

TEACHING THE STUDENT WITH A HEARING LOSS

At one time or another, every Seventh-day Adventist teacher instructs students with hearing losses. The result of middle-ear infections, most hearing losses are temporary and fluctuating.¹ Though transient, this lack of adequate hearing significantly affects classroom learning.² Yet, no school board or teacher thinks of excluding these students from Adventist classrooms.

Pupils with mild but permanent hearing losses also can be accommodated in Seventh-day Adventist schools. They do not require specialized methods that involve extensive training. They simply need teachers who use good instructional methods and flexible management strategies.

Students with hearing losses

ought to “learn the same subject matter in school as their hearing peers”³ and be “held to the same standards of achievement as anyone else, because they are not less able!”⁴ They have “normal cognition and intellectual abilities, although they may not score well on IQ tests.”⁵

Teachers of a student with a hearing loss need to know the nature and extent of the disability so that they can provide an accepting and supportive environment, especially for those youngsters who “tend to not want other children to know they are hearing impaired.”⁶ The teacher also should tactfully inform peers about the disability and its effects. Elementary

students often ask question such as these: “Why can’t _____ hear?” “How did she get that way?” “What does it feel like?”

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“How will _____ know there’s a fire if he can’t hear the alarm?” Nondisabled and disabled persons begin to feel comfortable together when they are in a setting that allows sincere questioning, provides accurate information, and includes meaningful interaction. A “sense of similarity, of shared humanity” develops.⁷

Amplification

Students with a mild hearing loss can still use hearing as their primary mode of learning. In addition, they watch lip movements, facial expressions, and body language to help decipher what is being said. Amplification often benefits these students, though they probably will be unable to hear certain tones. Students with mild losses may wear a hearing aid in one or both ears. Because these devices amplify all sounds, the teacher must use management strategies that reduce unwanted noises. Some ways to aid these students’ learning include the following:

- Require students to raise their hands and be acknowledged rather than calling out answers.
- Call each speaker by name. This keeps the student who is hard-of-hearing from having to figure out not only what is being said, but also who is talking.

- Use carpets, drapes, and insulators to reduce noise from corridors, windows, heating, cooling and plumbing systems, as well as the background noises of everyday school life. Common sounds such as the bubbling in a fish tank are major obstacles for those using an amplification system.

The teacher should seat the student with a hearing loss in a location where the teacher’s and peers’ faces are well-lighted rather than in silhouette. When speaking, the teacher should stand near

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the student, preferably at eye level. He or she should not speak while writing on the chalkboard. Teachers should speak distinctly and repeat important points, preferably in varying ways. Shortening sentences or slowing down a bit may be all that is necessary to adapt to a pupil’s needs. Asking a student to repeat what was said can help the teacher clarify misunderstandings. The hearing-impaired student should be encouraged to ask for information to be repeated whenever necessary.

Using a Microphone

If the pupil uses a microphone-hearing aid system, the teacher must make sure that each class member uses the mike or must repeat students’ comments so the hearing-impaired person knows what was said. Ordinarily, repeating comments is not advised, in order to encourage the students to pay attention when others speak. Teachers will need to work with the parents and the student to ensure that the hearing aid is working properly.

The pupil with a hearing loss should be allowed to move about the room as needed for optimum hearing. Early in the first year when I taught a child with a hearing loss, my pupils often reminded me that “Margie can’t see what’s happening.” These youngsters sensed that Margie understood most of what was said in class if she observed the speaker as she listened.

Teachers and parents need to remember that having to pay close attention constantly is hard work. A student who has to concentrate so intently needs many short breaks during the school day. He or she “will have more stress and frustration [and] . . . will tire easily and need more sleep than the average child.”⁸

Other Suggestions

- Include teaching methods that communicate nonverbally—pictures, charts, transparencies, demonstrations, displays, hands-on activities, realia, and experiments.
- Supplement oral instructions with written directions or rebuses. Prepare handouts of the major points of a lesson, or outline the main ideas on an overhead. This permits the student to concentrate on listening.
- Provide materials on audiotapes, and a headset so that the student may use amplification.

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- During videos and filmstrips, a youngster with mild hearing losses may need special accommodations. Obtain a written script, if possible, or prepare a handout with the major points in the video or filmstrip. To reinforce the main ideas, give the student a copy of your notes or those of a peer.

- Look for visual materials with captions, which are very helpful for people with hearing losses.

- Utilize television programs and videos with closed captioning (printed words that run along the bottom of the screen and explain what is happening).⁹

- Borrow materials from local and regional libraries, the Library of Congress, or organizations that serve people with hearing losses, such as Gallaudet University.¹⁰

Sometimes teachers or peers cannot understand the hard-of-hearing student's speech. When this occurs, the teacher should ask the student to repeat what was said. Restating the ideas in a different way, writing his or her comments, or drawing a picture can aid the learning process for such students.

Detecting Hearing Loss

Teachers may be the first to detect a child's mild hearing loss. The following characteristics can suggest such a loss:¹²

1. Lack of response to sounds that normally cause a reaction, e.g., fire sirens, bells of ice cream trucks.
2. Turning a "better ear" toward a speaker.*
3. Difficulties in understanding spoken language and/or speaking.
4. Frequent absences due to earaches, sinus congestion, allergies, and related conditions.
5. Inattention and daydreaming.
6. Disorientation and/or confusion, especially when noise levels are high.
7. Difficulties in following directions.
8. Frequent imitation of other students' behaviors in the classroom.

