mail and telephone communication the most with teachers and parents. She was able to check her cell phone voicemail messages throughout the day in order to ensure that she knew of any student absences or concerns of any of the teachers or parents about different students on her case load. She explained that she gave her cell phone and home phone number to all of the people in contact with the students on her case load. This itinerant was passionate about being available to those who needed her service and was adamant about making sure that anyone in contact with her students should feel comfortable calling her at any time.

This itinerant also had a mailbox at most of the schools and received notes, announcements, and other school and student information from general education teachers and staff members. The itinerant made sure she was available through all forms of communication in order to effectively correspond with teachers, parents, and other professionals concerning information about the students.

This itinerant also made time between meeting with students to conference with most of the general education teachers of the students on her case load. Many of the general education teachers made time to discuss the student's performance in the

classroom and go over any issues or concerns with the itinerant. One of the students on her case load at an elementary school had a teacher that was willing to stay after school for ten to fifteen minutes and talk with the itinerant because he was the final student the itinerant saw for the day. It was great to see how the two teachers were able to collaborate and share concerns about different issues that the student was experiencing, especially because he had additional home-life problems.

Similarly to the first itinerant shadowed, this itinerant teacher had established a great rapport with students, parents, and general education teachers and staff members. She explained that because she is always in and out of schools, it makes it harder to feel like faculty members know her, but that she tries to make herself available as much as she can. She said that it is important to her to make those connections with staff members and again, it was evident that this itinerant was also well-liked in each of the schools and that she knew many of the teachers, faculty members, and administrators.

General Education Teachers and Accommodations

The itinerant from Iowa was in contact with multiple professionals related to the students on her case load and she was able to demonstrate her involvement in making sure the accommodations of her students were met in the general education setting. Starting with the youngest children on her case load, the shadowing experience provided an opportunity to see how an itinerant works with families and caregivers in a home setting. It was observed that the itinerant was friendly and open with parents and caregivers when she went in to their homes and work with the children who were deaf or hard of hearing. For the most part, this type of setting allowed the itinerant to act upon

the environment in a way that she felt best accommodated the children, parents, or givers as a whole. She was polite and asked the parents questions about current performance, behaviors they had been noticing, and any issues, or concerns, they had. This type of set-up in the home was unique and the itinerant teacher acted as the primary early interventionist for some of the children and their families.

For the older students on her case load, the itinerant worked with many general education teachers and other professionals to ensure the needs of the students were met. There were many times throughout the course of the three-week span of shadowing the itinerant that she met with multiple teachers to help explain changes in the student's devices and she helped the general education teachers refresh their memories on how to troubleshoot them. Most of the general education teachers were comfortable working with the students' needs and adopted the itinerant's firm belief that hearing aids, cochlear implants, and FM systems should be checked and worn at all times in the classroom. One four-year old student on the itinerant's case load was going through the process of starting to use an FM system and the child was very excited. This was great to see during the shadowing experience because it allowed observation of how the itinerant conducted an introductory session with all of the general education teachers and additional staff members, such as the school nurse, who would be in contact with the child. The itinerant was able to do an in-service in order to familiarize the professionals with the device so she gave them a brief explanation of how FM systems work and was available if they had any questions for her. The in-service experience was valuable to all participants involved and the willingness of the general education teachers and other professionals to learn about how to work with the FM system truly affected the progress in a positive manner.

The child was eager to try it the next day at school and did not want to take it off when she had to go home because she had heard so much benefit from coupling the FM system to her bilateral hearing aids.

This itinerant experienced similar situations as the first itinerant did in terms of how general education teachers and staff members valued their knowledge of working with students with a hearing loss and their expertise in the field of deaf education. She explained that there had been many times throughout her career that teachers wanted to know how individual academic accommodations and behavior modification plans should be put into place with some of the students with a hearing loss in their classrooms. This itinerant felt appreciated and respected by most of the professionals she came into contact with and described that the teachers did their best in meeting the needs of the students on her case load in the general education classroom by asking for reminders of accommodations and advice for different situations they faced.

