

chapter 13

Disability Studies in Inclusive Education

Overview: Hearing impairment and curriculum adaptation

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Section learning outcomes

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- ✓ Reflect on experiences of children who are D/deaf or hard of hearing in an empathetic way.
- ✓ Understand the nature of hearing loss and its causes.
- ✓ Examine the effect of severe to profound hearing impairment on children who are D/deaf in the classroom.
- ✓ Identify barriers to learning experienced by learners who are D/deaf or hard of hearing.
- ✓ Explain the importance of human rights and policies for learners who are D/deaf or hard of hearing.
- ✓ Communicate effectively and respectfully with members of the D/deaf community by using appropriate terminology that reflects an understanding of their linguistic conventions, culture, perspectives, values, beliefs and experiences.
- ✓ Develop an understanding teaching strategies and accommodations that promote inclusive learning environments to address D/deaf students' difficulties with auditory processing, speech perception and language development.
- ✓ Apply teaching strategies for inclusive learning in their own educational context for learners who are D/deaf or hard of hearing.
- ✓ Describe advantages and disadvantages of different approaches to educating children who are D/deaf or hard of hearing.
- ✓ Analyse how the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can be used to create conducive learning environments for learners who are D/deaf or hard of hearing.

Introduction

In a situational analysis undertaken to inform teacher education in South Africa for children with severe disabilities (**McKenzie et al., 2018**), it was found that learners who are D/deaf or hard of hearing want to be taught by teachers who are proficient in sign language, specifically South African Sign Language (SASL). They would also like their teachers to be able to adapt the curriculum they are taught to cover the full range of subjects offered in the national curriculum, including language-based subjects that are seen to be “difficult” for learners who are D/deaf



or hard of hearing. But it is not only their academic needs that need to be attended to; learners also want their teachers to make an effort to get to know who their learners are and what their support needs may be.

In order for teachers to get to know their students, they need to be able to communicate effectively with them. This means that teachers need support in learning sign language – not just in once-off workshops, but also through ongoing support that is embedded within the curriculum and supported by the district education teams. While not all teachers will acquire sign language skills in an inclusive school, they should, at the very least, know how to work with sign language interpreters and advocate for their presence in classrooms where learners who are D/deaf or hard of hearing are taught. Teachers need to understand the best ways to work with learners who are D/deaf or hard of hearing, which means they need to understand what it is like to not have auditory information and to have to rely on other senses. This may require adapted teaching methodologies and learning environments that are enriched with accessible materials that can compensate for the lack of auditory information.

In this section, we will address the concerns of learners who are D/deaf or hard of hearing by discussing what learning at school is like for these children, how they perceive their world and how they would like to be supported. We will talk about the importance of hearing and acknowledging the experiences of children with disabilities and their families, and how curriculum needs to be adapted through UDL to meet their learning needs. We will also recognise the need for psychosocial support in both inclusive and special-school settings.

We will provide a brief overview of the nature of hearing loss; its causes and how it affects learners in the classroom; and make suggestions as to how the barriers they experience can be overcome through flexible teaching methods, as embodied in the UDL approach, as well as with the necessary individual support that might be needed. This will raise some questions about the different models for D/deaf education and their relative focus on using oral or sign language as methods of communication.

Before we start, I will share my personal perspective on what it is like to be part of the D/deaf community. You can also watch my video on “Understanding Deaf culture and community”.



WATCH: Understanding Deaf culture and community

Creator: Jabaar Mohamed

Date: 2021

Duration: 11 minutes



Insider view: Perspectives on education

In this extract, I share my personal perspective on what it is like to be part of the D/deaf community.

I am the only deaf member of my family. My siblings cannot sign, but they understand Deaf culture. Growing up deaf in the hearing world and in the deaf world is different. It is important for deaf children to have deaf role models and access to sign language. After university, I realised I had been using total communication (speaking and signing simultaneously) which is the wrong structure. I learnt the correct South African Sign Language (SASL) structure while socialising with the Deaf community. Now I know international sign languages and deafblind tactile sign language as well. SASL gives me full access to communication, unlike the hearing aids I have worn since age two.

I started signing at age seven, being taught by my peers at the deaf school. I previously attended an oral school to improve my speech. Most teachers were unable to sign, forcing us to speak. I failed repeatedly because my pronunciation was incorrect. Though, I passed school subjects because of their visual aspects. Maths was easy because it did not include spoken language, unlike English which was difficult. English became easier once we went on school outings and I could write essays based on my visual, real-life experiences.

In high school, we integrated with hearing schools, competing in debating competitions, which developed my self-confidence and sportsmanship. I was an avid learner; I wanted the same syllabus as the hearing schools. My dream of becoming the first deaf doctor was squashed because we could not choose our subjects. Some teachers were supportive, teaching us manners and professionalism. As a school youth leader, I learnt leadership and finance skills which help me with my career today.

After university, it was empowering working for a long-running adult literacy campaign teaching reading and writing to illiterate deaf people who had left school at a young age or had no access to schools. There are high rates of unemployment and low levels of education within the Deaf community. I believe it is possible to develop an educational institution for uneducated deaf people to improve their lives through education. To do so, both the hearing and Deaf communities must work together ensuring accessibility for the Deaf, access to good education and a better understanding of these needs.



REFLECTION

After reading my perspective on my personal circumstances, what are your thoughts on the experiences of members of your community who are D/deaf or hard of hearing and how they are able to communicate with others?

Reference

McKenzie, J., Kelly, J., & Shanda, N. (Eds.). (2018). *Starting where we are: Situational analysis of the educational needs of learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments in South Africa*. Disability Innovations Africa. <https://health.uct.ac.za/media/395032>

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