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Preparing Today's Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
to Work With Tomorrow's Students: A Statewide Needs
Assessment

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PREPARING TODAY'S TEACHERS OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING TO WORK WITH TOMORROW'S STUDENTS: A STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

T

he Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is explicit in its mandate that students who receive special education services have opportunities to be involved in and progress in the general education curriculum. Teachers providing instruction to students who are deaf or hard of hearing are expected to comply with this federal mandate. To determine if teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing throughout the state of Georgia felt adequately prepared to educate this population, a statewide needs assessment survey was conducted. Questionnaires were reviewed from 110 experienced teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. More than half of the teachers who responded judged their teacher preparation program to be appropriate. Specific suggestions for modifications to teacher preparation programs are provided.

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In an attempt to ascertain the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs in deaf education, a questionnaire was mailed in spring 2000 to 250 teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing throughout the state of Georgia. Individuals invited to participate in the survey were selected from databases provided by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission and the Georgia Department of Education, Division of Exceptional Students. A total of 110 teachers responded. In an effort to glean perceptions of teacher preparation programs at the grassroots level, teachers were asked to rate the level of applicability of their course work to their actual job responsibilities.

The survey was developed to gather demographic data, and to generate information regarding the disability-specific course content found in teacher preparation programs. Throughout the questionnaire,

teachers were asked to respond to specific questions related to course work within the areas of language/communication, multiple disabilities, methods, assessment, cultural/social issues, and curriculum. They were also asked to complete a checklist concerning general-education course work that had been included in their preparation program. Then, using the same list, and based on their teaching experience, teachers were asked to indicate the specific education courses they felt would benefit future teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Data were also gathered on the types of field-based, lab-based, internship, and student teaching experiences that had been offered to the survey respondents in their teacher preparation programs. Respondents were also asked to delineate the support services they had received and the

amount of professional interaction they had engaged in since becoming employed. Consideration of the results of this survey can provide insights into the perceptions of working professionals about their preservice instruction at the postsecondary level.

A demographic review of the results indicated that the respondents served deaf and hard of hearing students at a variety of grade levels and in a multitude of settings. Sixty of the 110 respondents indicated that they taught deaf and hard of hearing students at the elementary school level. An even larger majority, 84 teachers, said they taught in local public school systems. Survey respondents had taught from 2 to 30 years, and in all instances at least a portion of that time had been spent working with students who were deaf or hard of hearing. Additional information on the respondents' teaching experience is presented in Table 1.

When questioned about the specific amount of service they provided to students who were deaf or hard of hear-

ing, respondents indicated they provided resource special education services (less than 50% of the school day) to 45 students and self-contained services (more than 50% of the school day) to 39 students. Consultative services (a minimum of one segment per month) were indicated for 11 students.

The 110 survey respondents were graduates of 34 different teacher preparation programs. Institutions where 5 or more respondents had been enrolled in the teacher preparation program were Georgia State University, 30; the University of Tennessee, 11; Jacksonville State University, 10; the University of Georgia, 8; and the University of Alabama, 5. Seventy-six of the respondents reported holding other degrees in addition to their bachelor's in deaf education.

Professional Memberships

In response to the question pertaining to professional memberships, 66 of those completing the survey indicated

they held a membership in at least one of six major national organizations (see Table 2). As a group they identified an additional 30 local, state, and national organizations in which they held professional memberships.

Modes of Communication

In the survey, teachers were asked to describe the types of communication they used with students. Sixty-eight respondents indicated that they relied primarily on oral communication for instructional purposes; 32 said they relied primarily on American Sign Language (ASL). Thirty-nine respondents indicated that they used one or more other signing systems: Signing Exact English, 25; Conceptually Accurate Signed English, 23; Contact Sign or Pidgin Signed English, 23; and Cued Speech, 1.

A question about the predominant mode of communication used by students in the classroom during instruction produced only a slight change in the numbers. Seventy-one of the teachers indicated that during instructional classroom exchanges the students' primary mode of communication was oral, with 37 indicating that ASL was used and 33 that a signed English system was used. Additionally, when respondents described the predominate mode of communication used by students outside the classroom for socialization, the number again remained almost the same, with 68 indicating oral, 38 indicating ASL, and 28 indicating a non-ASL signing system. (For both questions, totals exceed 110 because some respondents indicated more than one mode as "predominant.")

