

Illinois Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Conference

(Marta Laskus, Zainab Sheth, Veronica Grgin attended)

On March 3-4, 2017, we had the privilege of attending the Illinois Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing 53rd Annual Conference that was held at the Chicago Marriot in Naperville, Illinois.

Encapsulated below is a synopsis of the two keynote and eight breakout sessions that we attended throughout the conference.

Terri Patterson (Keynote) Invest, Interact, Influence (Laskus, Grgin, and Sheth attended):

Ms. Patterson is founder and former Executive Director of Georgia Hands and Voices, and the current Program Director for the Georgia Hands and Voices Guide By Your Side Program. Patterson's experiences were infused throughout her presentation with cutting-edge information with real-world applicability in relation to how DHH educators can invest, interact, and influence with students, parents, staff, and one another.

Invest: Patterson encouraged DHH educators to invest in building relationships with students, parents, other pertinent related staff members, etc. Displaying authentic appreciation and consistently treating others with respect will set the tone with how DHH educators interact with one another. Furthermore, Patterson stressed the fact, "You can't pour from an empty cup. Take care of yourself first." In the mix of heavy caseloads, class sizes, educational system demands, she discussed the importance of taking care of oneself to ensure at running at full capacity in the classroom.

Interact: Patterson encouraged DHH educators to have relevant engagement with others by valuing each and all perspectives, agreeing upon data sources that contribute to understanding the issues and committing to reaching a consensus. She emphasized collaboration amongst educators, parents, and related personnel.

Influence: Patterson reiterated the ITDHH Mission: To provide service and expertise to the educational community serving DHH individuals. She expounded upon how we can influence students, parents, educational staff, etc. for the betterment of our students.

#ALLinForMusicalFun (Breakout Session #1-Friday, March 3, 2017-Laskus, Grgin, and Sheth attended):

Jill McCue, a teacher and interpreter for the Northwestern Illinois Association Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program at Hampshire High School, developed memorocussion. Memorocussion utilizes percussion rhythms with the expectation that increasing the number of beats memorized will increase a child's memory span for letters, signs and word resulting in improved learning and language. McCue utilized a hand-on approach to her session, and attendees were able to create personal shakers and depart with a plethora of ideas how incorporate memorocussion within the classroom.

Addressing the Needs of Bilingual/Multilingual Deaf Students and Their Families

(Breakout Session #2-Laskus, Grgin, and Sheth attended):

Sara Jozwik and Christy Borders presented results from a national survey evaluating the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and needs of practitioners whose caseloads include English Language Learners (ELLs). Great emphasis was spent on how this particular study is currently being conducted. Across stakeholder groups, the following five instructional practices are utilized the most with great gains amongst ELLs: explicit, intensive instruction, visuals, cooperative learning, demonstrations/role-play, and building schema/background. These five strategies should consistently be implemented in a DHH classroom.

Recommendations for Working with Deaf Students with Disabilities (Breakout Session #3-Laskus, Grgin, and Sheth attended):

Christy Borders' and Stacey Jones Bock's presentation described the current population some DHH educators encounter, provided an overview of service provision, and discussed a guidance framework for professionals support students who are DHH with additional disabilities. Specific strategies were emphasized. When working with DHH students with additional disabilities, capitalization on classroom structure is imperative. A systematic approach to learning is also beneficial (i.e. most-to-least prompting, constant time delay, etc.). Resources were distributed where to locate evidence-based instructional practices.

How Closed Captioning Benefits Everyone (Breakout Session #4-Laskus, Grgin, and Sheth attended):

Sarah Kiefer, Deaf Education Coordinator of the Indiana State Department of Health Center For Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education, presented on the benefits of incorporating closed captioning when incorporating media within the classroom. According to Kiefer, captioning can be a multi-sensory approach to reading, a unique way to develop student vocabulary, and a tool to benefit reluctant readers. Phenomenal resources were given to attendees. Amara.org and dcmp.org were two of my favorites. Individuals can caption their own video-related material at amara.org. Dcmp.org offers a wide-range of already captioned instructional-related videos that most educators tend to incorporate into their classroom to supplement learning.

Dr. Christy Boarder: Find Your Seat (Keynote –Laskus, Grgin, and Sheth attended):

Dr. Boarder presented on the importance of collaboration between DHH educators and other educational professions. With research displaying an increased number of DHH students with additional disabilities, Boarder stressed the importance to collaborating with others to implement appropriate strategies to ensure academic growth. In alignment to her overall theme of: Find Your Seat, boarder stated that "If you are not at the table, you are most likely on the menu." Thus, she pleaded to strive to always to what is best for their students. At times, that means thinking outside of the box and seeking outside assistance from another perspective.

