Creating an Optimal Preschool Environment for Listening and Spoken Language Development

Corine Theobald, MSDE, LSLS Cert. AVEd
Janet Felice, M.S., CCC-SLP
Preschool Environments

Range of Settings Available:

- Non-categorical Special Education Classroom
- General Education classroom (with or without supplemental services)
- Small-group instruction with a special education teacher with classmates sharing hearing loss as their primary qualifying disability
- A combination of two or more of the above
Preschool Environments

- Decision must be made individually & based upon the needs of each child and family
- No single setting can be considered an optimum, or even appropriate, fit for the needs of all children with hearing loss
- Appropriate setting can, & often should, vary for the same child across time
  - Needs of the child should be regularly assessed
  - Program or settings changes made as needed
Preschool Environments

Factors to consider for each child:

- Development relative to typically developing peers
  - Speech & language
  - Self-advocacy skills
  - Social skills

- Previous early intervention services

- Additional educational challenges present or suspected

- Intervention services received outside of school day

- Level of family support & involvement

- Needs of the entire family unit
## Non-Categorical Preschool Classroom

### Possible Advantages:
- Teacher likely has experience working with children with varying disabilities
- May be available within the family’s home school district
- Small student-to-teacher ratio

### Possible Disadvantages:
- Teacher may not be licensed in area of child’s primary disability
- Children’s skills may vary significantly across several areas of development
General Education Classroom

General Characteristics:

- Curriculum-driven
- Centered around skills & activities
- General vocabulary & language stimulation
- Group/class focused
A look inside an “Older 3’s” classroom:
General Education Classroom

Possible Advantages:

- Exposure to peers with age-appropriate speech & language skills
- Opportunity to practice listening & self-advocacy skills in a larger natural setting
- Most common classroom setting so multiple choices available

Possible Disadvantages:

- Academic & language levels may be too advanced for child’s current skill set
- Increased background noise & reduced attention from teacher due to larger class size
- Teachers generally have limited experience working with children with hearing loss
Components necessary to maximize success of a child with hearing loss:

- Child has the communicative competence to be successful

- School administration & classroom teachers with the time and willingness to:
  - learn about & understand the effects of a student’s hearing loss
  - become familiar with the child’s hearing device(s)
  - collaborate with parents/support personnel

- Support professionals with expertise stimulating language acquisition through listening & talking (including auditory stimulation through listening alone)
More components necessary to maximize success of a child with hearing loss:

- Aggressive audiological management including educating classroom teacher to perform listening checks
- Classroom acoustics within ASA & ASHA for regular education classrooms
- Frequent language comprehension checks opportunities for students to express themselves
- Opportunity to address areas of need that may exist within a small group or 1-on-1 setting
Listening & Spoken Language Classroom

General Characteristics:

- Primary focus is child communication
  - Auditory skills (phonetic & phonologic)
  - Vocabulary & semantics
  - Articulation
  - Syntax & Morphology
  - Pragmatics/Social interaction skills

- All activities selected with specific communication targets & then integrated into preschool & cognitive skill development

- Designed based upon individual child needs & the remediation of existing language weaknesses
Listening & Spoken Language Classroom
Listening & Spoken Language Classroom

Possible Advantages:
- Small class sizes
- School staff with specific expertise in stimulating spoken language acquisition with children who are D/HH
- Offers a safe environment for children to practice emerging language and listening skills
- Level of support available to parents

Possible Disadvantages:
- Environment may be too restrictive for some children
- May not be available at family’s school of preference
- Exposure to children with typically developing language skills may be limited
Circle Time
Components necessary to maximize success:

- Classroom teacher and supplemental support professionals with experience stimulating language acquisition
- Intensive stimulation of listening & spoken language skills throughout the school day
Components necessary to maximize success:

- Small class sizes with frequent opportunities to divide further based upon skill level
- Classroom acoustics within the Acoustical Society of America & ASHA standards for classrooms for children who are D/HH
- Frequent device checks (Ling Sound Test)
Additional components of an optimal Listening & Spoken Language Preschool:

- Team teaching - each child shared by more than one experienced D/HH professional

- Opportunity to interact with typically developing peers as appropriate for the child (including opportunities for partial mainstreaming)

- On-site or immediate access to audiological support
Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing - http://www.agbell.org

American Speech-Language and Hearing Association partnership with Council for Education of the Deaf (ASHA-CED) - www.asha.org/ashaced/


The following National Standard acoustic guideline documents are available for download free of charge at: http://asastore.aip.org/