* You can test for this type of response by slipping up behind and slightly to the side of a child, and speaking softly to him or her. Be suspicious of a hearing loss if the child turns the opposite ear toward the speaker. Try a number of repetitions in various situations over several days.

Finding Help

Classroom teachers may need to help locate additional services for the hearing-impaired student, such as auditory training, speech-reading, and speech therapy. They should investigate their community's resources, including those available from the public school system. They should not hesitate to make referrals.

Should You Enroll a Totally Deaf Child?

Some Adventist parents are requesting that church schools accept a child who is deaf. Many decisions must be made before including such a child. Among these is the mode of communication. Deaf students need many support services, most of which are not available in church schools, so they are not easily integrated a regular classroom.

Ideally, deaf pupils should study in settings that allow them to become bilingual, for example, using American Sign Language and English. (American Sign Language is a true language with its own syntax and grammatical rules, etc.

Some colleges and universities now accept American Sign Language as fulfilling their foreign language requirement.) As they move through the grades, deaf students need role models who use advanced levels of sign language. Few Adventist teachers are qualified to function in this capacity. Consequently, a deaf child in a regular classroom will need the services of an interpreter. The interpreter and the student must be placed so that they can see what is occurring all about the classroom. Classmates must take turns talking so that the signer can interpret all conversations. This is especially true during lively discussions.

Pupils who were born deaf or became deaf before learning to speak will have substantially weaker language skills than those who became deaf at a later time. Consequently, their instructional needs will be quite different. They will usually read and comprehend English at a level much below their age level. "The average deaf student finishing high school has reading and language abilities similar to a 9- or 10-year-old hearing student, with math achievement scores a grade or two higher."¹¹ Therefore, materials must be simplified. One way is to highlight the major points in the student's text. This method, however, does not reduce sentence complexity or limit vocabulary. Other techniques that may be more appropriate are purchasing an easier version of the text, rewriting in simplified form the major ideas of each chapter, using high interest, easy vocabulary trade books, employing videos that cover the topics, using materials prepared for pupils learning English as a second language, incorporating computer programs, and utilizing students as tutors.

Children with severe hearing losses

must not be denied access to the deaf culture, which is viewed by the deaf as "the most important factor in their lives."¹³ Teachers and parents should work together to take advantage of support groups and other resources.

American law now requires that children with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment. More and more, a regular classroom is deemed to be that environment. Church school teachers do have the skills to make Christian education accessible to Adventist youngsters with mild hearing losses. ☞

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Nancy Hunt and Kathleen Marshall, *Exceptional Children: Introduction to Special Education* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), p. 342.
2. V. Percia, Notes from a lecture given to a class in Language Acquisition at Fitchburg State College, Fitchburg, Mass., November 20, 1991.
3. Hunt and Marshall, p. 369.
4. G. Gustason, "Wall, After Wall, After Wall." In *Viewpoints on Deafness* (A Deaf American Monograph, vol. 42, Mervin D. Garretson, ed.)

(Silver Spring, Md.: National Association of the Deaf [Publ. No. ISSN 0011-72x], 1992), p. 65.

5. Hunt and Marshall, p. 354.

6. T. M. Shea and A. M. Bauer, *Learnners With Disabilities: A Social Systems Perspective of Special Education* (Dubuque, Iowa: Brown & Benchmark, 1994), p. 296.

7. M. Budoff and S. Conant, "The Development of Concepts of Handicaps: An Interview Study." In *The Development of Concepts of Deviance in Children, Volume I. Final Report* (Cambridge, Mass.: Research Institute for Educational Problems, 1980), (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 245 409), p. 351.

8. J. Biehl, "Parents: Have You Ever Asked Your Children . . . ? A Deaf Child's View." In *Viewpoints on Deafness* (A Deaf American Monograph, vol. 42, Mervin D. Garretson, ed.) (Silver Spring, Md.: National Association of the Deaf [Publ. No. ISSN 0011-72x] 1992), p. 27.

9. New television sets include a built-in decoder for closed captioning; a decoding box can be attached to an older set much in the same

way as a video recorder. With decoders, closed-captioned television programs recorded on a VCR will display the captioning when replayed. When purchasing a decoding box for an older TV set, take a sketch of the back of the TV to the store so that employees can determine the types of connectors or adaptors needed. The salesperson from whom the decoding box is purchased can demonstrate how to connect it to the school's television set.

10. A resource for computer programs is Software to Go, which has an annual membership fee of \$50 for each address to which materials are sent (a conference could set up an account and mail the materials to schools with hearing-impaired students). For the yearly fee, teachers may borrow, examine, and use in their classrooms more than 800 programs (Apple II family, IBM PC and XT, and compatibles). These programs may be reserved for use during specific weeks of the school year, but may not be copied. The service also makes available numerous public-domain software programs that may be copied. For more information, contact Ken Kurlychek, MSSD Library, Gallaudet University, 800 Florida Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20002-3695. Telephone: (202) 651-5705 (V/TDD). Materials for the deaf are also available from Christian Record Services, Inc., P.O. Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506.

11. Hunt and Marshall, p. 354.

12. The last six are direct quotations from Daniel P. Hallahan and James M. Kauffman, *Exceptional Children: Introduction to Special Education* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1994), p. 332.

13. Kathie M. Christensen and Gilbert L. Delgado, *Multicultural Issues in Deafness* (White Plains, N.Y.: Longman, 1993), p. 14.