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FACILITATING RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR IN DEAF CHILDREN

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Abstract

In recent years there has been an outpouring of political activity urging educational reforms. It is argued that additional monies will effect change in teenage pregnancy, reduce chronic discipline problems in schools, and lower dropout rates. Johnson, Liddel and Erting stated two reasons for academic failure in deaf education. The first is a language-related issue. The second reason involved the values and attitudes that have developed among those who educate deaf children. In order for deaf children to succeed, the promotion and integration of new teaching skills should be implemented in classrooms to enhance each child's self esteem and empower the student with skills and the desire to succeed in becoming responsible and independent. For this to occur, educators need to redefine their roles in the classroom. Also, an attempt must be made to persuade administrators to redefine institutional goals.

We are a nation at risk (Gardner, 1983) so we are told. Political platforms urge educational reforms at the state and federal levels and among the suggested reforms are more classes and extended days. It is argued that additional monies are needed to decrease teenage pregnancy, to stint

alcohol/chemical dependency, to provide a multi-cultural educational system, to lower the dropout rate, to deal with chronic discipline problems, and to reduce the high rate of suicide among our youth. No doubt, we are a nation at risk, and money alone for educational reform will not change the structure of our education. Previous attempts at educational reform have been unsuccessful. The major reason is that the relationships between teachers, students, schools, and communities have remained essentially unchanged (Cummins, 1986).

The intention of this paper is to discuss the promotion, integration and augmentation of skills that can be used in the classroom to enhance a child's self-esteem and empower the student with skills and the desire to succeed by becoming responsible and independent.

Developing Language Skills

Johnson, Liddel and Erting (1990) recently published a study, *Unlocking the Curriculum - Principals for Achieving Access to Deaf Education* in which they stated two reasons for failure in deaf education. The first of these problems is a language related issue. The second is primarily an issue of values and attitudes that have developed among those who educate deaf children.

The first aspect involving language is of utmost importance and concern to all who work

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with deaf students. As a counselor with the hearing impaired, the author realizes how important it is to use the language of the child to facilitate communication.

On November 10, 1989, Dr. I. King Jordan, President of Gallaudet University, gave the keynote address to the Educational Interpreting Into 1990's Workshop in which he said, "I believe strongly in a continuum of communication that signs in English word order at one end and American Sign Language at the other. Skilled signers unconsciously find that spot on the signed communication continuum that best fits the circumstances of a particular situation. Skilled signers easily move about that continuum to effect clear communication."

John Dewey, an educational philosopher, stated that education must start where the learner is and help the learner to expand from there. His view of education placed the child at the center of the problem-solving experience which is rooted in positive and humanistic acceptance of the learner. It builds on strength and minimizes preoccupation with deficiency (Goodman and Goodman, 1981).

In the area of whole language research Goodman and Goodman support (a) positive, building on existing strengths of a learner, (b) relevant, expanding on existing experiences of children within their own cultures, (c) transactional, treating learners as active participants, (d) personalized and (e) dynamic and process oriented (Goodman and Goodman, 1981).

These key supports are the basic tenets of whole language. Whole language is a theory of language development, in which language is learned in whole situations (i.e., reading, writing, speaking and listening) and not in out-of-context activities (Goodman and Goodman, 1981).

Supporting Cultural Identity

The second aspect of helping deaf students become responsible and independent is the cross-

cultural attitude recognizing deaf people as comprising a minority group with a hierarchical social structure and its own culture and language (Markowitz and Woodard, 1982).

This hierarchical social structure is identified in the research findings of Erting (1978), Benderly (1980), Woodard (1982) and Glickman (1983). Their major findings include:

- A. Cultural identity. American Sign Language serves as the primary criterion for identification of self and others as members of the deaf community and for promotion of solidarity in a group.
- B. Maintenance of cultural group boundaries through bilingualism. Language varieties serve to delimit interaction between deaf and hearing communities whereas ASL frequently is used in intragroup interactions, Pidgin Sign English is likely to be used in signing interactions with hearing persons who are rarely fluent in ASL.
- C. Enculturation into the deaf community. A majority (as high as 90%) of deaf children are members of families where both parents are hearing. Thus, the language and culture of deaf people are not transmitted from parent to child in a similar manner to other ethnic groups but instead are transmitted outside of the home through school (e.g., residential), peers (e.g., schoolmates), and/or deaf adult role models (e.g., teachers).
- D. Organized social network. Like members of other ethnic groups, deaf people have developed organizational networks that encompass local, national and international levels. These organizations include those that are social, recreational and religious as well as business and insurance.
- E. Shared experiences of stigma and inferiority stereotyping by the majority

