Transcript – Deafness, self-esteem, and the inclusive classroom

Mary V. Compton, Ph.D. (00:09)

There are a number of ways in which a teacher can reinforce a deaf student’s self image. I think making the student feel included as part of the classroom. For example, if you have — if you’re going to develop an activity, a group activity or a cooperative learning activity — you might want to pair that deaf student with a student who they already some good social relationships with, who can maybe sometimes even be that child’s, that student’s peer tutor. That can be helpful.

Martha Overman (00:38)

In the classroom I used to work in last year, in the kindergarten classroom, we had a teacher who was really good about, she taught the whole class signs. I mean, we always had a sign of the week, and when we would learn our word-wall words she would always teach them the sign for the word, so she did a lot. We had several songs that when the kids were learning the songs, she would sign the songs. So I think it made it really neat for that student. And all the kids would always want to be that student’s partner whenever they would do stuff and they would always want to show them the signs. It’s really cute when you’re young, because they do learn a few signs and they always want to walk up to the deaf student and sign. They’ll just sign “book,” or whatever, in front of them, it doesn’t really make any sense to what they’re talking about, but they’re just so excited that they’ve learned some signs that they think they can communicate with them, so it’s been great.

Kathy Metzer [in classroom to students] (01:33)

Very good both of you, your reading is wonderful today, wow!

Mary V. Compton, Ph.D. (01:39)

I think also by praising the child for his or her work efforts, and I’m talking about genuine praise, like, one thing you could say is “Oh you must be so pleased because you made such a terrific grade on that science test.” And that way the child sort of strokes themselves, “well, yes, I am very pleased with myself.” Rather than constantly making evaluative judgments, such as, like, “Good job,” which I think is over-used anyway. But I think to let the child know that you care about their interests. For example, maybe, at the beginning of the year to do like an interest inventory, and let the student fill that out. And then show the student, by capitalizing on some of those interests, by mentioning some of those interests, with other classroom students, to say, “Oh, and Darlene, your family does dah-dah-dah-dah-dah, and that is related to this,” and so to mention the student by name a lot. And I think to sort of to give the child some nonverbal facial expressions of positiveness. I think hearing — we who are hearing sometimes forget how important our nonverbal facial expressions are to giving someone positive reinforcement.

Kathy Metzer (02:53)

I think the regular classroom teacher can really help a deaf student’s self image by calling on them, by talking directly to them, by giving them the same expectations, the same jobs that she would give the hearing children. When they’re younger, everybody gets a little job, they can be line leader, they can help with different things, then that needs to be something the deaf child does.

Ms. Dixon [in classroom] (03:30)

Your group designated a person to share, so we’re going to go around and have a little closure by having each group to share what their group’s slogan is, and tell us a little bit about, let us see your billboard first, and then we’d like for you to share and convey your message.

Student [interpreted by interpreter] (03:52)

Our slogan is "Don’t litter and don’t pollute."

Kathy Metzer (03:57)

Even, we’ve had in the past, a teacher that will let the deaf student teach the class the signs. But not to be hesitant to call on that deaf student or have them come up and read their report or share with the class. And that’s where, I think they begin to believe, "I can do this." Because you do see them, they are really proud, of "I was able to teach my table, or teach the whole class something," so, I really think that’s the important piece. If even the teachers themselves try to learn signs, and talk to the students, that increases their self esteem, in that my teacher cares enough to learn some signs. But we have to remember, she also has twenty-some other students in her classroom. Here at our school we have a lot of support from the administration, and we really have a lot of support from the teachers. We are — we have a sign language club that’s offered to hearing and the deaf students, after school once a week. The parents, they have to fill out a form at the beginning of the year that they have to come and pick their child up at 3:30, and two years ago when we started it again, I don’t think we were ready for the excitement — we had 160 students sign up, so we had to to divide them.

Martha Overman (05:39)

It was amazing the first year we started it, I think our school was only about 400 students, and we had about 150 students sign up for the sign language club that met after school, and parents had to agree to say, "I’ll come and pick my child up, and provide transportation," but it was amazing to see the number of students that were really excited and involved. The students had really been excited and really wanted to learn how to communicate with the deaf students, and I think it’s been great for the deaf students to see that people are interested.

Kathy Metzer (06:14)

We do try to have special times during the year that we select some of the hearing students that have consistently come to sign language club, and they will, like, sign the pledge at PTA, or we have awards once a quarter, so at the end of this quarter, we have picked some students that get to sign the pledge and the school promise at the awards ceremony. They want to learn, and then they want to communicate with the deaf student that’s in their classroom. And it’s interesting: The classes who have had a deaf student in their for five years, the fifth grade classroom, there are students in there who are really great signers, because they really have taken an interest in it. They’ll see the deaf kids, and they’re not hesitant to say “hey,” or try to talk to them.

[classroom chatter, hearing child signing to deaf child]

Kathy Metzer (07:29)

At lunch, the deaf students can sit with their class, or if, by chance, maybe two deaf students maybe eat lunch at the same time, the administration has given permission that they can sit at a center table if they want to eat together, so that they can talk. But often they want to sit with their class because they want to talk to their buddies.

Mary V. Compton, Ph.D. (07:54)

Another way to help improve a deaf student’s self-image is to make sure you have collaborative relationships with parents and families, which sometimes is easier said than done, and you have to be somewhat persistant. But I think all families want to see their student succeed, and I think if you reach out to the families, perhaps by — I know that some teachers in elementary schools do, maybe they make a video of a child giving a presentation or some activity that the child has had an important and successful role in. Make a video of that, send that video home, and then the child can share his or her accomplishments with perhaps the extended family. One way that’s very good to collaborate with families is through email now, with the technology that makes the communication more accessible, because many parents have work schedules that prevent them from coming to school events. Maybe create your own web page for your students and your classroom, and have them post things to that to share the student’s accomplishments, that can really help a student’s self image immeasurably.

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