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Five Factors Leading to Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students' Success:
Perspectives of a Veteran Teacher

By Kelly K. Metz

As educators of deaf and hard of hearing students, we must close the gap that too often exists between a student's grade level and his or her actual achievement. Delays in developing and using English can lead naturally to delays in overall academic performance, and sometimes the gap between the student's grade level and his or her academic performance persists throughout the student's entire academic career (Scheetz, 2012). When a student who is deaf or hard of hearing does not have any concurrent disability, grade-level performance is attainable—and it is our responsibility to make sure our students attain it.
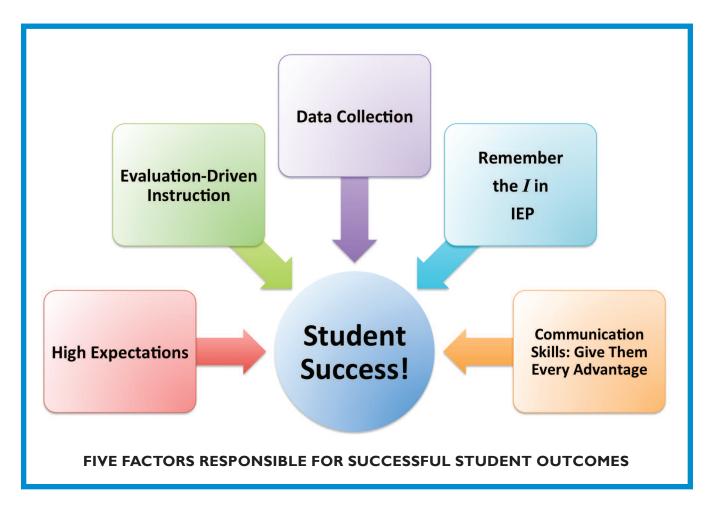
This may not be easy. Sometimes students' achievement scores are several years below their grade levels, and teachers must make more than one year of progress in one year's time—and we must do so continually. As a seasoned educator who has experienced success at closing the gap between grade level and achievement for many deaf and hard of hearing students, I offer the following perspectives on five factors responsible for successful student outcomes and closing the persistent but unnecessary gap between performance and grade level.

1. High Expectations
Researchers have found that both high teacher expectations and teacher credibility have a positive effect on student achievement (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016). When teachers have the high expectation that the student will attain grade-level competence, they have completed the first step in making grade-level competence an attainable goal. Of course, this does not mean skipping over pre-requisite skills and simply providing on-grade level instruction for students who do not yet function on grade level. We do not teach long division to a student who has not yet mastered subtraction.

Illustrations courtesy of Kelly K. Metz

FIVE FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR SUCCESSFUL STUDENT OUTCOMES

High expectations translate into an urgency to hit the ground running and not waste instructional time. This can mean using classroom management procedures to reduce transitional time or taking advantage of creative ways to infuse instruction into transitional times. For example, teachers might drill spelling words, vocabulary words, or math facts while students are waiting in line or passing between classes.

The teacher's sense of urgency, caring, and concern may increase his or her credibility with students, and this may result in greater student motivation and engagement. I have found that when a student is having difficulty mastering a given skill, one way to decrease the student's frustration and anxiety is to offer encouragement with statements similar to these: *Don't worry, (name of student). The reason you are not yet able to do (the target skill) is because I have not yet found the best way to explain it to you. Be patient with me, and I will find a better way to explain or demonstrate until you understand and are able to succeed.*

2. Evaluation-Driven Instruction

Evaluation results determine skill deficits as well as strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles. What to teach (i.e., skills, content) and how to teach it (i.e., methods, strategies) are based on assessment results. The following is a partial list of instruments and procedures that are useful in a comprehensive evaluation both for determining the educational impact of the student's hearing level and for making programming decisions about educational placement, teaching methods, and strategies:

- **Records review**—A thorough review of academic records may yield valuable information about current student performance. At minimum, this includes previous report card grades and the results of any district or statewide achievement testing. If a student has previously received or even been referred for special education services, there may also already be individual evaluation results from an educational psychologist, therapist, and/or special educator.

Table 1: Sample Data Collection Page for Vocabulary Acquisition

Student: <u>Ashley R.</u> Vocab Unit/Topic: <u>The Very Hungry Caterpillar/Days of Week</u> Date: <u>Jan 2017</u>

Word List	Demonstrates Receptive Comprehension			Demonstrates Expressive Use			Comments:
	Sign	Voice	Read	Sign	Voice	Write/Spell	
Sunday	1 1 1	0, 0, 0	1, 1, 1	1 1 1	1, 1, 1	1, 1, 1	*Unable to speech read Sunday. Voices gross approximation that is comprehensible in context*
Monday	1 1 1	1, 1, 1	1, 1, 1	1 1 1	1, 1, 1	0, 1, 1	*Can speech read in a closed set as it is the only one that starts with /m/*
Tuesday	1 1 1	0, 0, 0	1, 1, 1	1 1 1	0, 0, 0	0, 0, 1	
Wednesday	1 1 1	0, 0, 0	1, 1, 1	1 1 1	0, 0, 0 /wĕ-dã/	0, 0, 0	
Thursday	1 1 1	0, 1, 1 +2/3 trials	1, 1, 1	1 1 1	0, 0, 0 sounds like thirty	0, 0, 1	
Friday	1 1 1	0, 1, 1 +2/3 trials	1, 1, 1	1 1 1	0, 1, 1 +2/3 trials	1, 1, 1	*Ashley's favorite day of the week and the first one she learned to spell!*
Saturday	1 1 1	0, 0, 1	0, 1, 1 (+2/3 trials)	1 1 1	0, 0, 0	0, 0, 1	*Was able to speech read the 3rd time after I pointed out the number of syllables*
Total # Mastered	+7/7	+3/7 in a closed set	+7/7	+7/7	+3/7 in context	+2/7*	

Key: 1 = Correct, 0 = Incorrect, NR = No Response

Ashley can correctly fingerspell the abbreviation for all the days of the week but only consistently spells the entire word correctly for <u>Sunday</u> and <u>Friday</u>. She does not consistently capitalize the words when writing them. -KM

Johnson has a complete battery of tests, including the WJ-IV Tests of Cognitive Ability and the WJ-IV Tests of Oral Language (Schrank, McGrew, & Mather, 2014).