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culture. As a minority group, deaf people tend to be stigmatized and stereotyped by their inability to use speech and their preference for sign language which has historically been regarded as inferior and undesirable by the majority culture. Thus, there are continuous conflicts with the majority hearing culture regarding the maintenance of deaf cultural groups as opposed to assimilation into a "mainstreamed hearing world" (Anderson and Rosten, 1985).

There have been relatively few teachers of the hearing impaired who were themselves hearing impaired. This trend was evident at residential schools as well as in programs in public schools. Many deaf children have not been exposed to extensive role modeling by deaf teachers since deaf teachers are in the minority. Further, many deaf children do not come in contact with deaf teachers until they are in middle school and sometimes not until high school.

The best models for sign language development, cultural identity, and enhancement of self esteem for deaf children are deaf signers because these are the people who use the language proficiently and who can talk about deaf culture.

When implementing a program that focuses on responsibility and independence it is crucial to use an approach in which behaviors are taught within the framework of the academic classroom setting. As a counselor working in a residential school for the deaf, this writer has had many opportunities to work closely with a few families that were motivated to resolve issues which hindered the educational progress of their deaf children. Unfortunately, such motivated parents are the exception rather than the rule.

It is the author's opinion that all schools have the responsibility to work with it's students. In part, the schools have the obligation to educate our

students to become productive citizens and to become socially responsible.

Meeting Needs of Students

There are two goals that are very important. One is that teachers/staff need to provide a way to gradually share with the students more of the responsibility for learning and, just as important, for responsible behavior. The second is to reduce teacher's responsibility of managing and controlling student behavior. Ultimately, the control of student behavior should be the students' responsibility.

Dr. William Glasser suggests that if schools are structured so that they satisfy the basic human needs of belonging, power, freedom, and fun, the result would be far fewer discipline problems and much more learning.

In the March, 1988 issue of *Educational Leadership*, Ron Brandt interviewed Dr. Glasser and questioned him about these needs. All people have needs that are built into our genetic structures, and everything we do represents our best attempt to satisfy them. Individuals have a strong need for love and belonging. For example, if we ask young children what is the best part of school, invariably they will say their friends. Educators should explain to them that the reason they feel this way is that we all have a built in need for friendship and caring concern (Glasser, 1988).

Schools, especially primary schools, do a good job of encouraging children to socialize while they work (Glasser, 1988). Most schools, particularly secondary schools, would function much better if they made an effort to increase the opportunities for students to feel that in class they can talk and work with each other (Glasser, 1988). While most educators try to make their schools friendly places, they don't pay enough attention to the fact that the need for belonging is not turned off in the

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classroom. In many secondary classrooms students are taught as if they were supposed to suspend this need. They are expected to sit still and pay attention to what is being taught and not to each other. Teachers, therefore, need to find ways in class to give students a planned way of learning.

Dr. Glasser further suggests that students work together in order to build a sense of teamwork. He believes the need for power, even more than the need of belonging, is the core of today's difficulties, not only in school, but elsewhere in society. People who are not able to say that they are at least a little bit important in some situation will not work hard to preserve or improve that situation. According to Glasser, many students who maintain a good sense of feeling important (which they have gained from their home lives) are able to survive the lack of importance in the classroom, while many who come from homes that are not supportive are unable to maintain this equilibrium. In our culture, home life provides much less self-esteem than in more homogenous cultures, such as Japan. In Japan home support is so strongly a part of the culture that it can influence the child to work hard in schools that pay even less attention to this need of feeling important than we do (Glasser, 1988).

It became apparent to me that the way most of us satisfy these needs of power, belonging, freedom, and fun, is by working in teams with people we respect and care for. A well-functioning family is a team. The extra-curricular activities in almost all schools lead students to feel important. Band, orchestra, athletics, school newspaper, and drama club are all satisfying team activities. Yet, even though the importance of working in teams is an accepted proposition, all too often teachers fail to apply this beneficial strategy to the classroom. Teachers encourage individuality and are continually telling students to keep quiet and to keep their eyes on their own work (Glasser, 1988).