Exploring Assessments (Breakout Session #1-Laskus attended)

Emily Anderson and Lindsey Siegel presented on the use of formal and informal assessment in the DHH profession. A vast array of options were explored that could be utilized to gather data. Anderson and Siegel wanted attendees to understand the link between evaluation and instruction results in increased learning. The following auditory assessments were discussed in detail: TAPS-3 Test of Auditory Processing Skills, D-TAP: Developmental Test of Auditory Perception, FAPI: Functional Auditory Performance Indicators, APT/HI: Auditory Perception Test for the Hearing Impaired, Third Edition, and The Listening Comprehension Test 2. Additionally, the following language (receptive and expressive) assessments were discussed: OWLS: Oral and Written Language Scales, LPT-3: Language Processing Test 3, CASL-2:Comprehensive Assessment of Spoken Language, and EOWPVT-4/ROWPVT-4: Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test/Receptive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test. The following informal assessments were also reviewed: FLE: Functional Listening Evaluation, GAP Guide to Access Planning, Fatigue and Learning Scale, SIFTER: Screening instrument for targeting educational risk, and LIFE-R: Listening Inventory for Education-Revised.

Simple Language for Complex Topics (Breakout Session #1-Grgin and Sheth attended):

It was presented that parents typically get stuck on how their children have a hearing loss. When teachers are asked to discuss the audiogram, what the student can and cannot hear, teachers utilize medical terms that are not readily understood by parents. The audiologist gave different ways to explain various types of hearing loss, the levels of hearing loss, and how sound travels to the ear in terminology that is understood by parents.

A Framework to Accommodate the Unique Needs of HoH Students (Breakout Session #2-Laskus and Grgin attended):

Corey Axelrod, President of the Illinois Association of the Deaf, presented first hand observations of the differences between DHH students, including an analysis of the cultural identity issues hard of hearing students may encounter in the classroom. He discussed how DHH educators can best advocate for their students' needs during Individualized Education Program (IEP) development and implementation. He stressed the importance of considering each student's unique capabilities. Axelrod stated that "It is vital to remember that you cannot fit a square peg in a round hole." As the educational experts, he stressed that IEP meetings should provide the team with a 360-degree view of the student to determine the best course of action to take for student's educational journey. He discussed various resources that could be implemented into the classroom that could potentially assist with developing the students' personal cultural identity.

Deaf/Blind Interveners (Breakout Session #2-Sheth attended):

Michelle Clyne presented on the differences between DeafBlind interveners, paraprofessionals, and interpreters. Tools that educational teams could implement into the classroom were discussed. Training programs that prepared individuals for this type of specific credentialing and certification was also discussed to further prepare individuals who were interested in enhancing their skill-set.

Young Students All In With Hands-On Learning (Breakout Session #3-Laskus attended):

Raven Stromek, an Early Childhood teacher of the deaf at the Mid Valley Special Education Cooperative, presented activities, games, songs, projects, creations, thematic units, and resources that addressed language, literacy, math, science, social studies, hearing loss, and behavior. Stromek had attendees explore a variety of hands-on materials specifically designed and developed to keep early childhood learners engaged, motivated, and curious. Pictures, videos, and Stromek's self-created materials were displayed and demonstrated throughout the entire session. This was my favorite session of the entire conference. Currently, I am vacillating between earning my doctorate in early childhood, educational leadership, or special education. I am very intrigued with the research that is currently associated with young learners entering a structured learning environment for the first time. Thus, being able to take away new ideas that I could one day implement into an early childhood class, if given the opportunity to do so, was exceptionally-pleasing!

Fostering Healthy Identities (Breakout Session #3-Grgin attended):

Axelrod and Altmann presented how a healthy self-identity in children is paramount for long-term success. They were able to give real-life situations from their own personal experiences that would assist teachers in working with student in class. The presenter also provided effective techniques and strategies for educational professional to use to foster healthy deaf identity deaf identity development.

Rethinking the Speech Banana (Breakout Session #3-Sheth attended):

Christy Borders and Stefanie Gardiner-Walsh presented on the inherent oversimplifications in the speech banana, that DHH teachers typically reference to, that have led to critical misunderstandings amongst parents, teachers, and related staff members. The newest version of the speech banana was displayed and discussed at length. Borders and Gardiner-Walsh wanted attendees to re-learn speech acoustics that are present in the speech banana without the typical misrepresentations/misunderstandings.

Treasure Chest Continued: More Jewels (Breakout Session #4-Laskus, Grgin, and Sheth attended):

Shelley Strnad and Andrea Praught presented attendees with classroom ideas and resources for elementary age DHH students in the following areas: English Language Arts (phonics, spelling, vocabulary, writing, and reading), classroom management, Deaf Studies, math, and listening and speaking. Self-development materials were shared with the group, along with personally utilized Teacher Pay Teacher materials that provided students with academic growth. Specific learning strategies, such as Visual Phonics, were discussed. Strnad and Praught disseminated the gems that they have personally collected throughout their professional careers. They presented two opposing viewpoints. Strand favored the Teacher Pay Teacher site due to her hectic schedule and the site's time-saving capability. Praught, on the other hand, preferred to develop her own materials. As a financial conscious educator, she displayed various techniques that could be implemented within the classroom to keep students engaged throughout the learning process.

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We are extremely grateful for the opportunity to have attended the 53rd Annual Illinois Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Conference in Naperville, Illinois. We were able to gather a plethora of new techniques and strategies to implement in the DHH classroom. Keeping abreast of current evidence-based research, learning strategies, and related resources that will engage, empower, and enlighten DHH students is imperative. Thank you very much for fiscally supporting our professional growth and further enhancing the education toolbox we utilize on a daily basis!

-Marta Laskus, Zainab Sheth, Veronica Grgin, Teachers of the Hearing Impaired