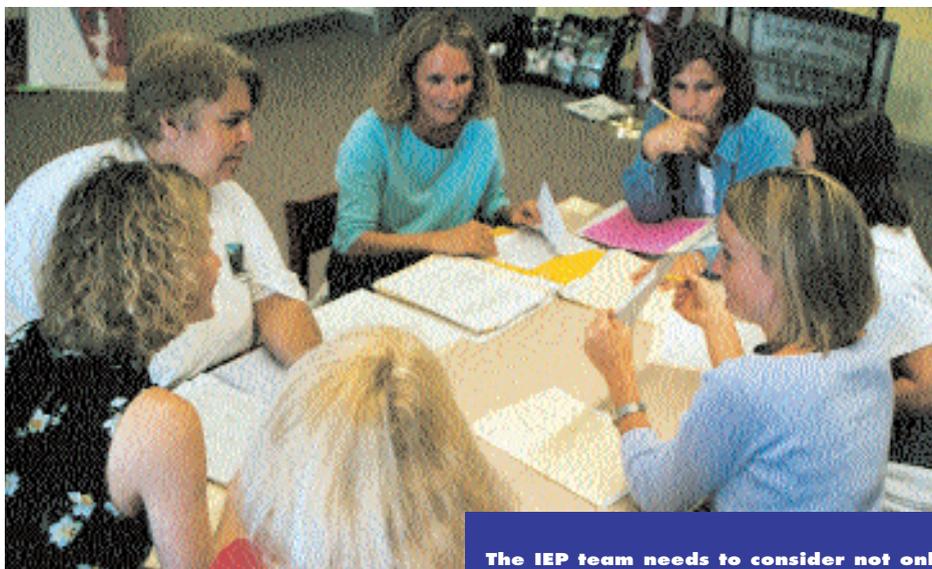


Considering Placement and Educational Approaches for Students Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

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The IEP team needs to consider not only potential harmful effects of a placement, but potential benefits as well.

According to Lawrence Siegel (2000), deaf and hard of hearing children deserve a

quality, communication-driven program which is formally articulated in law and requires appropriate communication assessment, communication development opportunities, and communication access not just for academics, but for interactions with peers, teachers and staff, deaf and hard of hearing role models; and access to extra curricular and other important school activities.

Children who are deaf and hard of hearing have specific communication

needs that other children with disabilities do not have, and the U.S. Congress has included these children in the scope of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and its amendments (see box, "It's the Law"). This article examines what the law provides, what the students need, what conflicts exist, and what implications for practice we can garner.

Considering Social, Emotional, and Educational Needs of Students

In 1978, the U.S. Department of Education published a collection of papers commissioned by the Bureau of

Education for the Handicapped. The purpose of this publication was to investigate issues of quality in the implementation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) set forth by P.L. 94-142. Aloia (1978) discussed several important factors to consider in making a decision about the educational placement for a student with special needs (see box, "Conflicts Over LRE and FAPE").

The important concept of potential harmful effects was considered to be an extremely important way to look at the most appropriate placement for a student. Aloia (1978) specifically suggested

It's the Law

IDEA. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142) has been reauthorized most recently by the U.S. Congress as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 (Public Law 105-17). This federal law mandates that "all eligible children with disabilities ages 3-21 receive an appropriate education at public expense with special education and related services which have been designed to meet the unique educational needs." In addition, the reauthorization of IDEA includes a statement of specific considerations that must be made for students who are deaf and hard of hearing (IDEA '97, [Section 614(d)(3)(B) (iv)]).

IDEA '97. The 1997 IDEA Amendments continue the six basic principles set out in 1975 in P.L. 94-142:

- Free and appropriate public education (FAPE).
- Appropriate evaluation.
- Individualized education program (IEP).
- Least restrictive environment (LRE).
- Parent and student participation in decision making.
- Procedural safeguards.

Though all six of these principles are important for all children with disabilities, appropriate evaluation is crucial for students who are deaf and hard of hearing, as is parent and student participation in decision making. If the school has adhered to both of these principles, there is a solid base for people to make decisions about the educational needs of students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Students who are deaf and hard of hearing have specific individual needs, but the underlying need that they all have in common is the need for a communication-rich environment. The needs of each individual child must be taken into account in the development of the individual education program.

