

The Impact of Hearing Peers on Language Development of Students in Deaf/Hard of Hearing Classrooms

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Abstract

When preschool aged children who are deaf/hard of hearing (DHH) enter educational settings with typically hearing children, they have the opportunity to build positive relationships with their peers. However, without intentional facilitated support from educators, therapists, and professionals, recent studies show that children who are deaf/hard of hearing interact less with peers and engage in less play than hearing children of the same age (Antia, Kreimeyer, Metz, & Spolsky, 2011). The ability to interact socially is a key aspect of development for every child, whether deaf or hearing. Positive peer relationships are associated with increased self-esteem, emotion regulation, successful adjustment to school transitions, and positive attitudes towards school (Batten, Oakes, & Alexander, 2013). Providing preschool aged children the opportunity to build positive peer relationships at a young age will enhance their relationships and social interactions as they progress in school and in life. Instilling a joy for friendships and communication with individuals of all abilities in young children can impact the types of interactions children have and provide them with skills for successful social communication for the future.

Objectives

1. Identify benefits of hearing peers in deaf/hard of hearing preschools.
2. Review the effectiveness of including hearing peers in deaf/hard of hearing preschools on social language development of students who are deaf/hard of hearing.
3. Describe the role of hearing peers in deaf/hard of hearing preschool settings.
4. Describe the roles of educators, therapists, and professionals in deaf/hard of hearing preschool settings.

What are “Hearing Peers?”

- The term “hearing peers” refers to children the same age as a child that is deaf or hard of hearing, but has typical hearing.

Role of Hearing Peers

- In the classroom, the hearing peers are students. They participate in all activities with the other children in the classroom.
- Serve as communication and play partners for students who are deaf/hard of hearing
- Serve as examples of typical development for educators and professionals.

Role of Professionals in Classrooms with Learners Who Are DHH and Hearing Peers

- Deaf Educators
 - Provide specialized instruction based on learners' IEPs.
 - Prompt language and correct articulation from all students in the classroom.
 - Aid in conflict resolution and social language development.
- Therapists
 - Provide individualized occupational, physical, or speech and language therapy (PT, OT, SLP) depending on the child's specific needs.
 - Therapy services can be provided in an individual or group setting.

Questions to Consider When Evaluating Readiness for Typical Peer Models

Are the children who are DHH demonstrating auditory skills sufficient to discriminate peer and teacher voices?

1. Do the children who are DHH have language skills which allow them to effectively communicate their wants and needs?

1. Will including hearing peers in the classroom impact the student-teacher ratio in a way that will negatively impact the children who are DHH?

1. Do the students, both hearing and DHH, have appropriate classroom behaviors?

1. Are the children who are DHH able to focus auditory attention to target input in the presence of auditory distraction?

1. Do the children who are DHH have appropriate self-advocacy skills?

Effectiveness of Including Hearing Peers in Deaf/Hard of Hearing Preschool Classrooms

- Benefit the expressive language, vocabulary usage, and social communication skills of students who are DHH and hearing peers.
- Promote diversity, allowing deaf and hearing children to interact with children who are different from themselves.
- Increase positive peer relationships, in turn, decreasing poor self-concept, isolation, and depression among students who are DHH.
- Instill a joy for friendships and communication with individuals of all abilities.
 - Successful friendships will need to be facilitated and supported by Deaf Educators and other professionals with thorough evaluation of the skills needed to maintain these relationships.
- Provide children who are deaf/hard of hearing and hearing, skills for successful social communication for the future.

Benefits of Hearing Peers in Deaf/Hard of Hearing Classrooms

Hearing peers serve as vocabulary and language models in the classroom during play, lunch, recess, and explicit instruction.

Hearing peers serve as models for appropriate social interaction.

Hearing peers help children who are DHH learn to make friends and practice key elements of interpersonal interactions.

Hearing peers provide special educators a constant reminder of typical development.

Risks of Hearing Peers in Deaf/Hard of Hearing Classrooms

Including hearing peers in the classroom may reduce the specialized attention given to the children who are DHH.

The response rate of the hearing peers may limit the speaking opportunities for the students who are DHH.

Hearing peers may exhibit behaviors that will require modification.

Readiness for Inclusive Settings

- Successful scaffolding of expressive language, vocabulary usage, and social communication by deaf educators and speech-language pathologists in specialized settings prepares children who are DHH for transition to an inclusive classroom setting.
- After forming friendships in specialized settings with support from professionals, children who are DHH will gain the skills necessary to maintain relationships with others, enhancing their success as they transition to more inclusive classroom settings.

References

