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Mainstreaming Hearing Impaired Students into Cooperative Education and Book Review

Barry S. Davidson

Director of Cooperative Education at East Carolina University, N.C.

Leanord M. Ernset

Director of the Program for Hearing-Impaired Students at East Carolina University N.C.

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MAINSTREAMING HEARING IMPAIRED STUDENTS INTO COOPERATIVE EDUCATION

Barry S. Davidson
Leonard M. Ernest

Introduction

In the past there has been a lack of professional documentation of the development and implementation of legislative regulations on handicapped programming in Higher Education. Educational institutions are faced with analyzing current programming and directing their energies toward this set of issues while raising the consciousness level of faculty, staff, and students. The main focus of this article will be on hearing impaired students who traditionally have been isolated and under-represented in the general student body on our college campuses. Cooperative Education programs, which have traditionally been available to non-handicapped students, may be an excellent avenue for hearing-impaired students bridging the gap between the academic world and the world of work experiences.

What is Cooperative Education?

Cooperative education is a program integrating classroom theory with on-the-job practical experience in which undergraduate and graduate students alternate specific periods of academic study with periods of off-campus public or private employment. Most institutions of higher learning offer this "learning while earning" career education combination provided that it is related to the student's academic concentration within the field of study or that it is career affiliated. The

number of postsecondary institutions with fully operational or actively planned cooperative education programs in the United States is over 1,100. This figure includes two-year and four-year public and private technical institutes, community colleges, colleges, and universities.

The East Carolina University Cooperative Education Program exists as a working relationship in which students, faculty, and staff combine with employment professionals in a systematically organized manner which provides benefits to all parties. Cooperative education is not affiliated with any special department or curriculum but seeks instead to work with the total University community.

The Office of Cooperative Education at East Carolina University requires participants to complete a specified series of academic courses and work experiences. This work experience may begin on a part-time basis while the student is taking classes or follow the conventional pattern of alternating semesters. The employment experience is evaluated by the institution, the employer, and the student. In most instances, work experiences are preceded by a formal meeting between the student, co-op coordinator, faculty advisor, and the employer. Learning contracts and objectives are usually constructed at this time. In this way, each student's work schedule is individualized to meet their needs while insuring

Barry S. Davidson, was, at the time of the article, Acting Director of Cooperative Education at East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

Leonard M. Ernest is Director of the Program for Hearing-Impaired Students at East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

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maximum personal benefits.

Co-op at ECU comprises several models of work and study. The questions of credit or non-credit, number, scheduling, and duration of training assignments are all individually planned for each student. Students seek credit through their individual academic departments while negotiating the rate of pay with the employer. A student may work without financial remuneration for a social welfare or educational organization. The final employment decision rests with the individual agency or firm.

Placements for each student may be with a single employer, who increases responsibilities as the student progresses, or with several employers. Some students choose a combination of the plans. The Office of Cooperative Education considers all work models in supporting co-op students as they advance toward a degree.

Student advantages and benefits of Cooperative education include, but are not limited, to:

1. Furnishes students, as early as the freshman year, the opportunity to explore a number of career choices before making long term commitments.
2. Provides persons who have decided on a major field of study the opportunity to explore and test that concentration in depth by being employed in a career related field almost two years, if desired.
3. Aids in determining if students have made the proper selection about an appropriate career.
4. Allows learners to modify their career goals by testing their work ideas.
5. Encourages the student to become more aware of human interactions, work resources, and internal organization operations in an actual work setting.
6. Promotes the occasions to apply classroom theories and perceptions in a work milieu.
7. Makes facilities and equipment available to students that are not accessible on the campus.
8. Advances the opportunity to help supplement the financial resources for his/her college education.
9. Helps individuals gain practical first-hand career-related professional experience, while developing needed skills and habits which aid in resumé building for job placement.
10. Allows the student to accumulate professional experience while making employment contacts which may lead to permanent employment.
11. Supports co-op participants in justifying higher entry-level salary with increased responsibilities after graduation.
12. Bolsters students toward becoming more mature, self-confident, responsible, and conscientious.

In many cases the cooperative education work experience has increased the reality and relevancy of a student's academic program, providing for improved motivation and understanding of the real world work ethic.

What is Mainstreaming In Education?

Mainstreaming of handicapped students has been an active issue of concern at East Carolina University since 1977, and subsequently has been explained and defined in various ways. At East Carolina University, the Office of Cooperative Education, in conjunction with the Program for Hearing Impaired Students, views mainstreaming as the process of integrating hearing-impaired students into the total University community.