IEPs. IDEA '97 describes the requirements for the individualized education program (IEP) for all students who are eligible for special education [Section 614(d)(1)(A)]. These include: present levels of educational performance; measurable annual goals, including benchmarks or short-term objectives; statement of special education and related services and supplementary aids and services; an explanation of the extent to which the child will not participate in the regular class; and participation in state assessments.

In addition to the requirements noted here, Section 614(d)(3)(B)(iv) of IDEA '97 states that for students who are deaf and hard of hearing, the IEP team shall "(iv) consider the communication needs of the child, and in the case of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, consider the child's language and communication mode, academic level, and full range of needs, including opportunities for direct instruction in the child's language and communication mode."

There is no one best communication method or educational placement to educate all children who are deaf and hard of hearing.

looking at harmful effects in regard to the following:

- Emotional adjustment.
- Psychological adjustment.
- Peer group relation; parental/home environment; and failure potential.

When looking at the needs of the student who is eligible for special education, we must consider the social, emotional, and educational needs of students at various age and grade levels. As an example, a student in the elementary grades should be involved with

Conflicts Over LRE and FAPE

Since the enactment of P.L. 94-142, educators and researchers have debated the issue of what is the least restrictive environment (LRE) for students with disabilities, especially students who are deaf or hard of hearing. In the 25 years since this law was passed, Congress has amended it three times. Yell and Shriner (1997) stated that each time Congress has reenacted the law, specific clarifications have been made to meet the needs of students with disabilities and their families. Conflicts over LRE and a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) have led to much litigation (Yell, 1995; Yell & Drasgow, 2000); and court decisions have strengthened the congressional FAPE mandate. Whereas the cases noted by Yell and Drasgow did not involve students who were deaf or hard of hearing, the court rulings regarding appropriate educational placements certainly apply.

Since P.L. 94-142 was enacted, school districts have been required to offer a continuum of services and placement options. The most accepted idea has been that the LRE is the school that the child would attend if he or she did not have a disability, and the most restrictive placement is presumed to be a residential school. For students who are deaf and hard of hearing, as for some students with some other disabilities, the general education classroom in the "home" school does not necessarily provide the LRE. To determine the LRE, the appropriateness of the educational placement is extremely important.

peers, but is more often focused on the adults in the school setting; whereas a student in high school needs to have active involvement with peers, in addition to developing academic or vocational skills. In looking at the educational placement options, it may be

helpful for the team to consider not only potential harmful effects of a placement, but potential benefits as well.

A Continuum of Placement

Because the individualized education program (IEP) team may determine that the student cannot be educated satisfactorily in the general education classroom, even when supplementary aids and services are provided, the team must then consider an alternative placement. Schools are required to ensure that “a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services” (IDEA '97). This continuum of services includes a range of alternative placements, and each placement type can also have a range of time spent in various settings. While the LRE is often interpreted as the school a student would attend if he or she did not have a disability, this is not necessarily the case for a student who is deaf or hard of hearing.

The range of educational options might include general education classes (inclusion/mainstream), itinerant programs, resource rooms, special day classes, special day schools, and residential schools. IEP teams must make placement decisions, based on the needs of the individual student who is deaf or hard of hearing.

Choices in Educational Approaches

There is no “one best” communication method or educational placement to educate all children who are deaf and

hard of hearing. Given the many variables that come into play for each individual child and family, there can be no single solution for educating children who are deaf and hard of hearing. Every child, however, needs to have a communication-rich environment (Siegel, 2000) in which to grow and learn. If educators do not create the appropriate environment, students will not have optimum academic or social/emotional opportunities to develop to their potential. Pittman and Huefner (2001) provided an excellent historical overview of the controversies surrounding the education of students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

The differing approaches to teaching students who are deaf and hard of hearing provide opportunities to meet individual needs. The contrasting nature of some of the educational approaches can cause frustrations for many parents trying to determine what is best for their own child and for educators trying to meet the individual needs of students who are deaf and hard of hearing and their families.

Pittman and Huefner (2001) have investigated issues related to bilingual-bicultural education, which is often chosen by families who are involved in Deaf culture. Because of the reauthorization of IDEA, they have speculated that courts will be more likely to consider families' choices of communication rather than simply allow school districts to retain control in regard to the issue of language and communication modes. While their focus was on issues related to a bilingual-bicultural approach, the impact of IDEA '97 will also be felt for families who opt for an oral approach for their family communication. Ninety percent of all children who are deaf and hard of hearing are born to parents who are hearing. Many of these families want their children to use spoken language and choose a “total communication” approach or an “oral” approach. Families who chose the total communication approach use both spoken language and sign language for communication. A large number of babies and young children who are deaf are receiving cochlear implants that require extensive training in speaking

and listening and these families might be more likely to choose an oral approach.

