

Deaf Education Revisited

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Who?

Who teaches and works with deaf students?

Deaf Education Today: Special Education teachers, audiologists and speech pathologists

Deaf Education Revisited: Additive language experts for the dominant written language of the culture (ESOL for the U.S.) who weave the majority language through communication, literacy, and content education, along with reading specialists, American Sign Language teachers, Special Education teachers, audiologists, speech pathologists, and parents and caretakers using both the majority language and a sign language

What?

Deaf Education Today: What result do we get from Deaf Education? Too many high school graduates are leaving school with limited reading skills and content knowledge

Deaf Education Revisited: What result do we seek from Deaf Education in the future? Academic fluency in reading (English in the U.S.), academic fluency in sign language (American Sign Language in the U.S.), and content knowledge

When?

Deaf Education Today: When are students educated? Deaf students are educated while in class

Deaf Education Revisited: When will students be educated? Deaf students will be educated 24/7. They will learn the connections between English (or the majority language) and American Sign Language (or the local sign language) and progress to academic fluency in reading through daily life learning experiences, in addition to learning experiences in school.

Where?

Deaf Education Today: Where are students educated? In schools for the deaf, in day classes, and in the mainstream

Deaf Education Revisited: Where will students be educated? Online and at home, in addition to school settings. Online education should become a major resource for deaf students and their families, and education should be integrated into daily life within the family, just as it is with hearing children. This can happen as parents, siblings and other family members are offered more easily accessible resources for developing bilingual fluency in English (or the majority language) and sign language. Environmental print (such as that found on road signs, ads, product packaging, menus, greeting cards, movie and TV captions) can be connected to sign language and provide reading opportunities in daily life. Online resources for families learning sign language (and sometimes, also, learning English and/or the majority language) are as important as online resources for deaf K-12 students and deaf adults. Students should be encouraged to develop motivation for self-education (autonomous growth in language, reading, and general knowledge).

Why?

Deaf Education Today: In Deaf Education today, K-12 “special education” is provided, and high school diplomas are issued. Yet many deaf students do not graduate with skills similar to those of hearing graduates. Reading fluency, which is the key to educational advancement, may be subordinated to other general education goals.

Deaf Education Revisited: In a new model for Deaf Education, deaf high school students should have reading skills and content knowledge commensurate with hearing high school graduates.

How?

Deaf Education Today: Traditional “special education” in schools and day classes for the deaf use techniques and ideologies associated with a patchwork of adaptations to regular education. Deaf students who are isolated as the only deaf student (or as one of only a few deaf students) in a mainstream school are typically provided with a single and very artificial “accommodation.” The teachers’ words are interpreted into sign language. Meanwhile, the entire universe of communication in and around the deaf student may be lost. Much more direct instruction in literacy should be provided to mainstreamed deaf students and much more should be done to promote sign language use among their hearing peers.

Deaf Education Revisited: Through the integration of sign language and other forms of visual presentation, raising reading levels in the majority language should be the primary educational objective. Literacy should be key, and content lessons should enhance reading and vocabulary. Additive language principles (combining education in a majority language and a sign language to promote connections between print and sign) should drive all educational approaches. Examples of additive language approaches include connecting environmental print in the majority language (the written word as it appears in daily life – such as on road signs, ads, product packaging, menus, greeting cards, captioning, and online communications) to the local sign language, having students communicate in the majority language and sign language as they work collaboratively on learning tasks, and using more authentic (“real life” instead of specially-prepared) materials to teach reading.

Additive language teachers (such as ESOL teachers) and American Sign Language (and other national sign language) teachers should work closely with reading specialists, using bilingual educational principles to promote academic literacy in both the majority language and the local sign language. Online educational resources supporting deaf students and their families and friends should be offered, such as sites and applications that foster connections between ESOL and ASL. Presentations should go beyond storytelling, interpreting and captioning to direct bilingual language instruction using sign language to provide concepts and context for reading. Opportunities for connecting ideas in multiple languages should be encouraged online, in school, and in daily life.