When students and teachers become involved

in cooperative learning environments, and work together to provide the opportunities for discussion in areas of decision-making and problem-solving, students learn to become responsible for their decisions. In teaching the children to become more responsible, we focus on three things: teaching students to care about themselves, teaching students to care about others, teaching students to care about the world that they live in (Pendergrass, 1982).

When students' needs are not met, then problem behaviors will occur which must be dealt with in the classroom. Simply telling the child to leave the room will not resolve the problem. The problem began in the classroom and the problem needs to be resolved in the classroom. If a problem develops, the teacher needs to address it as soon as possible, preferably in the environment in which the problem occurs. The issue could be a child who has become defiant because of an argument between the teacher and the child, an argument between students, or because the child is rebelling against homework. The problem exists in the classroom and that is where it needs to be resolved.

Sometimes the issue might not be school-related. It could be family, friend or peer related. The teacher must take the time to show that he/she cares for that child. Occasionally the teacher may have to ask a disruptive student to leave the room, and that is appropriate; however, at the most opportune time, the teacher and student must discuss the problem, hopefully when there are a few minutes during class, right after class, or as soon as possible. The issue must be resolved by the student and teacher. Taking the time to help resolve the conflict gives the student confidence that the teacher cares. As teachers, we need to work with children and not alienate them. Resolving issues in acceptable ways are a part of learning and becoming social.

To assist the student in learning to become responsible, contracts may be helpful. Luckner

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(1990), established the following steps for developing a contingency contract which were adapted from Westling and Koorland (1988):

1. Determine the target behaviors to be reduced or increased.
2. Determine potentially effective reinforcers.
3. Decide on a suitable length of time for the change to occur.
4. Establish a criteria for acceptable performance.
5. Write a simple statement that specifies the arrangements between the behavior and the reinforcements.
6. You and the student sign the contract.
7. Observe the student's behavior and keep a record of it.
8. Provide the agreed upon positive reinforcer if the student achieves the goal.
9. Rewrite a new contract based on the student's performance. If the goal is achieved, set higher standards. If the goal is not achieved, determine other methods for being successful. Potential adaptations include changing the time requirement, performance level, or the positive reinforcer.

Note, however, that both the teacher and the student work collaboratively in developing this contract. This contingency contract can be adjusted to suit the situation at hand. The contract can be short and simple; elaborate documents are not necessary.

Administrators sometimes argue that this might take time away from the classroom and that time in the class is very important. However, so are behavior skills and getting along in society. Teachers need to take the time to develop relationships with their students because those relationships produce well-rounded citizens when they graduate.

Summary

Students who are empowered by their school experiences develop the ability, confidence, and motivation to succeed academically. They participate competently in academic areas and, as a result, develop appropriate types of attitudes towards school and life.

There are three considerations to help students become responsible and independent. The first consideration is language. To facilitate the acquisition of academic skills the student must be able to learn the materials in the language that is conducive to learning whether it be signs in English word order or American Sign Language.

The second consideration is the cross cultural perspective of recognizing deaf people as a minority group. There has been considerable research which suggests that for dominated minorities, the extent to which students' language and culture are incorporated into school programs constitutes a significant predictor of academic success (Campos, Keatinge, 1984; Cummins, 1983).

The final consideration in education is the extent to which the needs of children are being successfully met. This occurs when the teacher managing and controlling the behavior of each student has been successful and when the student has become responsible for managing his/her own behavior.

The writer uses the analogy of whole language to illustrate how behaviors should be treated. The philosophy of whole language is based on the total environment, not taking words or phrases out of context. Behaviors in school should also be treated in the environment in which they occur not in isolation. Taking the student out does not provide the skill-building and problem-solving abilities that reduce inappropriate behaviors.

Until educators and administrators are convinced that changes in the classroom are

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necessary, there will be no successful reform.

In order to reverse the pattern of wide-spread minority group educational failure, educators and policymakers are faced with both a personal and a political challenge. Personally, they must redefine their roles within the classroom, the community, and the broader society so that those role

definitions result in interactions that empower rather than disable students. Politically, they must attempt to persuade colleagues and decision-makers of the importance of redefining institutional goals so that the schools transform society by empowering minority students rather than reflect society by disabling them (Cummins, 1986).

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