Table 1 describes three basic communication and educational approaches: bilingual-bicultural, total communication, and oralism. The various combinations of approaches, methods, and modes of communication can be confusing. It is critical that team members understand the communication issues for each individual student and family when making decisions. The family's choice of communication must be considered and supported. However, the educational needs of the student must be at the center of the IEP discussion and decision.

Three different sources of questions for considering the communicative and educational needs of children who are deaf and hard of hearing are presented here. Figure 1 presents questions that should be considered for all students who are eligible for special education, and most educators are familiar with these questions. Figure 2 presents questions that should be considered for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Both Figures 1 and 2 present information taken directly from IDEA '97. Figure 3 presents questions that are raised by Siegel (2000). These questions emphasize important issues to be considered in regard to the communication-rich environment that is necessary for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Aloia (1978) described the importance of considering the potential benefits and potential harmful effects of an educational placement. Table 2 provides a visual organizer for examining these issues. Sometimes it is helpful to examine the IEP team's adherence to the six principles of IDEA. Figure 4 provides a framework for reviewing the process.

Implications for Practice

Students who are deaf and hard of hearing have communication and educational needs that educators and IEP teams must consider for each individual. Professionals working in the area of deafness need to be aware of all of the options and opportunities for individual students. More students are being served in the general education class-

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Table 1. Three Possible Educational Approaches for Students Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Educational Approach	Brief Description
Oralism	Emphasizes the development of speech, speechreading, and listening with appropriate amplification. Sign language is not used with this approach.
Bilingual-Bicultural (Bi-Bi)	Emphasizes the early use of American Sign Language (ASL) because it is a natural language that permits children who are deaf to go through normal stages of language acquisition. ASL is used as the language of instruction, and English is taught by reading and writing. Both English and ASL are valued, as are the cultures.
Total Communication	Focuses on using the individual child's preferred modes of communication. It includes oral, auditory, speech reading, sign language, writing, and gestures.

Source: Illinois State Board of Education. (2000). *Comprehensive service guidelines for Illinois students who are deaf or hard of hearing: Birth to twenty-one*. Springfield, IL: Author.

Figure 1. Questions to Consider to Determine What Is Appropriate for Every Student Who Is Eligible for Special Education

1. Present level of performance
 - ✓ What are this student's academic needs?
 - ✓ What is this student's level of educational achievement?
2. Measurable annual goals, benchmarks/short-term objectives.
 - ✓ What are appropriate goals for this student?
 - ✓ What are appropriate short-term objectives for this student?
3. Statement of special education and related services and supplementary aids and services
 - ✓ What special education services does this student need?
 - ✓ What related services does this student need?
 - ✓ What supplementary aids and services does this student need?
4. Explanation of the extent to which the child will not participate in the regular class
 - ✓ Can this student participate in the regular class?
 - ✓ What needs to be done so that this student can participate in the regular class?
 - ✓ If this student cannot participate in the general education class, why not?
5. Participation in state assessments
 - ✓ Which state assessments are appropriate for this student?
 - ✓ What alternative assessments are appropriate for this student?

Source: Individuals with Disabilities Act Amendments of 1997. (IDEA '97). *Children, youth, and families. Inter-governmental relations*. 20 USC 1400 note [Section 614(d)(1)(A)]

Figure 2. Questions to Consider to Determine What Is Appropriate for Students Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

1. Communication needs
 - ✓ What does this student need in order to communicate?
 - ✓ Does this student use residual hearing efficiently?
 - ✓ Does this student need training in specific communication mode?
2. Language and communication mode
 - ✓ What is this student's proficiency in spoken English? (other spoken language?)
 - ✓ What is this student's proficiency in written English? (other written language?)
 - ✓ What is this student's proficiency in manual communication? (signed English?, ASL?)
3. Academic level
 - ✓ What academic skills does this student have?
 - ✓ Does this student have the academic skills to compete with hearing peers?
4. Full range of needs
 - ✓ What other needs does this student have that will affect academics, socialization, and emotional development?
 - ✓ What are the social and emotional implications of an educational placement for this student?
 - ✓ What are the specific needs of this student based on age?
5. Opportunities for direct instruction in the child's language and communication mode
 - ✓ Can the student communicate effectively with the teacher?
 - ✓ Can the student communicate effectively with other staff in the school?

