Optimizing the Teaching-Learning Experience for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Learners of English

Dr. Gerald P. Berent
National Technical Institute for the Deaf
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, New York, USA

Conference on Teaching English to Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students at Secondary and Tertiary Levels in the Czech Republic

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Abstract

The presenter will provide an overview of the week’s presentations and activities and will summarize the English teaching/learning themes addressed in the conference lectures and seminars. He will then discuss the major challenges for educators of deaf and hard-of-hearing students and their responsibilities for optimizing their students’ teaching/learning experience. He will emphasize the critical need to experiment with new methods and materials in an effort to help students to experience the greatest success possible in developing their English language knowledge.
Teaching English to Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students at Secondary and Tertiary Levels in the Czech Republic

CONFERENCE FORMAT

- **LECTURES** - 8 presentations covering critical topics in the field of English language teaching and learning
- **SEMINARS** - 10 sessions covering critical English teaching-learning topics and involving participants directly in activities and discussion
- **ENGLISH LAB VISITS** - optional evening opportunities to explore lab technologies and materials
- **PANEL DISCUSSIONS** - 2 sessions summarizing conference issues, strategies, and future directions and soliciting questions and feedback from conference participants
  - Educational Strategies
  - English Teaching Strategies
Conference Lectures

1. An Introduction to Principles of Language Learning
2. Optimizing the Teaching-Learning Experience for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Learners of English
3. Input-Enhancement in Teaching English to Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students
4. Reading and Writing English as a Foreign Language: Factors Leading to Success for Deaf Adolescents and Young Adults
5. Addressing the Writing Needs of Deaf Students at Different English Proficiency Levels
6. English Classroom Communication and Management
7. Practical Strategies Used for Teaching English to Deaf Students at Bauman Moscow State Technical University
8. Learning Strategies of Deaf and Hearing-Impaired Students in Higher Education
Conference Seminars

A. Assumptions and Expectations Regarding People Who Are Deaf
B. Practical Strategies for Teaching English to Deaf Czech Students
C. Various Methods Used in EFL Teaching of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students in Heterogeneous Classes
D. Evaluating English Teaching Materials to Identify Factors That Maximize Deaf Students’ Success
E. Coding Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students’ Successful and Unsuccessful English Productions
F. Practical Strategies for English Classroom Communication and Management
G. Using Rhetorical Modes to Reinforce Deaf Students’ Writing Skills at Different English Proficiency Levels
H. Creating a Language-Rich Environment for a Deaf Learner: The Experiences of Two Deaf Parents of Deaf Children
I. The Challenge & Strategies Involved in Aiding Deaf Students’ Retention of Their English Language Learning in Their Undergraduate & Post Graduate Lives
J. Literacy for Deaf Adults: Filling in the Gaps
Language Teaching-Learning Themes

- Linguistic principles and language acquisition
- Second language research and deaf and hard-of-hearing learners
- Teaching methods and materials for specific skill development
- Teacher training and distance learning
- Materials development and evaluation
- Enhancing English input
- Teacher feedback and student progress
- Deaf and hard-of-hearing learners:
  - Attitudes and expectations
  - Optimal learning environments
  - Specific learners and programs
  - Diversity (heterogeneity) of learners
  - Classroom communication and management
  - Learner strategies
  - Different proficiency levels
  - Retention of English knowledge
Starting from the Beginning: Harsh Realities

- Average reading level of deaf persons in the United States = **Grade 3 - 4**
- Reading levels of NTID students = **Grades 6 - 12+**
- Low English skills pose one of the greatest challenges to deaf students’ educational and career success
- Over time, there has not been much change in deaf persons’ English literacy levels:

“It is not surprising that our increased understanding of the processes of reading and writing has not altered substantially the low-literacy achievement of students with severe to profound hearing impairment. Perhaps there needs to be a more concerted effort to ensure the interrelationships of theory, research, assessment, curriculum, and instruction” (Paul & Quigley, 1994, p. 187)
Major Challenges for Administrators, Teachers, Researchers, and Teacher Trainers

- Seek collaborations among administrators, teachers, researchers, teacher trainers, and students (!) to explore the interrelationships of theory, research, assessment, curriculum, instruction, and learning (!).

- Deaf education cannot make progress in a vacuum! Seek interdisciplinary collaboration and investigation from all relevant disciplines.

- Take risks:
  - Discard old practices that are not effective.
  - Build on existing practices that seem to be effective.
  - Experiment with new practices in a constant search for methods and materials that can lead to significant student progress.

