IMPORTANCE OF DEAF MENTORS IN EHDI PROGRAMS

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The Need

- Majority of parents of deaf/HOH child have no experience with deafness
- Similarly, many lack understanding of early childhood education and especially importance of language acquisition
The puzzle of raising a deaf child has several parts

- Education
- Communication/Language
- Technology/Aids
- Culture and Communities
- Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Development

Each piece of puzzle has a Specialist
“The whole is greater than the sum of the parts” – Gestalt Psychology

A child is much more than his hearing status
Deafness = not just a diagnosis; it is a life-long experience

• “Deafness is a difference, not a deficit.” (Thomas, 1994, p. 553)

The big picture – the deaf experience

• How different aspects of a child’s life come together to create a unique person
• E.g. education: based on communication
Study: Deaf Mentor Experimental Project

(SKI-HI Institute, Utah State University, Logan)

- Three year project
- Measured effectiveness of deaf mentor services to young children 0-5 and families
  - Bilingual-bicultural model
- 2 groups: one receiving deaf mentor services, another not receiving such services
  - Deaf mentors: used ASL and Signed English with children and family
  - Children matched on hearing loss, age, pretest development
  - Both received parent advisers visits
    - Parent advisors used Signed English
- Diagnostic tests performed on children every 6 months
- Children

(Watkins, Pittman, and Walden, 1998)
Results:

• Children with deaf mentors showed greater gains in receptive and expressive language
  - Average language gain: 6 months
  - Performed better on other linguistic tests – including English grammar test

• Parents also benefitted from deaf mentors
  - Parents report less frustration re: communication
  - Perception on deafness more akin to deaf community
Deaf Mentor Program: An Overview

- Trained deaf/HOH mentors
- Regular (weekly) home visits
  - Deaf Mentor join the family during particular family events, happenings and routines within the context of the home
- Knowledge of language, culture, deafness shared and discussed
Characteristics of a Deaf Mentor

- Trained
- Experience as a deaf child
- Knowledge of various technologies and aids
- Local educational opportunities
- Communication methods
- Experience with self-esteem, socialization, identity, overcoming adversity and stereotypes
- Neutrality!
Advantages of Deaf Mentors

- Parents get to meet a deaf person – for the first time?
  - much better understanding of opportunities available for child
  - Siblings learn as well

- What it means to be deaf
  - Little nuisances, day-to-day occurrences, thought processes
  - Importance of visual information
  - Community involvement

- Show that deaf people can be successful and self-sufficient
  - Mentor can discuss success stories of other deaf adults
  - Parents feel more confident, reassured
Advantages of Deaf Mentors

- Enhance parents’ self-efficacy
  - Parents receive hands-on training, practice with feedback – learn to identify learning opportunities for child
  - Encourages early invention

- Exposure to cultural/linguistics model when child very young:
  - Parents more relaxed, interact more freely
  - More optimistic about child’s future
  - Promotes self-esteem, communication and language usage
  - Sense of identity for deaf child yet exposed to both culture
Advantages of Deaf Mentors

Language acquisition
- Shows family how to use ASL
- Enable child to learn both ASL and English
  • Greater fluency in ASL $\rightarrow$ better English literacy
  • acquire language during critical period
- If no language:
  • Child ends up with poor language skills
  • Communication at home seriously affected
  • Unprepared for school
  • No language to access curricular content

In some cases, parents remain friends with mentor for a long time
COLORADO: *Deaf and Hard of Hearing Connections*

- Collaboration between Hands and Voices, Colorado Department of Education and CSDB
- Diversity of mentors
- Mentors share personal stories
  - Technology, education, interaction with family/friends
  - no advocacy for specific strategy
- Panels/home visits
MINNESOTA: Deaf Mentor Project

- Dept. of Human Services
- SKI-HI trained mentors
  - Deaf/HOH teachers undergo SKI-HI training too
  - Mentors work with teachers
- Ongoing training
Training

- SKI-HI Institute, Utah State University, Logan
  - 586-page curriculum containing ASL lessons for families, and lessons about early visual communication and Deaf Culture
  - 8 states using SKI-HI Deaf Mentor Program
    - (not necessarily state-wide)
- Hands and Voices
- Gallaudet: select courses
Currently, not every state has a Deaf Mentor Program

- Concerns include funding, administration/monitoring
Recommendations/ Next Steps

Keys to success

- Programs easily accessible
  - Price, application, flexible hours, ESL families
- Explain importance to parents
- Consistency
- Trained staff
  - All communication opportunities, parents’ emotions, creative activity ideas, fluent in ASL and English
- Team with PIP/EI teacher
- Support groups