Aspects of Teacher Preparation Programs

Teachers were asked about specific aspects of their teacher preparation programs in order to determine the types of field and lab-based, internship and student teaching, and practicum experiences they had been offered. Teachers were also asked to indicate

Table 1
Respondents' Teaching Experience

Teaching Experience (Yrs.)	Number of Respondents	
	With Deaf/Hard of Hearing Students	Overall
2-5	20	26
6-10	21	24
11-15	18	19
16-20	17	20
21-30	20	22

Table 2
Respondents' Professional Affiliations

Organization	Respondents Reporting Membership
Council for Exceptional Children	19
National Association of the Deaf	17
Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf	12
Alexander Graham Bell Society	11
Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf	4
American Association of Deafness and Rehabilitation	3

how many semester hours of these experiences had been incorporated into their respective preparation programs. Respondents were then asked to indicate how many hours of actual experience they had completed in these settings. In each of the areas (i.e., field and lab-based experience, internships and/or students teaching, and practicum), teachers indicated that they actually spent more service hours in the designated setting than required by their preparation program (see Table 3).

Teacher Support and Coordination of Services

In another section of the survey, teachers were asked for information on the type and amount of support they received and the amount of coordination of services they experienced in their current position. Of the 110 teachers who responded to a question asking if they had had an on-the-job mentor when they started teaching, 47 answered yes. Of those, 36 indicated that the mentor had been assigned. An open-ended question allowed respon-

dents to indicate other ways a mentor relationship had been established. Most of the comments received in response to this query included statements about being “adopted” by a master teacher or about instances of “reaching out” to develop close relationships with faculty; respondents also said they kept in close contact with their teacher preparation program.

Respondents were also asked about the frequency with which they had professional interaction with other special education and support service personnel, such as speech-language pathologists and audiologists. Areas of particular interest included the interaction teachers reported with speech-language pathologists, educational interpreters, and other certified teachers of the Deaf and hard of hearing. The highest percentage of respondents indicated that they had daily interactions with these different groups. Table 4 illustrates the frequency of interaction with different types of support personnel reported by the teachers.

General Education Courses

The survey asked respondents to indicate the content areas in which they were responsible for providing instruction. Seventy-nine respondents indicated that they taught English to deaf and hard of hearing students. Almost as many respondents (76) indicated that they

Table 3

Hours of Out-of-Class Experience Required by Teacher Preparation Programs and Hours Reported Spent by Survey Respondents

Respondents Reporting			
Hours required	Field, lab experience	Internships and/or student teaching	Practicum
1-3	24	12	21
3-6	23	22	27
6-9	21	17	14
>9	32	52	40
Hours spent	Field, lab experience	Internships and/or student teaching	Practicum
1-3	16	4	11
3-6	9	11	14
6-9	13	4	10
>9	56	80	62

Table 4

Frequency of Interaction With Selected Support Personnel

Support personnel	Frequency of interaction (number of respondents reporting)				
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Other
Audiologist	4	25	30	29	7
Speech-language pathologist	43	37	10	7	2
School psychologist	3	13	18	28	31
Other certified teachers of the Deaf and hard of hearing	36	11	28	15	4
Educational interpreters	41	11	5	16	25
System deaf and hard of hearing service coordinator	8	18	35	10	18
System special education director	9	12	39	22	15

taught reading. Sixty-seven reported that they taught mathematics. The content areas with the fewest such responses were social studies (53) and science (45).

Survey participants were asked to identify which general education courses on a list of 14 were incorporated into their teacher preparation program. They were also asked, based on their classroom experience, to identify the courses they considered beneficial to them as teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students (see Table 5).

When asked whether a course in classroom management strategies specifically for preservice teachers of the Deaf and hard of hearing would be beneficial, 94 participants responded affirmatively.

Disability-Specific Course Content

Twenty-three items on the survey were designed to determine the level of ap-

plicability of disability-specific courses and whether these classes were taken at the graduate or the undergraduate level. The disability-specific course content surveyed was in the areas of language and communication (see Table 6) and multiple disabilities, methods, assessment, cultural/social issues, and curriculum (see Table 7).

Sixty-nine survey respondents indicated that, for the most part, their teacher preparation program had been appropriate for the job responsibilities of their current position; 28 answered that it had not been appropriate. Thirteen respondents either left the question blank or checked both "yes" and "no."

The following is a representative sample of comments received in response to an open-ended request to survey participants to explain their answers:

We had lots of speech classes, inadequate sign language classes, and

not enough content-specific courses for HI [hearing impaired] or general education.

I needed more training in writing IEPs [individualized education programs] and in teaching secondary content subjects; also I would have liked to have more training in ASL.

The majority of time needs to be the development of lessons and modifications to materials that are too difficult for our children to read.

Cultural issues, psychosocial issues, reading and writing methods were not available when I attended college. These are critical areas I learned on my own.