- Don’t wait for “experts” to tell you what to do. You have as much responsibility for discovering how to promote student success as anyone else.
Some Responsibilities of Teachers of English to Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students
(Berent, 2001, Table 3)

- Pursue professional development activities.
- Take advantage of methods and materials for Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language (TESL/TEFL).
- Take advantage of emerging computer and internet technologies.
- Observe, record, and monitor students’ progress in English.
- Share experiences (successes and failures) with other teachers of deaf and hard-of-hearing students.
- Experiment with new methods and materials.
EXPERIMENT

In the field of teaching English to deaf and hard-of-hearing students (and deaf education in general):

- The status quo is unacceptable.
- Complacency is unacceptable.
- The search for innovations that lead to observable, measurable, appreciable gains in students’ receptive and expressive English language abilities must be the driving force of the field.
- In this search, *instructional experimentation* must be the norm rather than the exception.
Experimenting with New Methods and Materials
Factors Guiding Adoption of an Innovation (Ellis, 1997, p. 29)

- Dissatisfaction with existing teaching
- How easy to implement under current teaching conditions?
- Compatibility with existing teaching style and ideology
- Relevance to students’ learning needs
- Complexity of the innovation (how easy/difficult to grasp)
- Clear and convincing rationale for the innovation
- Ease of trying the innovation in stages
- How visible are the results of the innovation to others?
- How high a level of originality is required of the teacher (e.g., development of special materials)?
- How much “ownership” do teachers feel for the innovation?
I’m overwhelmed! What am I supposed to do?

- The harsh realities are depressing.
- The major challenges are daunting.
- The responsibilities make me nervous.
- I’m afraid to experiment and make changes.
- I’m sorry I ever registered for this conference.
- I want to quit teaching, move back to Hradec Králové and become a zubní technička.

STOP! There is a solution: Do “SOME”
Returning to the Teaching-Learning Themes of the Conference

1. Linguistic principles and language acquisition
2. Second language research and deaf and hard-of-hearing learners
3. Teaching methods and materials for specific skill development
4. Teacher training and distance learning
5. Materials development and evaluation
6. Enhancing English input
7. Teacher feedback and student progress

*Deaf and hard-of-hearing learners:*

8. Attitudes and expectations
9. Optimal learning environments
10. Specific learners and programs
11. Diversity (heterogeneity) of learners
12. Classroom communication and management
13. Learner strategies
14. Different proficiency levels
15. Retention of English knowledge
How You Can Optimize the English Language Learning Experience of Your Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students

- Develop *some* basic knowledge of the *linguistic principles* guiding language acquisition. [1, 2]
- Develop *some* awareness of *major issues* in second language acquisition research and teaching. [1-7]
- Become familiar with *some* new methods and materials for teaching English as a second/foreign language and for teacher training: [3-5]
  - General English-teaching methods and materials
  - Methods and materials for teaching specific skills
  - Distance learning
- Learn *some* criteria for critiquing English teaching materials and *some* guidelines for choosing materials that address your own students’ needs: [5]
  - Selecting existing materials
  - Adapting existing materials
  - Developing your own materials
Optimizing the English Learning Environment (continued 1)

- Use *some* methods for **structuring** your students’ English **learning environment**: [6, 9, 12]
  - Make interactions and activities communicative
  - Enhance the input to help students “notice” it
- Learn *some* new approaches for providing students with **meaningful feedback** and for **monitoring their progress**. [7, 15]
- Take *some* action to encourage **positive attitudes** toward deaf and hard-of-hearing learners, and establish **high but realistic expectations** for your students. [8, 11]
- Learn about and provide your students with *some* access to **“technologically optimal learning environments”** (when possible): [9]
  - Computers and access to the internet/World Wide Web
  - Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) software
  - Other emerging educational technologies
- Learn *some* information about **different kinds of programs** and **different kinds of learners** (adults/tertiary/secondary/primary students) and the goals, requirements, philosophies of these programs and learner needs [10, 11]
Optimizing the English Learning Environment (continued 2)

- Accept the fact that deaf and hard-of-hearing students are not a heterogeneous learner group; make *some* changes to recognize, appreciate, and accommodate students’ diversity. [10, 11, 13, 14]
- Learn *some* strategies for ensuring accessible classroom communication and effective management of the learning environment. [12]
- Learn about *some* of the different learning strategies used by deaf and hard-of-hearing students and modify methods and materials to accommodate different learning strategies. [13]
- Become familiar with *some* English language characteristics, activities, and needs of students at different proficiency levels. [14]
- Use *some* assessment techniques to see how well students retain aspects of English language knowledge over time; seek methods for reinforcing students’ retention of specific English skills. [15]
CONCLUSION
Implementing What You Learn This Week

DO NOTHING…
Unacceptable

DO EVERYTHING…
Impossible

DO SOME…
You’ve succeeded!

SOME + SOME + SOME + SOME… = a whole lot of knowledge and skills!

Hodně štěstí a dobře se bavte!