THE ABSENCE OF DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING STUDENT PERCEPTIONS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SETTINGS.

Natalia Rohatyn-Martin, University of Alberta

ABSTRACT

In North America, students who are Deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH) are being placed in inclusive educational settings with little research evidence on what students themselves say about their academic and social experiences in these educational contexts. Currently, student perceptions of, and experiences in, inclusive classrooms are generally absent or marginalized in discussions about how best to support successful educational and social outcomes for students with exceptionalities (i.e., Lightfoot, Wright, & Sloper, 1999; Mitchell & Sloper, 2001; Roose & John, 2003). The focus of the above mentioned group of studies was with students who had learning disabilities, autism, physical disabilities, and chronic illnesses; only two studies, Jarvis, Iantaffi, and Sinka (2003), and Dalton (2013) focused on the perceptions of students who were D/HH. Jarvis et al., (2003) conducted interviews with 61 British junior high school students with hearing loss about their experiences in inclusive classrooms, whereas Dalton (2013) focused on three students with mild and moderate hearing loss over the age of 18. Results of both studies revealed that some students viewed inclusive classrooms to be supportive of their educational and social success while others did not. These results suggest the need to better understand the sources of disparity affecting the perceptions and experiences of inclusion for students who are D/HH.

The Absence of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Student Perceptions in Inclusive Education Settings

The last three decades have seen a trend towards inclusion of students who are Deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH) in mainstream classrooms, (also referred to as inclusive classrooms), in North America (Antia, Jones, Reed, & Kreimeyer, 2009; Siegel, 2000). Students who are D/HH, especially students who communicated through sign language, were historically educated in segregated classrooms or in specialized schools due to the perceived uniqueness of their language needs. Students who communicated orally (i.e., spoken English) were typically educated in mainstream schools (Antia, Stinson, & Gaustad, 2002), but were most often educated in segregated classrooms away from hearing peers also due to the perceived uniqueness of their language needs (Crawford, 2005; Porter, 2008). However, educational placements in segregated settings have not resulted in high academic and social achievement for this student population. In fact, compared to hearing peers, lower academic and social achievement has been consistently reported for students who are D/HH (Antia et al., 2009; Marschark, 1997; Mayer, 2007; Slobodzian, 2011; Stone, 1997).

Cole and Flexer, (2011) stress that the North American educational system operates "using a failure model...[where] the child must demonstrate deficits in order to qualify for services" (p. 93) in inclusive classrooms. Operating under a failure model, no single educational setting has met the needs of all children (Cole & Flexer, 2011). Rather than working from a deficit model perspective, which may produce more positive results for a variety of children, Luterman (1999) suggests embracing a developmental perspective of education. In order to embrace a developmental model of education each child must be individually considered in determining appropriate services and support (Cole & Flexer, 2011; Estabrooks, et al., 2004; Luterman, 1999; Ziv, Most, & Cohen, 2013). An avenue for individually considering students' needs would be to engage in more extensive conversations with students and include their points of view into the school structure. Students are rarely given the opportunity to voice their perspectives about their own education, especially when it comes to current practices within their schools that affect individual learning (Rix, Nind, Sheehy, Simmons, & Walksh, 2010). If students are to be successful both academically and socially, students have a right to contribute to, and be consulted about, their education (Jarvis et al., 2003).

The sociological and political debate over the experiences of students who are D/HH in classroom settings can sometimes appear to be "primarily concerned with the social good rather than addressing the needs of the individual" (Powers, 2002, p. 232). In North America, schools are now focused on building classroom environments that include all students, and structured to meet every student's needs (Angelides & Aravi, 2006/2007), but the individual needs of students may be overlooked if students themselves are not being asked what is needed or what they require to be successful in inclusive educational settings. For example, Antia et al. (2002) highlight the need for membership in educational settings where students' individual needs are met within the school. To accomplish this necessitates an investigation into the individual needs of students, and therefore demands examining students' perspectives. Acknowledging the perspectives of students who are D/HH in educational settings, render students as experts on their own lives (Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010). Byrnes, Rickards, Brown, and Sigafoos, (2002) agree with the need to heed students' perspectives and suggest that curriculum, practice, and educational policies should be influenced from students' experiences and perspectives, rather than an outsider's perception of what students may actually encounter. Gordon (2010) adds that integrating student perspectives into educational choices and experiences may be a valuable way of moving education practices forward. Paying attention to students' views provides a powerful mechanism for connecting with students whose perspectives are "often marginalized at school... and recognizes that students are genuine citizens of their schools, not merely temporary captives of them" (Gordon, 2010, p. 5).

