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fostering skills in self-advocacy:
a key to access in school and beyond

By John L. Luckner and Sharon J. Becker

Self-advocacy occurs when deaf or hard of hearing individuals explain to hearing teachers, classmates, bosses, and officemates the nature of their hearing loss, their language skills, and the accommodations they require in order to effectively do their work, participate in conversations, and get involved in other activities.

Self-advocacy may be especially important for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and attend schools with predominately hearing peers and teachers. Similarly, it may be critical for deaf and hard of hearing adults who work with hearing coworkers. Self-advocacy may be like learning arithmetic; the skills for it may not come easily to some people. Therefore, self-advocacy should be taught while students are in school, giving them multiple opportunities to understand and practice their skills prior to entering postsecondary education and the world of work.

What is Self-Advocacy?

Self-advocacy has been defined as "the extent to which a student can identify the supports that he or she needs to succeed and communicate that information to others, including teachers and employers" (Friend & Bursuck, 2012). Educators and researchers have indicated that self-advocacy skills are vital for deaf and hard of hearing students to succeed in school, postsecondary education, and work environments (Bullard, 2003; English, 1997; Fiedler & Danneker, 2007; Garay, 2003; Hammer, 2004; Luckner & Stewart, 2003; Schreiner, 2007; Spencer & Marschark, 2010; Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005; Wehmeyer, 2007).

Despite this widespread agreement, self-advocacy skills and opportunities to self-advocate are frequently not included in the instruction of students who are deaf or hard of hearing (Garay, 2003; Ingraham & Anderson, 2001; Velaski-Sebald, 2005). The consequence can be severe—students who are unable to advocate for themselves may end up unemployed, underemployed, and unable to live independently (Bowe, 2003; Wheeler-Scruggs, 2002).

Photo by John T. Consoli

Right: One of the
four components in the
framework to develop
students' self-advocacy
is leadership. Students
should be able to lead
their own meetings and
make presentations.

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To Teach Self-Advocacy
A Conceptual Model for Planning and Assessment

Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy (2005) conducted an extensive literature review of self-advocacy and solicited input from more than 30 professionals to develop a conceptual framework. Based on four components, the framework has been modified by us for use with deaf and hard of hearing students. Using this framework, educators can develop a guide for planning and assessment. The components of the framework are:

- **Knowledge of self**—Students should develop an understanding of their interests, preferences, strengths, and needs. Simultaneously, they should be able to explain their hearing loss, be aware of the potential impact of their hearing loss on their academic and social lives, and be able to identify strategies that enhance their performance.

- **Knowledge of rights**—Students should know their rights as citizens, as individuals with a hearing loss, and as students receiving education under state and federal laws.

• **Communication**—Students should be able to interact effectively with individuals and small groups using appropriate body language, negotiation, persuasion, compromise, and, when necessary, assertion.

• **Leadership**—Students should be able to function in groups, lead their own Individualized Education Program (IEP) or transition meetings, make presentations about hearing loss, and mentor younger students.

Promoting Self-Advocacy
Teaching Knowledge and Skills

Knowledge and skills in self-advocacy may be gained when professionals provide explicit instruction, set up role playing opportunities, and structure occasions to practice. Each of these educational activities is described below.

Explicit instruction. When providing explicit instruction, Archer and Hughes (2011) suggest using three processes to show students what they are expected to learn, to give them opportunities to practice the skill under conditions that promote high levels of success, and to provide an opportunity to demonstrate that they can perform the skill independently. The processes are:

1. Modeling or demonstrating the skills (the *I do* stage, in which the teacher models skills)

2. Providing guided practice (the *we do* stage, in which the teacher and the students practice skills together)

3. Providing unprompted practice (the *you do* stage, in which the students demonstrate skills unaccompanied)

Role play. Prior to situations that require students to use self-advocacy skills, educators and students talk through scenarios and use role play to practice the appropriate skills. Examples of role play include acting through situations that involve school and situations that involve transition. School

role play might prompt students to cope with such emergencies as the battery of his or her cochlear implant dying or a general education teacher who consistently chooses not to wear the frequency modulation (FM) system. Transition role play, on the other hand, might include a student choosing a plan of study to become a car mechanic, scheduling an interpreter for a medical appointment, or making plans to move out of the family home.

Structuring practice opportunities. Students can practice using self-advocacy knowledge and skills during their IEP meetings. A four-level incremental approach for student involvement in IEP meetings, adapted from Mason, McGahee-Kovac, and Johnson (2004), allows students to address levels of opportunity as well as progress through levels in accordance with their age, capability, and opportunities for practice:

• *Level 1*—Students introduce everyone at the meeting to each other.

• *Level 2*—Students present their goals for the future.