The itinerant also was aware of her role as an advocate for the students on her case load and proved that she was willing to do whatever it took to get the students' accommodations met. For example, the two students who lived in the Amish community in rural Iowa were located in an area and independent school system which was not in line with the special education services of northeast Iowa. Since the Amish community had enough cases of genetic hearing loss passed down the generations of many children per family, the itinerant had worked with many of the students in the one-room schoolhouse during her career. She fought to make sure the state of Iowa would allow her to serve the students with a hearing loss from this particular community and adapted the needs of the students once she began working with them. There were many cultural

differences far beyond the location of where the itinerant met with the students. One of the most interesting accommodations the itinerant needed to collaborate on with the schoolmaster of the Amish education system concerned the materials that she would use to teach the students. Arrangements were made between the itinerant and the schoolmaster to ensure the students were still receiving the standard information taught in general Amish education classroom. This meant that the itinerant used the school books and other materials that the students' normal hearing peers used and that the itinerant was not to bring in too many outside icons or ideas from the "outside world". These accommodations were met and the itinerant did an amazing job adjusting her teaching style and goal writing for an altered IEP for each student.

Individualized Education Plans: A Team Effort

The itinerant from Iowa had comparable duties as the case manager for most of the students on her case load every school year. She was able to share the process she goes through in setting up IEP meetings with families, multiple team members, and sometimes the students. The data collection that the itinerant did during almost every session with her students was compiled in a manner that was in compliance with the IEP's goals. The itinerant met with all of the other itinerant teachers for students who are deaf or hard of hearing in her Area Education Agency in northeast Iowa once a month for what they deemed, "quality processing" meetings. This was a new development for the group of itinerants to analyze how well they were tracking data from their students and then meeting the goals of the IEP's. This was a wonderful additional aspect of the shadowing experience because one of the itinerant meetings was observed. It is

impressive that this group of itinerants get together to consult and collaborate with one another to make sure they are doing the best possible job they can to provide quality services to students on their case loads and striving to be accountable for their responsibilities.

The itinerant also verified that she puts forth great effort to make sure everything gets in place and all of the people who are involved in the IEP team are contacted and invited to the meeting. In preparation for the IEP meetings, it was essential that the itinerant communicated with the teachers, parents, and other professionals many months in advance to ensure the process would be completed in a timely fashion. She did a great job showing how the IEP is an important part of collaboration with multiple people to determine how well a student is doing in the general education setting. Although the IEP process takes a lot of organizing, planning, and communicating with many people to make it work, this itinerant was able to prove that she was certainly capable of providing valuable information because of it.

Discussion

Common themes were highlighted across all measures of the present study about the irreplaceable role of an itinerant teacher who serves a population of students who are deaf or hard of hearing placed in general education settings. Most of the itinerant teachers who participated in previous studies, as well as the current study, shared similar experiences in the itinerant position.

Many itinerants described advantages of the position and there were various accounts of why the teachers chose to work as an itinerant teacher. Some of the core

reasons were related to the flexibility and independence an itinerant teacher has. The reality of having the freedom to work with many different schools and more children than in self-contained classrooms allowed a sense of autonomy for many itinerants. Several of the itinerants also shared that they were fond of working with diverse age groups and were also passionate about providing, as well as teaching, advocacy to the students on their case loads.

They also explained that the consultative quality of working with multiple general education teachers, parents, and other professionals was enjoyable in addition to working with the students. A lot of itinerants reported that they liked to educate not only the students on their case loads, but the general education teachers and other professionals on the educational teams, as well, through in-services and conferences about the students. Many of the itinerant teachers were optimistic about the many responsibilities and changing case loads they have each year.

There were also shared feelings about certain aspects of the position that many of the itinerant teachers considered to be challenges concerning the role as an itinerant. Several of the itinerants reported that the driving time between schools often became an obstacle to the effectiveness of their services because they were on strict time schedules in order to meet the needs of many students located in many different places. The time constraints itinerant teachers are up against is one of the frequently discussed challenges of the position. Also, many of the itinerants conveyed that there is a sense of scattered support and isolation as a result of being a traveling teacher, going in and out of schools every day.

According to a number of the itinerants, there were also concerns about inadequate meeting places in schools and scarcity of resources because they do not have a home classroom in which they meet with students. Given that almost all of the itinerants utilized the “pull-out” service-delivery model with at least one or more students on their case loads, the issues of availability of meeting places and resources affected the services they provided.

Among the itinerant teachers included in the previous and current studies, they reported that an important feature of the role of an itinerant revolved around the communication, consultation, and collaboration they experience with multiple individuals. The itinerant teacher is responsible for effectively working with and building great rapport with the following individuals: the students on their case loads, general education teachers, parents, other professionals involved in the students’ educational progress, and administrators. The itinerants also highlighted that they are often the case manager for many students on their case loads and are solely responsible for organizing and conducting the IEP meetings, which can be an overwhelming task when there are sixteen or more students on each itinerant’s case load.

