

Making Inclusion Work

My name is Catherine Davis, and I have been a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing in the Blue Valley School District in Overland Park, Kansas, for four years. The first year, I worked as an itinerant deaf education teacher serving six schools. Then I was lucky enough to get to start a center-based resource room program in a brand-new elementary school. There I teach preschool through fifth-grade students whose IEP teams have decided that due to the educational impact of their hearing loss—often accompanied by additional disabilities such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and/or cognitive, motor, and/or vision impairments—they would be best served in this program rather than in their neighborhood school. My students spend the majority of their day in the general education classroom but come to me for academic support as well as auditory training, speechreading, and sign language instruction.

I grew up in a small Midwest town where there was not a lot of diversity. One boy in my high school was deaf, and I watched the other kids tease him, thinking he couldn't understand what they were saying because he couldn't hear them. He could. I decided to become his friend, learned to sign, and eventually started tutoring him. Thus, my love of teaching, combined with an interest in deafness and signing, began. After graduating from high school in 1992, I attended an interpreter-training program at the University of Kansas. Seeking to utilize my skills and have an adventure at the same time, I set out for Homer, Alaska, where I accepted a job interpreting for two Native Alaskan students. Miles from home, I encountered beauty and adventure, but also a challenge for which I was definitely unprepared. The two students with whom I worked had multiple disabilities and needed significant support. Unfortunately, the itinerant teacher was not always there to provide this support. Even though I loved Alaska and my job, this experience solidified my desire to teach, and I knew I needed more training. So after a year, I returned to

Kansas. I completed a BS in elementary education and an MS in deaf education, and I am now in my final year of my PhD in special education with a focus on deaf education.

Inclusive Education Experience

The group of kids that I currently work with is truly representative of the type of caseload that a future teacher of the deaf can expect to have. My students are as different as can be. I have one first grader who has a cochlear implant and communicates solely through sign language and another first-grade student who is hard of hearing, wears hearing aids, and uses an FM system. She is oral but learning to sign. A second-grade student has multiple disabilities including ADHD, aphasia, and vision loss. She wears hearing aids and an FM system, and uses both verbal and sign language. The fifth grader I teach has a severe hearing loss, wears hearing aids, uses an FM system, and also has multiple disabilities including motor, cognitive, and vision impairments. Her predominant mode of communication is oral.

At the beginning of every year, I do an in-service for the entire staff in order to provide suggestions for working with students with a hearing loss. I also go into the general education classrooms and do lessons with all of the students explaining hearing loss, sign language, and Deaf culture. Often these lessons occur only with the classroom teacher or the special education teachers. However, I believe the whole school needs to be educated to really ensure that my students are fully included. I find that the more people know, the less apprehensive they are to interact with these kids. I let them try on hearing aids, listen to an FM system, watch a video on cochlear implants, learn some sign language, and even try to take a spelling test by reading lips to simulate what it might be like for students with a hearing loss.