

Critical Review:
What Barriers Exist When Transitioning to Work or Post-Secondary Education Following High School?

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It is recognized that teenagers and young adults with hearing loss face challenges when transitioning to work or post-secondary education (Warick, 1994). In order to best support the transition process one needs to understand and know what barriers are being faced. The aim of this paper is to investigate what possible factors may limit the transition of today's youth towards successful integration within the workforce or in post secondary education. Overall, the studies provided a description of some of the physical and perceptual barriers experienced by hearing impaired youth. Investigating this question will help inform further research and clinical practice towards developing strategies and support services.

Introduction

Hearing loss (HL) is an invisible disability (Brookhouser, 1996). As such, people with HL tend to be treated and viewed the same as the normal hearing population (Warick, 1994). However, hearing loss impacts the way one connects and communicates with other people and the world around them. Therefore, due to the nature of the disability, individuals with HL encounter different experiences than the normal hearing population (Warick, 1994). This raises a particular dilemma for teenagers and young adults with HL.

In the current educational context, youth with various degrees of HL (i.e. mild to profound) and are also oral communicators, are being taught in regular classes (Punch, Creed, & Hyde, 2005). This means they rely on their residual hearing supplemented with speech reading and possibly hearing instruments, while at the same time learning with their normal hearing peers (Punch, Creed, & Hyde, 2005). As previously stated, despite being in the same environment people with hearing loss may encounter the experience differently. This especially holds true for those being mainstreamed in school. From kindergarten to high school some school boards, government run agencies, clinicians, and parents ensure to the best of their ability that students with hearing loss have accessibility to support services.

Studies selected for the inclusion in this critical review were North American, Eastern European, and Australian findings. This criterion was used because relevant information from a cultural context was desired. Additionally, articles that specifically discussed difficulties or barriers were examined.

Data Collection

Results of the literature search yielded the following types of articles congruent with the aforementioned selection criteria: (3) survey based (2) qualitative

Results

HIGH SCHOOL vs. POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Warick (1994) created a large-scale survey to question Canadian youth about their current educational experiences, in relation to their hearing loss. For the purpose of this study, the target population was defined as being between the ages of thirteen and twenty-five, have hearing loss, and rely on oral means of communication.

The survey was developed in consultation with members of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA), a national consumer group. The completed survey was then field tested and distributed nationally through CHHA's magazine,

Lecturers were not the only complaint within the realm of the classroom. Participants also stated that they had difficulty hearing classmates and staff. This was predominantly difficult during group discussions. Furthermore, an identified problem area for the participants was listening to slide shows, films that were not captioned, and tape-recorders.

While these results are somewhat outdated the above issues expressed could easily be difficulties that exist in the classroom today. While some of the findings did suggest that some students with hearing loss are coping well in both high school and PSE settings, over all the participants are encountering difficulties associated with their hearing loss.

CAREER BARRIERS

Punch, Creed, and Hyde (2006) examined perceived career barriers of 65 high school students with various degrees of hearing loss. They contended that examining career

Working in groups was also a perceived challenge, more specifically when trying to follow a conversation. The need to incorporate active speechreading made discussion fatiguing, difficult, and not enjoyable. This barrier impacts both formal (i.e. meetings) and informal (i.e. social gatherings) aspects of a vocational setting. While there are technological and communicative strategies that can be used to compensate for the difficulties few participants were aware of them.

Finally, students indicated that they had ruled out some career choices because of their hearing loss. However,

However, students with hearing loss face additional difficulties. The above findings clearly demonstrate that these individuals experience a large spectrum of challenges, perceptually and physically. As such, encountered environmental and attitudinal barriers can impede their success.

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Attitudes, accommodations, and accessibility appear to be three main barriers that students in the above studies discussed. With respect to attitudes, students encountered or feared they would encounter hostile and negative attitudes from lecturers, staff, students, and employers. They believed that these individuals lacked an understanding and knowledge with regards to the functional effects of hearing loss. They also feared the number of incidents they would encounter with new people who would not take into account the implications of their hearing loss. This concern reflects the reality they will face as they transition from high school. As their status changes they will no longer be provided with the same support as in secondary education, therefore they need to advocate for themselves.

Many students described difficulties with following conversations in groups and in difficult listening situations. The need to speechread to supplement hearing often made conversations hard and not enjoyable. Participants expressed feelings of frustration and described “giving up” on the task. Furthermore, some students ruled out careers of interest because they felt employers would not be accommodating. It is important to recognize that many of these participants did not explore work options in the field of their interest. It appears that they were unaware of the ways in which workplace accommodations sometimes can decrease the hearing difficulties they may encounter.

Consideration is rarely given that students with HL are being deprived of access to the full spectrum of PSE or work life. Isolation or not successfully transitioning may be key factors in academic or career achievement. While there are further strategies that can be used in difficult situations, participants frequently seemed unaware of them or did not have financial access to them. For instance, in the first study the most commonly used resource in high school, an itinerant teacher, was not even available for PSE students. If access to the devices and strategies that assist in this area are limited then students with hearing loss are at a disadvantage in comparison to their normal hearing peers.

More information is needed in order to truly be aware of the barriers encountered when transitioning from high school. There is no available research that

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