

# Deaf ≠ Silenced: Serving the Needs of the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing Students in School Libraries

Feature

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by Kimberly Gangwish, October 2015

**A**lthough the number of students who are deaf/hard-of-hearing (HoH) may be small within a single school or district, the unique learning needs of this population cannot be ignored. To ensure that students who are deaf/HoH have the same access as hearing students to resources and programming designed to meet their learning needs, school librarians must consider the needs of these students in all aspects of library services.

Equitable access means that *all*—not some—students have the right to become educated and information literate. A Common Belief of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) *Standards for the 21st Century Learner in Action* is that "equitable access is a key component for education" (2009, 11). But in many cases, "equitable" is considered in terms of funding or technology. Equitable access is more than that; it requires that all students have equal opportunity to learn. School librarians have a responsibility to support successful learning for every student, preparing each for the information-rich world in which they will study and work

Approximately two to three out of 1,000 children are born in the United States with hearing loss and one in eight people aged twelve and older suffers loss in both ears (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders 2015). According to the Center for Hearing and Communication, "15% of children between the ages of 6-19 have a measurable hearing loss in at least one ear" and "approximately 3 million children in the U.S. have a hearing loss." There are four key areas in which the work of school librarians can result in better access and learning opportunities for this population of students:

## Did you know?

There are comic books featuring deaf characters? Marvel Comics recently published Issue 19 in the *Hawkeye* series, which features a deaf character and uses sign language throughout the comic book. Other Marvel characters include Maya, who appears as "Echo" in the *Daredevil* series and as "Ronin" in *New Avengers*. Maya is deaf, and she is also portrayed as gifted and strong. Titles such as these can increase the interest levels of students who are deaf/HoH.

1. First, school librarians need to consider students who are deaf/HoH in their collection development decisions.
2. The implementation and use of technology can also help provide equitable access for these students.
3. School librarians can consider how they teach and incorporate instructional strategies that meet the learning needs of the deaf/HoH more effectively.
4. Finally, school librarians need to become leaders in their schools and districts about services, materials, and teaching methods for students who are deaf/HoH.

## Collection Development

Students should be able to see themselves and their lives reflected in a school library collection. Most school libraries have materials related to diverse cultures and groups of people. But would a student who is deaf/HoH find materials relevant to his or her life and challenges? Does the collection have books—both fiction and nonfiction—featuring deaf characters, authors, and issues? As school librarians develop their library collections, they can include books that reflect the lives of students who are deaf/HoH. In young adult fiction, this might mean books with deaf characters, such as *Strong Deaf* by Lynn McElfresh, *Hurt Go Happy* by Ginny Rorby, or *Wonderstruck* by Brian Selznick. In nonfiction, consider adding books that deal with deaf issues and culture, such as *Angels and Outcasts: An Anthology of Deaf Characters in Literature* by Trent Batson and Eugene Bergman or *Train Go Sorry: Inside a Deaf World* by Leah Hager Cohen. Book lists featuring deaf characters, authors, and culture can be found from several sources. Resources from the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center of Gallaudet University and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) are great starting points. Also consider adding audio books to the collection for those students who benefit from amplification

devices.

## **Technology**

Technology can be used to ease the frustration levels of struggling students, especially the deaf/HoH. These students may be challenged by learning and/or reading comprehension difficulties and may become frustrated with trying to learn in a hearing environment. Consider using technology tools to facilitate the learning of students who are deaf/HoH. For example, teach students to use features of research databases to support their individual needs, including searching by reading level or using visual search methods. Access to information at the appropriate reading level is a critical component in providing equal opportunity for classroom success.

Closed-caption technology can also benefit students who are deaf/HoH. An easy way to provide this is the closed-captioning service of YouTube. When searching in YouTube, look for the closed-captioned symbol in the description for videos. Do you use school- or teacher-created videos? YouTube can help add closed-captioning to those as well. Create a YouTube account and upload the videos to the account. Then in Video Manager, edit videos to include subtitles/closed captioning. Although the translation is not always perfect, it does offer another opportunity to provide information to students who are deaf/HoH in a familiar format. A step-by-step guide is available on YouTube.

## **Instructional Strategies**

Think about how you instruct students, and whether you take into consideration students who are deaf/HoH. When I analyzed my own teaching style in relation to students who are deaf/HoH, I realized that what I do is designed to meet the needs of my hearing students—not my students who are deaf/HoH. For example, I use a projected image to show what I'm teaching, I verbalize the content, and I tend to walk around the area, all at the same time. The only item of benefit to students who are deaf/HoH is the projected image. Even if a student who is deaf/HoH reads lips, when an instructor moves around the room, the student either has to choose to focus on the screen or the teacher. Add in the possibility that they may also have an interpreter to watch, and the frustration level likely increases and the opportunity for learning decreases.

How can school librarians address this? Provide alternatives to allow these students to access the same content in multiple ways. Develop handouts with screen shots and clear instructions concerning the lesson. Allow opportunities for learning independently and at students' own pace.

Challenge yourself to develop videos created with both closed-captioning and American Sign Language interpretation. These videos offer students who are deaf/HoH visual support and interpretation, which is helpful for students whose reading comprehension may make the use of closed-captioning alone difficult. iMovie is one program that allows the creation of these videos using the subtitle and picture-in-picture steps. A step-by-step guide for this process can be found on the Apple website.

## **Leadership in the School**

School librarians should become leaders in their schools and districts to support the needs of students who are deaf/HoH, as well as to provide professional development for teachers and administrators. School librarians are in the unique position of being able to work with every curricular area in their school. This provides the opportunity to inform other teachers about the unique needs of these students, to introduce library resources that support their needs, and to share strategies that work in different class settings. Along with special education teachers or specialists, school librarians can learn about strategies and then model and guide other staff members in effective methods of teaching students who are deaf/HoH. School librarians can also help to inform the student population about deaf/HoH culture through books, information, dialog, and programming.

Equitable access means that every student has the right to materials and instruction that meet their needs. Addressing collection development, technology use, and instructional strategies will allow school librarians to better meet the needs of all students, including students who are deaf/HoH. School library standards demand equal access and opportunity for all students. In order to provide that access across the school, school librarians need to become leaders in their schools and districts in providing effective methods of teaching and interacting with students who are deaf/HoH.

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#### **Additional Resources**

Bill of Rights for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children <http://nad.org/issues/education/k-12/bill-of-rights>

Education Rights for Deaf Children <http://wfdeaf.org/databank/policies/education-rights-for-deaf-children>

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