At the beginning of testing sessions with deaf or hard of hearing students who use hearing devices (e.g., hearing aids, cochlear implants, FM systems), be sure to conduct a listening check. If a student's devices are missing or not functioning properly, it is best to reschedule the testing session. If there is a problem with the student's devices, or if any accommodations are made during the evaluation, be sure to consider this when interpreting the results and make note of it when writing the evaluation report (Metz, 2011). If the student's preferred mode of communication is ASL, ensure the test is administered by an examiner fluent in ASL.

- **Screening Instrument for Targeting Educational Risk**—This instrument is helpful for conducting a quick, informal assessment of a deaf or hard of hearing student in comparison to his or her hearing peers. The classroom teacher is asked to rate the student's performance on a five-point Likert scale in the areas of academics, attention, communication, class participation, and school behavior. This instrument yields scores of pass, marginal pass, or fail in each of these five areas (Anderson, 1989). It is easy to administer and score, and is available free of charge at *https://successforkidswithhearingloss.com/uploads/ SIFTER.pdf*.

- **Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement (WJ-IV)**—This instrument measures academic achievement in individuals from ages 2-90+ years. It contains 20 tests measuring four curricular areas: reading, math, written expression, and general academic knowledge. The instrument yields standard scores with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of ±15. When evaluating a student whose primary mode of communication is American Sign Language (ASL), the test should be administered by a qualified teacher or clinician who is fluent in ASL. The examiner's manual includes a section with guidelines for using the tests with individuals with a hearing loss. In addition to the WJ-IV tests of achievement, Woodcock-

3. Data Collection

Data collection is necessary to document mastery of skills and progress towards the goals of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and state standards. When the data show a lack of satisfactory progress, a change is needed in instructional methods. General education teachers tend to use rubrics associated with various assignments as an objective way of determining if unit and lesson goals have been mastered. Similarly, as a teacher of deaf and hard of hearing students, I use a variety of data collection sheets associated with IEP goals and objectives to determine and document mastery of skills. See Table 1 for an example of a data collection page for documenting vocabulary acquisition.

4. Remember the 'I' in IEP

Don't forget the *Individual* in the IEP. This applies to educational placement and services as well as to communication

modality and instructional methods. There is no "one size fits all" in deaf education. Different students benefit from different educational placements and instructional strategies. Moreover, the same student may benefit from different placements and different instructional strategies at different times in his or her life. The challenge for educators is to consider the needs of the individual student as well as his or her family in order to arrive at the best option for the student.

Placement options available for deaf or hard of hearing students include schools for the deaf, self-contained classes or resource room support at the local public school, and full inclusion in general education classrooms, often with support from an itinerant teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing. Itinerant services may include equipment management and consultation services to ensure the deaf or hard of hearing student receives the appropriate accommodations or modifications needed to progress in the general education curriculum as well as direct instruction to provide intensive or alternative interventions. Another promising educational placement option for deaf and hard of hearing students, neither widely known nor widely available, is "co-enrollment," in which a critical mass of deaf or hard of hearing students—one third to one half of a given class—is included in a general education classroom that is co-taught by a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing and a general educator who share equal responsibility for all of the students. Co-enrollment may have the potential to provide the best of both worlds to deaf and hard of hearing students: access to their hearing peers and to the general education curriculum as well as direct communication with deaf peers and staff who sign (Antia & Metz, 2013).

5. Communication Skills: Give Them Every Advantage

We would serve our students well if we spent less time debating the merits of manual versus oral communication and more time getting them to grade level by giving all of our students every advantage to develop all of their communication skills to the fullest extent possible. This means supporting bilingualism and maximizing skills in both sign and oral communication. It would be wrong for a deaf child whose primary mode of communication is sign language not to be provided with a qualified sign language interpreter when placed in a general education classroom. Likewise, it would be wrong for an oral hard of hearing child who is attending a school for the deaf not to receive instruction through spoken language. We ought to give our deaf and hard of hearing children every opportunity to achieve their full potential in every communication modality: signing, speaking, reading, and writing. No child should be denied access to fluent communication during the developmental years. Regardless of what communication modality is used, "the consensus within the field is that ... input of language must occur before the age

of 2 if normal language development is to occur" (Scheetz, 2012).

In addition to developing bilingual skills in ASL and English, we should provide our deaf and hard of hearing students with other opportunities to learn different languages, signed and spoken. Deaf students who are immigrants from other countries could become fluent in both ASL and the signed language of their country of origin, giving them "the potential to return to their countries of origin as Deaf social activists" (Call, 2010).

Whether learning another language, solving math problems, or completing a social studies assignment, deaf and hard of hearing students should work on grade level. If they are not doing so, it is our responsibility as teachers to assist them in catching up. When teachers begin with high expectations, use assessment data to tailor instruction, and ensure full communication, they can help students progress academically to grade level and achieve equally with their hearing peers.

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