Teachers of the Deaf and hard of hearing in Georgia reported that the deaf education programs they graduated from provided them with appropriate preparation for their current employment. However, respondents identified critical areas where additional training was needed. These areas included:

- ASL (both receptive and expressive skills)
- assessing the written language of deaf students
- assistive listening technology, specifically sound field systems and cochlear implantation
- cochlear implant rehabilitation
- IEP development
- coordination of multiple related services for students
- incorporation of the general education curriculum

Psychosocial and Educational Issues

Survey respondents were asked to identify psychosocial and educational issues they commonly experienced in the classroom. They were further requested to indicate those strategies they used to remedy the problems, and

Table 5

Survey Respondent Reports on Prevalence and Utility of General Education Courses in Teacher Preparation Programs

Course	Teacher comment (number of respondents reporting)	
	Course was available	Course was (or would be) beneficial
Educational Psychology	92	59
Child Development	92	80
Foundations of Education	90	31
Teaching Reading	88	89
Educational Assessment	67	81
Mathematics for Early Childhood Teachers	62	53
Curriculum Instruction for Elementary Students	59	60
Cognitive Development	55	79
Curriculum Instruction for Young Students	38	56
Assessment of Students With Diverse Needs	24	73
Curriculum Instruction for Secondary Students	22	54
Corrective Reading in the Early Grades	11	79
Teaching Critical Thinking Skills	10	67
Content-specific courses		
Science	37	44
Social studies	32	44
Mathematics	39	44
Literature	32	41

Table 6

Level at Which Survey Respondents Reported Taking Language and Communication Courses

Course	Undergraduate (%)	Graduate (%)	Did not report taking course (%)
Audiology and Aural/Oral Habilitation	39	48	13
Aural/Oral Rehabilitation	32	39	29
Speech Development & Auditory Habilitation for Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing	41	50	9
American Sign Language I	32	28	40
American Sign Language II	21	19	60
American Sign Language III	15	10	75
Linguistics of American Sign Language	12	9	79
Instruction in Manual Communication Sign Systems*	34	24	42
Normal Language Acquisition	40	42	18
Cued Speech	10	6	84
Auditory/Oral Methods for Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing	26	39	35

*Signing Exact English, Conceptually Accurate Signed English, Contact Sign

Table 7

Level at Which Survey Respondents Reported Taking Disability-Specific Courses

Course	Undergraduate (%)	Graduate (%)	Did not report taking course (%)
<i>Multiple disabilities</i>			
Development of Self-Help and Motor Skills in Students With Severe Disabilities	13	9	78
Life Skills Training for Students With Severe Disabilities	3	5	92
Teaching Academics to Students With Multiple Disabilities	12	11	77
<i>Methods</i>			
Instructional Methods for Teaching Reading to Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing	30	47	23
Methods for Teaching Writing to Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing	16	22	62
Individualizing Instruction for Students With Special Needs	22	30	48
<i>Assessment</i>			
Psychosocial Aspects of Deafness	22	53	25
Assessment of Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing	19	43	38
<i>Cultural/social issues</i>			
Cultural Aspects of Deafness/Deaf Studies	30	47	23
Orientation to Deafness	16	22	62
<i>Curriculum</i>			
Curriculum Development and Instructional Methods for Children Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing	23	45	32
Curriculum Development and Instructional Methods for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Youth	20	24	56

to describe the criteria they used to determine when to refer students to social service personnel.

Most of the responses reflected similar concerns and could be clustered into three common areas. The first centered on behavior problems, attributed to both behavior disorders and behaviors that appeared as a result of insufficient parental involvement and breakdowns in communication in the home. The second area focused on the teacher's perceptions of the students' sense of isolation. This was attributed to the limited numbers of deaf and hard of hearing students enrolled in any one program, and the lack of hearing peers who actively encouraged those who could not hear to become part of their social group. The third area focused on educational issues: specifically, the low reading levels exhibited by this population, and the number of students who possessed secondary disabilities.

Teachers responding to the survey reported that they employed a variety of strategies to meet students' needs in the social skills area. Behavior modification and behavior management

plans were implemented to facilitate solution of the behavior problems. Instruction was provided in the social skills area to promote appropriate behaviors. Several teachers indicated that they taught advocacy skills and lessons in self-esteem, while others encouraged parental support of classroom activities. Furthermore, the majority of those responding indicated that they followed school system guidelines to determine when to refer students to social service personnel. The majority also indicated that they watched for signs of neglect or abuse as well as signs of depression.

Conclusions

The survey described in the present article provided insights into the perceptions of teachers of the Deaf and hard of hearing in Georgia regarding the effectiveness of their teacher preparation programs. The following conclusions are based on the survey results:

1. More than half of the teachers who responded judged their preparation program to be appropriate.
2. The respondents had few professional affiliations.
3. As a whole, the respondents spent more time than required by their preparation programs in out-of-class experiences.
4. There are specific general education courses (Assessment of Students With Diverse Needs, Corrective Reading in the Early Grades, and Teaching Critical Thinking Skills) that the majority of respondents labeled as beneficial but that were not included in their teacher preparation program.
5. The frequency of interaction teachers have with selected support personnel varies widely.

Data from the survey indicate that teachers found their general course work, as well as their courses pertaining to specific disabilities, to be beneficial and applicable to their actual job responsibilities. Teacher preparation programs may find the results of this survey helpful as they examine their own curricula.