Source: Individuals with Disabilities Act Amendments of 1997. (IDEA '97). *Children, youth, and families. Inter-governmental relations*. 20 USC 1400 note [Section 614(d)(3)(B)(iv)]

Figure 3. Educational and Communication Needs of Children Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

1. Communication-driven program
 - ✓ Is communication a central concern in the development of this student’s individualized education program (IEP)?
2. Appropriate communication assessment
 - ✓ Has the student had an appropriate communication assessment?
 - ✓ Is continuous communication assessment an important facet of this placement decision?
3. Appropriate communication development opportunities
 - ✓ What opportunities are available for communication development for this student?
 - ✓ What opportunities are available for communication development for others in the educational environment (peers, teachers, staff)?
4. Communication access for academics
 - ✓ How will the student communicate with the teacher?
 - ✓ How will the student communicate with peers?
 - ✓ How will the student communicate with teachers and staff to participate as a “citizen” of the school?
5. Deaf and hard of hearing role models
 - ✓ Are deaf and hard of hearing role models available for the student who is deaf or hard of hearing? peers? teachers and staff?
6. Access to extracurricular and other important school activities
 - ✓ Will this student have an opportunity to participate freely in activities of interest? How?

Source: Siegel, L. (2000). The educational and communication needs of deaf and hard of hearing children: A statement of principle on fundamental educational change. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 145(2), 64-77.

room, and all support staff need to be aware of the communication needs of students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

The general classroom with an interpreter can be a restrictive environment if the student cannot communicate with peers and with staff in the school. The residential school setting where students live in dorms and attend school with peers who are deaf and hard of hearing have a 24-hour communication environment. That educational environment might be the least restrictive environment—one that does not restrict the student as he or she communicates with peers and staff and participates in extracurricular activities without communication barriers. Each student must be considered individually. Social, emotional, and psychological growth and development can affect a student’s academic achievement and ultimate success in life.

Final Thoughts

The field of deaf education continues to have many controversies surrounding

Table 2. Potential Benefits and Possible Harmful Effects of Educational Placement Options

Placement Type	Description	Potential Benefits	Potential Harmful Effects
Regular Classroom (Inclusion or Mainstream)	Regular class; related services; supplementary aids and services		
Itinerant Services	Regular class; support services; teacher of the deaf		
Resource Room	Regular class much of day; special classroom with teacher of the deaf; individual services		
Special Day Class	Special class, teacher of the deaf; regular school building		
Special Day School	Separate day school		
Residential School	Separate school; residential option		

Figure 4. Evidence of Adherence to the Six Principles of IDEA for Each Child or Youth, Ages 3-21

1. Appropriate Evaluation
 - ✓ Was all evaluation information gathered by individuals knowledgeable about deafness?
2. Parent and Student Participation
 - ✓ Have parents been involved in every aspect of the IEP process and decisions?
3. Individualized Education Program (IEP)
 - ✓ Have all decisions been based on an accurate and appropriate evaluation?
 - ✓ Does this plan meet the unique educational needs of this student?
4. Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
 - ✓ Is the educational placement appropriate for this student at this time?
5. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
 - ✓ Is there an opportunity for academic, social, and emotional growth and development?
6. Procedural Safeguards
 - ✓ Have procedural safeguards been discussed if there are disagreements?

Note: IDEA = Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Source: Aloia, G. F. (1978). Placement in the least restrictive environment. In *Developing criteria for the evaluation of the least restrictive environment provision*. Washington, DC: Department of Health, Education and Welfare, U.S. Office of Education.

the best method for educating students who are deaf and hard of hearing. All the various methods have been successful for some students, but no specific method or philosophy has been found to be successful with all students. Many issues will continue to fuel debates, cause parents worry and concern about what are the best choices for their children, and provide technological opportunities never known for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. Cochlear implants will continue to be a major issue; students with cochlear implants can have different educational needs from students whose parents are deaf and their first language is American Sign Language (ASL).

Newborn hearing screenings will identify more babies earlier with hear-

ing loss, and early intervention services will affect the educational needs of children who are deaf and hard of hearing as they receive amplification and educational services at an earlier age. A careful examination of each student's needs is important, not only because it is the right thing to do, but because districts will surely see increasing due process and lawsuits if they use a "one size fits all" approach for the educational placement of students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

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We must consider the social, emotional, and educational needs of students at various age and grade levels.