An itinerant teacher wears many hats and is expected to professionally meet the needs of the aforementioned individuals in accordance to their relation with the students. The itinerant teachers involved in the previous and current studies indicated that the role of an itinerant must be filled by an individual who is an effective communicator who is also flexible when working with many different personalities in changing settings.

Many of the itinerant teachers had parallel recommendations, or suggestions, intended for future deaf educators in an itinerant position. Each measure of the present

study implied that an individual who wants to be an effective itinerant teacher must be flexible and prepared to communicate, collaborate, and consult with multiple individuals. A vast majority of the participants in the studies agreed that an itinerant should possess excellent communication skills and promote advocacy for the students on their case loads. Despite the time constraints built-in to the itinerant position, several itinerant teachers expressed that there are ways to avoid limitation as a result of the clock and that staying organized can help relieve some of the spontaneity of the position.

Also, some of the itinerants included in the present study suggested that future itinerant teachers should develop a broad base of knowledge. Many of the itinerants shared that they need to be accountable when working with many students of different ages and with students using different modes of communication. As a result of this, an itinerant teacher must be prepared to be well-educated across many parameters to facilitate the best possible teaching services provided to their students. A lot of the itinerant teachers suggested that an individual interested in becoming an itinerant should be well-informed about general and special education laws of practice, changing technology, and teaching methodologies.

Finally, numerous itinerants suggested that an on-site practicum experience with an itinerant is the best preparation for an individual who may someday be an itinerant. The on-site shadowing experience component of the present study confirmed a more informed understanding about the role of an itinerant teacher and offered a wealth of information about the position.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of recent literature about the role of an itinerant teacher for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, results of questions about the position answered by current itinerants, and the two shadowing experiences; there is a defined overlap between many of the topics covered and information obtained as a result of these measures. The data collected demonstrates that the role of an itinerant teacher is unique in many ways. The sheer fact that itinerant teachers travel to many schools and work with students of all ages invites curiosity about the position.

The combined results of previous studies and those from the present study indicate many significant findings to further understand the role of an itinerant teacher for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The itinerant service-delivery model is likely to remain a viable process for educating students who are deaf or hard of hearing and ongoing examination of the efficacy of this model is essential so as to address its shortcomings and highlight its advantages (Yarger and Luckner, '99).

The outlook for future itinerant teachers for students who are deaf or hard of hearing is bright and it is important for future research studies of the service-delivery model to focus on how to prepare teachers with the intention of providing optimum services to students in general education settings. The changing technology of assistive listening devices, such as high-digital hearing aids and cochlear implants, has changed the face of the students who are deaf or hard of hearing that are being placed in their home school districts in a general education setting. It is crucial that the students in this population are being served by highly-trained itinerant teachers for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

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Appendix A:

**Questionnaire for Itinerant Teachers for
Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

1. How long have you been a teacher for students who are deaf or hard of hearing?
2. How long have you been an itinerant teacher for students who are deaf or hard of hearing?
3. On average, how many miles do you travel total per day and how many students who are deaf or hard of hearing are currently included in your case load and how often do these students receive services (i.e. one hour/daily)?
4. Please provide information about the students in your current caseload: age, degree of hearing loss, types of assistive listening devices they utilize (hearing aids, implants, FM systems, etc.) and modes of communication they make use of. Do any of these students have additional disabilities other than a hearing loss?
5. What types of services as an itinerant teacher do you provide? Direct services? Push-in/Pull out? Collaborative services with another teacher/team teaching?
6. Where do you usually meet with your students?
7. How do you successfully work and communicate with the students' general education teachers? Do you have time to meet with them and do they adhere to accommodations for the students who are deaf or hard of hearing? (i.e. wear the FM system counterpart device).
8. Do you have a mailbox at each school you visit or another way of communicating with the staff? (School e-mail account, etc.)

9. How do you act as a team member in formulating the students' Individualized Education Plans (IEP) with caregivers, general education teachers, and other professionals involved in the process?
10. In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of being an itinerant teacher for students who are deaf or hard of hearing?
11. Do you believe that the itinerant service delivery model for students who are deaf or hard of hearing is an effective model of education? Why or why not?
12. What suggestions do you have for future itinerant teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing?