Some Practical Considerations for Providing Access to the Postsecondary Environment

Alan T. Hurwitz
Rochester Institute of Technology- National Technical Institute for the Deaf

Sara Kersting

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.wcsu.edu/jadara

SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROVIDING ACCESS TO THE POSTSECONDARY ENVIRONMENT

T. ALAN HURWITZ

SARA KERSTING

Rochester Institute of Technology

National Technical Institute for the Deaf

Rochester, NY

Abstract

Whether initiating the design and development of new programs, or modifying existing programs, those who seek to support deaf/hard-of-hearing students in mainstreamed environments must carefully consider the nature and needs of both the academic environment and the student. Developing systems of support which are effective, cost-efficient, and relevant to faculty and students requires close examination of the broader questions of organization, administration and resources, as well as specific attention to details of classroom dynamics and thoughtful analysis of students' academic, and personal-social needs.

Recognition of the interaction among these various elements is critical and suggests that efforts towards planning, development, and evaluation should include joint participation of administrators, faculty, support providers, and students to ensure that all critical needs are identified and addressed.

Introduction

Recent increases in the number of students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and mainstreamed into postsecondary education programs have challenged educators to become informed about the needs of these students and to find ways, regardless of staffing and funding issues, to meet those needs.

To insure that deaf/hard-of-hearing students receive the highest possible quality of instruction, interpreting services should be made available to students and instructors, and notetaking services should be provided. Group and individual tutoring programs, advising services, and training to prepare instructional staff to teach deaf/hard-of-hearing students must also be considered.

In addition to these educational services, attention must also be given to the personal and social needs of mainstreamed students. Retention studies consistently indicate that student success results not from one single factor, but from a complex interaction of personal, social, academic and environmental variables (Bean, 1985; Pantages & Creedon, 1978; Tinto, 1975). Studies of the success of deaf college students (Stinson, Scherer & Walter, 1987) confirm that these same variables affect the persistence of students who are deaf.

The guide on *College and Careers Programs for Deaf Students* (Rawlings, Karchmer & DeCaro, 1988) states that substantial funds are needed to establish and deliver these services, which may create hardships for many campuses in the country with very small numbers of deaf students and very small budgets. This paper will address both the educational and personal-social needs of deaf/hard-of-hearing students in mainstreamed environments regardless of the level of professional staffing and funding at these campuses. The first

part will focus on the programmatic and qualitative aspects of educational services, in particular, tutor/notetaking and interpreting services. The second part will examine the kinds of services that can help students to make an adequate social adjustment on a mainstreamed campus.

Educational Support Services

Tutor/Notetaker Program

It seems appropriate to give a brief history of how the Tutor/Notetaker program was developed. This program began at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) when the number of students was small, and the budget was limited. When NTID was first established in 1968 there were no special educational programs for deaf students; all of them were placed in regular classes at the other colleges of Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), host institution of NTID. Interpreting services were made available to students who needed them, but they were not sufficient for some of the students who had difficulty in taking their own notes while watching the interpreter simultaneously. Hence, additional educational services (e.g., notetaking and tutoring) were developed and offered to these students. In 1969 a new notetaking procedure for deaf students was established (Stuckless, 1972) using a notebook that contained 200 sheets of pressure-sensitive paper so that a hearing student would be able to take lecture notes and assignments in duplicate or triplicate, retaining the original copy and sharing a duplicate copy with deaf classmates.

During the early years, two hearing students in each class at RIT were asked to volunteer to take notes for deaf students so that the deaf students would have at least one version of notes for their personal study needs. This worked well for a while, but soon the staff at NTID became concerned with the quality of notes. Likewise,

there was considerable difficulty in recruiting and securing qualified notetakers, probably because the novelty effect in providing notes to deaf students on a voluntary basis wore off as the number of deaf students enrolled in the other colleges of RIT rapidly increased. It was determined that the quality of notes taken by volunteer notetakers varied greatly. Many volunteers understandably preferred to concentrate on the lectures and take notes for their own purposes. In some situations these notes, when shared with deaf students, were not useful since there was much crucial information missing.

Hence, a training program for notetakers and tutors was established in 1974 (Osguthorpe & Hurwitz, 1979). The rationale for providing a dual training program (notetaking and tutoring) to student (peer) trainees was based on the assumption that notetaking techniques would be greatly enhanced if the notetaker also had the skills to review the notes, whenever necessary, with deaf students. It was ultimately decided that notetakers could help deaf students to clarify or explain the notes, and provide additional examples to some problem areas in the notes. The notetaker was trained to have the knowledge and sensitivity to refer the deaf student to an appropriate individual (an instructor or a professional tutor) if and when the student required intensive tutorial assistance. In some situations the notetaker was able to provide tutorial assistance only if the individual had strong subject background and communication skills to work with deaf students. In this case, it became very important that the notetaker and the classroom instructor work closely together.

Evaluative data were gathered over a three-year period on the peer tutoring and notetaking program. The results of these studies indicated that with proper training, college-age peers can provide quality tutoring and notetaking services (Osguthorpe & Hurwitz, 1979).

Interpreting Services

Deaf students who are mainstreamed in higher education normally encounter considerable difficulties keeping pace with their hearing peers. The tendency of instructors to move around, speak rapidly, and use visual aids ineffectively in their lectures, all contribute to classroom challenges. It is almost impossible for instructors to slow down their rate of speed or use less abstraction in lectures in a "mainstreamed" classroom, especially when there may be only one, or a small number of deaf students. Provision of interpreting service is one way of alleviating this problem. However, simply having an interpreter in a classroom is not the solution. Some students may have difficulty in conceptualizing, through interpreters, the meaning of particular spoken content in the lecture or discussion. Part of this lack of understanding may be a direct result of lack of skill of the interpreter, or the students' lack of familiarity with certain signs, concepts or vocabulary. Some deaf students may need supplemental tutoring in order to keep pace with their classmates. Many students may benefit from training in the effective use of the interpreters.

Interpreting services cannot be successful without faculty involvement in the process of educating a deaf student. It is critical that instructors understand the nature and impact of deafness, the problems a deaf student might have in an integrated class, and how they may be able to interact effectively with interpreters and deaf students in their classes. Instructors need to be assured that an interpreter's role is to facilitate communication between the instructor and deaf students, not replace it. Instructors should inform the interpreter regarding the format of the class (e.g., lecture or discussion), and media to be employed (e.g., overhead projection, movie, or slides) so that the interpreter can prepare appropriately for specific situations. For example, it is not an unusual occurrence for an interpreter to be "left in the dark" when a professor decides to show a film. With notice an interpreter can arrange for lighting with an interpreter lamp during "blackout."

It is a good idea for instructors to minimize their movement as much as possible so that the deaf student can have a full view of the instructor, the interpreter, and the blackboard, concurrently. It is also important for the instructor to be sensitive to the "lag time" that occurs in communicating among instructor, student, and interpreter. The interpreter will need time to identify speakers in different parts of the room, signify changes in topic, and list other pertinent items. The "lag time" should also be kept in mind when asking questions of deaf students. It is not unusual for an instructor to ask if the class has any questions and, after pausing for a moment, continue to the next topic assuming there were no questions. What the instructor may have not taken into account is that the interpreter just finished interpreting the question when the lecture began again and the deaf student never had time to raise a question.

An instructor should be prepared to reword or clarify a question if the deaf student appears to be confused or answers incorrectly. It is necessary to keep in mind that a deaf student may be overlooked when a valuable discussion becomes heated and rapid, because when two or more people are talking at the same time and interrupting each other, the interpreter is unable to keep pace with the dialogue. The instructor can help by presenting an outline of what will be discussed that day on the blackboard or in the handout form. The instructor should use overhead projections or write on the blackboard any important points in the lecture. This practice will allow time for the deaf person to observe the visual information as well as the interpreter and establish a reference point for classroom activities as they must switch their visual field to attend to both the interpreter and the blackboard. Deaf persons receive information primarily and sometimes solely in the visual mode. They must have lead time to

PROVIDING ACCESS TO THE POSTSECONDARY ENVIRONMENT

receive the spoken message through the interpreter and subsequently process the information.

The responsibility for optimizing the chances that the interpreted lecture is understood by deaf students rests not only with the instructor and the interpreter, but also with the students. It is essential for deaf students to be well prepared for each class. This means reading the textbook in advance, doing homework on time, and listing relevant questions to be asked during class. One of the problems in relation to obtaining information and becoming a participant in class could be trying to find an effective method to educate students about how they can effectively utilize an interpreter. Motivating them to learn how to use the interpreter properly in order to successfully participate in the classroom is a challenge. Students should be encouraged to learn how to internalize the role of the interpreters, and their own responsibilities in an interpreted situation. This requires ongoing training and guidance on the part of support staff to prepare students for effective use of interpreting services as well as other services. Students can become independent learners if they have the appropriate skills and tools to plan and use resources to meet their educational needs.

Each deaf student has different needs for services. Some critical thoughts should be kept in mind as an educational service program for each deaf student is designed and developed. The following questions may be asked:

1. Can students use their interpreter well? Do they have the facilities for effective use of the interpreter in the classroom (e.g., understand signs well and/or read lips well)? Is the student able to understand the instructor without the aid of an interpreter?

2. If students are able to understand the instructor with or without the aid of the interpreter, are they able to take their own notes in the classroom? If so, how good

are their notes? Are they helpful to them in their study sessions?

3. If students are not able to take a complete set of notes, is it possible for them to just jot down their own thoughts, concepts or key terminology which can help them to study and compare them with other sets of notes provided by a trained notetaker or someone else?

4. What kind of notetaking assistance would be most appropriate for students? Would a trained notetaker be required, or would a volunteer notetaker be sufficient? Would the student be satisfied with the notes provided by their instructor, if any?

5. Do students use their notes or notes from someone else as one of the primary study sources? Do the students compare the notes from a trained notetaker or someone else with their own jotted notes, if any, and rework the notes?

6. If students are not able to use an interpreter and none of them are able to understand the instructor, would notes provided by a trained notetaker help? Would they need a tutor? Is it the best way to provide a service to the students? If not, what are some alternatives?

7. What additional services are needed for the students? For instance, do the students have reading problems? Are the students academically prepared for the course? Do the students have any other problems (e.g., emotional or social) which may be hindering their academic progress in the classroom in spite of the services being provided? Can a tutor effectively help the students to develop study skills and classroom participatory skills?

In the final analysis, we must ask questions to determine whether the educational services are worthy for particular students. We must find out if these services are helping them to participate

more actively in the classroom, if the services are beneficial to the student, if students are becoming independent learners and are responsible for their own academic, social and emotional performances in the utilization of these services, if students are fully aware of the value of this service and understand the consequences when it is reduced or eliminated, and if students are playing an effective part in the utilization of the service.

While it is true that most campus programs have fewer resources than NTID or Gallaudet University, it is possible for many programs to provide basic services at a reasonable cost, e.g., interpreting, tutoring, notetaking, academic advising and other related services. These programs can find a way to overcome the obstacle of limited resources through networking and consulting with community resources and other campuses. Of a special note is a report of the National Task Force on Educational Interpreting: Educational Interpreting for Deaf Students (Stuckless, Avery, & Hurwitz, 1990), which addresses many of the needs of educational institutions and school districts in the procurement and use of the services of educational interpreters. It is important for these campus programs to reach out and seek help which would enhance access to postsecondary education for many students who are deaf.

Addressing Personal-Social Needs of Mainstreamed Students

Student Needs

In order to make an adequate social adjustment in a college setting, most students need to establish relationships with peers and with faculty. In addition, most students, during their college years, struggle with questions of identity; they seek experiences to define and clarify similarities and differences between themselves and others. Deaf/hard-of-hearing students exhibit

these same needs, but successful social integration often poses additional challenges for them.

Relationships with peers, found to have a very significant effect on student retention (Bean, 1985), can be very complicated for students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. Communication difficulties and negative attitudes may prevent relationships between hearing and deaf/hard-of-hearing students. In other cases, relationships may be severely limited to what Foster and Brown (1988) term "acquaintanceship." In their study of academic and social aspects of mainstreaming, they found that close and sustained friendships between deaf and hearing students were very rare.

Dependence on deaf/hard-of-hearing peers for these relationships, however, is not always a solution. The Foster and Brown study (1988), which found that deaf students relied on social networks of deaf peers and participation in deaf clubs, was done in the NTID/RIT environment where large numbers of deaf students, associations, and activities provide a wide range of social opportunities. In a more typical mainstream setting, with few deaf students, choices can be very limited.

Establishing relationships with faculty may be even more difficult for deaf/hard-of-hearing students. Even if the student finds solutions to communication barriers, there may be additional obstacles in terms of attitudes and awareness of some hearing faculty. Obviously, in cases where a number of deaf/hard-of-hearing faculty and staff are available, the deaf/hard-of-hearing student will have other opportunities to satisfy this need for interaction; however, in most colleges, there are no deaf/hard-of-hearing faculty or staff for students to seek out. This need for interaction with faculty is a critical one; studies, such as that by Ramist (1981), suggest that it impacts not only social integration but also academic performance.

Complicating both needs for relationships with peers and with faculty is the struggle to develop identity, which can become a painful and isolating

5

process for deaf/hard-of-hearing students caught between deaf and hearing worlds. Some students who are experiencing problems accepting their own deafness may reject relationships with other deaf/hard-of-hearing students; others may create obstacles such as refusing to learn sign language or expecting all deaf/hard-of-hearing peers to use speech. A further consideration is the subgroupings within a deaf population, as noted by Foster and Brown (1988), and discussed by Glickman (1986), which may significantly affect relationship patterns. Factors such as fluency in sign language, proficiency in speech, educational background, and acceptance by deaf/hearing communities can be the basis for rejection or acceptance among such groups of deaf/hard-of-hearing students.

Unfortunately, identity issues can impact much more than social success, as in cases where deaf/hard-of-hearing students avoid contact with not only deaf/hard-of-hearing students, but also with service providers such as interpreters and tutors.

Program Analysis

The next step for a college preparing for mainstreaming should be careful analysis of the programs and services already in place to address students' personal-social needs. Reasons for this are obvious; first, although not specifically designed for deaf/hard-of-hearing students, many of these programs could, with some modification, meet the needs of deaf/hard-of-hearing students; secondly, developing new programs for deaf/hard-of-hearing students can be very costly; and thirdly, separate programs restricted to hearing-impaired students might conflict with one of the basic goals of mainstreaming, i.e., to allow deaf/hard-of-hearing students to participate in and benefit from the same experiences as hearing students.

Efforts to increase retention have resulted in a variety of programs and services addressing the personal-social dimensions of student life. Many of these programs are "multiple-action," designed to address various of personal, social, academic and career concerns (Beal & Noel, 1980). A leading example is the development of extensive orientation programs designed to introduce students to the physical, social, and academic resources of the campus, and also provide contact with older students and residence life staff. Counseling and advising programs offer not only assistance with personal and career development needs, but also an opportunity for students to interact with faculty, and, in the cases where peer counseling/advising programs exist, with students. Student organizations and associations often offer welcoming activities for freshmen and sponsor faculty-student interaction activities.

Given the necessary interpreting support, many of these activities can be beneficial for deaf/hard-of-hearing students. Older deaf/hard-of-hearing students should be recruited to participate in orientation and residence life programming, not only to provide contacts for deaf/hard-of-hearing freshmen, but also to educate and familiarize hearing students with aspects of deafness. Leaders of student organizations and associations should be provided with information concerning needs of deaf/hard-of-hearing students, and incentives to accommodate new deaf/hard-of-hearing members. Orientation programs should also include information about any campus or community organizations, associations, and services for deaf/hard-of-hearing people.

Meeting the counseling needs of deaf/hard-of-hearing students may be more difficult, given the unique psychological aspects of deafness and students' communication needs. Providing interpreting services and additional training to existing staff may be the only alternative for some colleges which are unable to afford the luxury of specially trained counselors. In some cases, students can be referred to individuals in the community.

Program Development

Limitations of existing programs, as well as the unique nature of some deaf/hard-of-hearing students' needs, may necessitate the development of new programs. One cost-effective solution is to integrate personal-social components with programs for academic support.

For example, a program designed to introduce new deaf/hard-of-hearing students to the use of services can be expanded to address critical personal-social needs. Meetings concerning procedures and policies about interpreting, notetaking, and tutoring services can become opportunities to introduce service faculty and staff to students. Relationships with support service providers can often meet some of the needs for faculty-student interaction.

Whenever possible, older deaf/hard-of-hearing students or alumni should be recruited for support service meetings, or asked to participate in "Big Brother-Big Sister" programs, or peer advising programs. These students can serve as valuable role models, provide opportunities for relationships, and become valuable sources of information about services. In some cases, these older students may be able to assist new students in resolving conflicts over deaf/hearing identity issues.

Programs to acquaint hearing faculty and staff with services, communication strategies, and needs of deaf/hard-of-hearing students should, whenever possible, include deaf/hard-of-hearing students. Structured interaction between hearing faculty and deaf/hard-of-hearing students can often alleviate apprehensions, clarify misunderstandings, and encourage relationships.

In mainstream situations where numbers of deaf/hard-of-hearing students are small and spread across campus, efforts should be made to develop activities and strategies to promote regular interaction (e.g., Friday afternoon (TGIF) sessions, Sunday brunches, a student/support service staff lounge, a special bulletin board for information needs, etc.). If numbers are extremely small, a network could be developed with nearby colleges which also have deaf/hard-of-hearing populations.

The importance of these efforts to recognize and address personal-social needs cannot be overemphasized. As research continues to confirm the relationships between these variables and student success, those responsible for the design and delivery of services must insure that deaf/hard-of-hearing students have the same kinds of opportunities to adjust, grow, and develop as their hearing counterparts.

PROVIDING ACCESS TO THE POSTSECONDARY ENVIRONMENT

References

Beal, P. & Noel, L. (1980). *What works in student retention: The report of a joint project of the American College Testing Program and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.* Iowa City: American College Testing Program.

Bean, J. (1985). Interaction effects based on class level in an explanatory model of college student dropout syndrome. *American Educational Research Journal, 22,* 35-64.

Foster, S. & Brown, P. (1988). *Academic and social mainstreaming: Deaf students' perspectives on their college experiences. Paper presented at the 1988 meeting of the American Educational Research Association,* New Orleans, LA.

Glickman, N. (1986). Cultural identity, deafness, and mental health. *Journal of Rehabilitation of the Deaf, 20,* 1-10.

Osguthorpe, R.T. & Hurwitz, T.A. (April 1979). *The NTID Tutor/Notetaker Program.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, California.

Pantages, T. & Creedon, C. (1978). Studies of college attrition: 1950-1975. *Review of Educational Research, 48,* 49-101.

Ramist, L. (1981). College student attrition and retention. *College Board Report No. 81-1.* New York: College Entrance Examination Board.

Rawlings, B., Karchmer, M. & DeCaro, J. (1988). *College & career programs for deaf students.* Washington, DC: Gallaudet University.

Stinson, M.S., Scherer, M.J. & Walter, G.G. (1987). Factors affecting persistence of deaf college students. *Research in Higher Education, 27,* 244-258.

Stuckless, E.R. (1972). *A notetaking procedure for deaf students in regular classroom.* Internal publication, National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Rochester, New York.

Stuckless, E.R., Avery, J.C. & Hurwitz, T.A. (1990). *Educational interpreting for deaf students: A report of the National Task Force on Educational Interpreting.* National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Rochester, NY.

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropouts from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research, 45,* 89-125.

8