Academic and Social Perspectives of Students who are D/HH
The academic and social experiences of those who are D/HH in various classroom settings has been studied from the perspectives of educators (Afzali-Nomani, 1995; Antia et al., 2002; Luckner & Muir, 2001), parents (Bat-Chava & Deignan, 2001; Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004), and hearing students (Cambra, 2002; Hung & Paul, 2006). While these studies provide valuable information on what educators and hearing students experience in inclusive classrooms with students

who are D/HH, and what parents perceive happens within these classroom settings, they cannot accurately reflect what students who are D/HH experience (Lightfoot et al., 1999). There have been studies investigating the perspectives of students who are D/HH in inclusive classroom settings, but most studies have significant limitations, or have been conducted retrospectively.

A number of researchers (i.e., Angelides & Aravi, 2006/2007; Cambra, 2002; Dalton, 2013; Hintermair, 2010; Jarvis et al., 2003; Luckner & Muir, 2001; Robertson & Serwatka, 2000; Slobodzian, 2011) have investigated the academic and social experiences of students who are D/HH within their current inclusive classroom settings. This group of studies did not provide information with respect to the mode of communication used by students in the classroom (spoken language or sign language), or the types of supports that were provided to students, (e.g., the use of an educational interpreter or amplification technology). Issues such as these could significantly affect the student's experience in a classroom. Other than teacher nomination, there was also no indication of how the students fared academically compared to their hearing peers. Unless these questions are addressed, it is difficult to form a complete picture of what factors contributed to the success students with hearing loss in inclusive education settings.

Retrospective Studies

While retrospective studies (i.e., Kluwin, Stinson, & Colarossi, 2002; Angelides & Aravi, 2006/2007) provide insight into the benefits and challenges of education in various educational settings, strategies used in past settings may be out of date or inappropriate in today's schools. Current experiences of students who are D/HH in classrooms are needed to provide insight into methods required to support current students' needs, and to assist in the development of practices that are beneficial to the individual child (Gordon, 2010). Also, in these retrospective studies D/HH participants were recruited based upon similarities in their schooling experiences, but students were not identified in terms of hearing loss, (i.e., deaf or hard of hearing), or their mode of communication in the classroom (i.e., sign language or spoken English). While a group identity for students who are D/HH is often assumed by researchers and educators, this group identity does not take into account the individual differences among students (Byrnes et al., 2002). Identifying students' levels of hearing loss and communication mode, and student and family characteristics is essential to understanding who the student is, as this may contribute to their perspectives of their educational experiences.

Survey Studies

Another group of researchers focused on the views of students who are D/HH using survey studies (i.e., Byrnes, 2011; McCain & Antia, 2005; Robertson & Serwatka, 2000). Findings from this group of studies revealed the majority of students who were D/HH felt that they were academically achieving lower than their hearing peers. Socially, students who are D/HH reported feeling "accepted" by their peers, but felt they had fewer friends than their hearing peers. Priesler, Tvingstedt, and Ahlstrom (2005) argue that quantitative measures such as multiple choice surveys may not truly capture the students' perspective and do not provide them a way to explain their rationale. Students who are D/HH are not a homogeneous group and not all will have the same educational experiences. There is "a need for qualitative research that incorporates the views of individuals to ensure that the wide

range of student views is acknowledged" (Byrnes et al., 2002, p. 254). Failure to capture the student experience suppresses the expression of unique attitudes and opinions that students hold toward their educational experiences (Gordon, 2010). Students are seldom asked their perspectives on issues concerning their own lives. Priesler et al., (2005) explain that family members, researchers and teachers can benefit from learning about a student's experience in not only life, but education as well. It is crucial to hear from students who are D/HH who are participating in inclusive classroom settings to better understand their social and academic needs. Acknowledging students' perspectives about their educational experiences is "one way to determine the best methods required to support their needs and to assist schools to develop best practices" (Gordon, 2010, p. 3).

Conclusion

The above review suggests is that obtaining the perspectives of students is viewed as a worthwhile endeavour in order to develop practices that will best support students. Unfortunately, many researchers, especially in the area of Deaf Education, feel they are truly capturing the voice of students who are D/HH, but are missing considerable context. Results lack specificity as students' levels of hearing loss and communication modes are often absent, or not clearly stated. Qualitative studies are needed in this area to respond to some of these oversights, and to better understand the sources of disparity affecting the perceptions and experiences of inclusion for students who are D/HH.

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