• *Level 3*—Students explain their disability, share their individual strengths and challenges, and explain beneficial accommodations.

• *Level 4*—Students lead and close the meeting.

Putting It Together
Teaching the Critical Skill of Self-Advocacy

Teaching self-advocacy should begin during elementary school, and specific self-advocacy goals should be embedded in IEPs to ensure that instructional opportunities for practice take place. Successful self-advocates overcome barriers, educate others, and make positive transitions to adult life. What more can we want for our students?

An Educator's Guide: Self-Advocacy Resources

Hands & Voices, *www.handsandvoices. org/needs/pdf_imgs/selfadvocacy.pdf*

Hearing Loss Association of America, *www.hearingloss.org/ content/advocacy-people-hearing-loss*

PepNet, *www.pepnet.org/ resources/faq19*

National Association of the Deaf, *www.nad.org/issues/about-law-and-advocacy-center/advocacy-tips*

Informal Inventory of Independence and Self-Advocacy Skills for Deaf/Hard of Hearing Students, *www.handsandvoices.org/pdf/ SAIInventory.pdf*

Phonak's Guide to Access Planning, *www.phonakonline.com/ MyGap/GapMain.html*

Self-Determination Synthesis Project, UNC Charlotte, NC, *http://sdsp.uncc.edu/sd_lesson_ plans.asp*

Me! Lessons for Teaching Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy, *www.ou.edu/content/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/trasition-education-materials/me-lessons-for-teaching-self-awareness-and-self-advocacy.html*

Self-Advocacy Competencies
for Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Developed by examining the work of Clark and Scheele (2005), the Douglas County School District (2009), the Iowa Department of Education Bureau of Student Family Support Services (2010), and the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center's (2006) K-12 program, the chart below allows students to be evaluated on knowledge and skill competencies for each component necessary for successful self-advocacy.

	1	2	3	4	5
KNOWLEDGE OF SELF					
Individual					
Understands strengths and weaknesses					
Identifies interests and goals					
Understands his/her hearing loss					
• Type/degree of his/her hearing loss					
• Potential impact of his/her hearing loss on communication and learning					
• Technology, amplification, and assistive listening devices					
• Responsible for care of technology, amplification, and assistive listening devices					
Evaluates postsecondary options with respect to skill level and personal goals					
Environmental					
Understands impact of the environment on learning (e.g., noise, distance, attention, fatigue)					
Understands classroom factors that may help or hinder learning					
Understands accommodations					
Understands modifications					
Cultural awareness and preferences					
KNOWLEDGE OF RIGHTS					
Indicates basic wants and needs					
Understands the concept/definition of self-advocacy					
Understands the concepts of laws and rights					
Understands how laws and rights apply to self					
Understands the basics and implications of the IDEA					
Understands the basics and implications of the ADA					
Understands the roles and responsibilities of the interpreter/transliterator					
Understands the services, accommodations, and modifications listed on his/her IEP					
Understands the roles and responsibilities of the members of the educational team					
Understands public accommodations and how to access them					
Understands where complaints and suggestions can be directed to school personnel, various government agencies, or consumer groups					
Knowledge of local and national resources available to support the rights of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing					
COMMUNICATION					
Responds to meaningful information					
Attends to/participates in classroom discussions and respects other students' input (i.e., proper eye contact, turn-taking, social greetings)					
Follows directions and class rules to share information/communicate during instruction					
Monitors understanding and uses strategies to aid in comprehension					
Explains his/her hearing loss, potential impact, use of equipment, accommodations, and modifications					
Awareness of and identification of barriers to communication					
Effectively works with interpreters/transliterators					
Demonstrates communication repair strategies					
Effectively uses other access options (e.g., CAN, CART, peer notes)					
Expresses communication, academic and social rights, needs, and wants appropriately					
Accesses communication in the community					
LEADERSHIP					
Participates in goal-setting conferences					
Participates in IEP meetings					
Participates in transition planning					
Makes presentations to groups (e.g., students, parents, preservice teachers, teachers, community members)					
Mentors younger students					

1 = Date selected   2 = Not observed or not applicable   3 = Inconsistent   4 = Consistent   5 = Generalized

Professionals on the Importance of Self-Advocacy

"If students do not learn to make choices based on their own interests and to experience and learn from the consequences of these choices in the structured environment of school, it is unlikely that they will be able to do so in response to the ever-changing demands of home, community, and work."

~ Michael L. Wehmeyer
(2007, p. 18)

"Clearly, the embedding of specific self-advocacy goals into an IEP is one of the strongest assurances that such instruction will take place and be monitored for accountability, just as teachers instruct and monitor other important student goals."

~ Mary B. Schreiner
(2007, p. 303)

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