Cooperative Education provides hearing impaired students the opportunity to alternate periods of campus study with off-campus career related work experience. The least restrictive doctrine as applied to cooperative education means placing the physically and sensorily impaired in career related on the job training assignments. Co-op placements provide employers and the hearing impaired students' fellow employees with an opportunity to evaluate their own attitudes toward handicapped people and to examine society's pre-determined values and expectations of

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handicapped groups.

Some educators feel there is too much emphasis on the hearing impaired student being different and not enough positive emphasis on what the individual can really do. Others fear mainstreaming and the competitiveness of our aggressive society will overwhelm the deaf student's ability to cope with the real world. Sapon-Shevin (1978) relates that the question of competition and social stratification as a dominant theme in American education, as a microcosm of society, needs to be studied and evaluated.

The Office of Cooperative Education at East Carolina University has been active in developing job placements for hearing-impaired students in private, Federal, and state agencies. The Co-op Office is committed to aiding the University in its compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. In compliance with the law, the Co-op Office has served to aid in the integration of hearing impaired students into the mainstream work force, helping insure the rights of all handicapped students to appropriate career related work experiences.

The co-op coordinators have been working in close liaison with the Director of the Program for Hearing Impaired Students in their efforts to make the co-op program equally accessible to hearing and deaf students. The program for hearing impaired students has been coordinating interpreter services for interviews, placement, and follow-up. Rockoff (1979) holds that mainstreaming is a team effort requiring a positive attitude and a realization that mainstreamed deaf students happen only to have a few more needs than their peers.

Cooperative education is effective as an aid in mainstreaming because it helps relieve the apprehensiveness and preconceived ideas many employers and shop managers have when contemplating a hearing impaired person for employment. The integration and assimilation of the deaf student into society is increased when the cooperative education coordinators, in conjunction with other ancillary personnel, help tailor each student's off-campus work experience schedule while meeting employer

demands. The Office of Cooperative Education coordinates the faculty, interpreters, and support staff to make on-site visits with the employers. Written evaluations are prepared to provide continuous assessment of work progress. Hopefully, hearing impaired students will have the same opportunities to develop their skills and talents while interacting within a work force which is predominantly hearing.

Although we are concerned with adaptability in regard to work site modifications (e.g., visual warnings such as flashing lights or special telecommunication devices) for the hearing-impaired, our emphasis is more on the humanistic concerns of providing service to the total University handicapped community. By focusing on humanism in education we are keeping the channels of communication open and constantly reviewing the needs of each individual student for practical training. We are aware of the needs of each student and try not to emphasize the loss of hearing itself. The opportunities for mainstreaming hearing impaired students is limitless, yet job development is a very long and time consuming process. We must continue to strive to eliminate communication and employment barriers.

Cooperative Education has been a valuable aid in bridging the communication gap between employers and the deaf community. At East Carolina University, hearing-impaired students have been included in the social structure of the cooperative education student advisory committee. Silver (1974), in his article on serving the deaf client, cites the effectiveness of the cooperative education program's ability to aid hard of hearing persons in seeking work experience. Co-op helps in emphasizing social skills, association with hearing colleagues, job responsibility, a chance for personal growth and development in social and work relationships, and daily interactions with the hearing world.

Cooperative Education and The Hearing Impaired

More than 15 million Americans have hearing impairments ranging from mild to profound levels. Of that number more than 2½

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million have hearing losses severe enough to be considered deaf. Many hearing impaired persons achieve individual success in life and in the fields of business, law, science, education, and in a wide variety of skilled and semi-skilled employment, when given the opportunity. However, there is often a misunderstanding by the general public of the abilities of hearing-impaired persons because of the lack of communication skills which may accompany hearing loss.

It is not only the fact that hearing impaired persons lack communication skills which cause employment handicaps. The greatest fear of many employers and supervisors when considering the employment of a hearing impaired person is that they, themselves, will not be able to communicate with the deaf employee. However, experience in job placement indicates that many deaf persons are able to communicate adequately with hearing persons and supervisors by lipreading, writing notes, or using gestures and signs appropriate to the work area. The manual alphabet, or fingerspelling, may be easily learned and used in communication with deaf employees by co-workers. This invariably reduces the difficulty of social isolation for deaf employees.

Cooperative Education Programs provide a unique opportunity for post-secondary students to become involved in the private and public business sector. Through the work experience of co-op placement, hearing-impaired students can transfer the theory of classroom instruction to actual business experience. An actuarial table may be only a one-dimensional graph in a textbook, but it becomes a useful instrument in business management, and therefore a meaningful part of work experience.

In many ways, hearing impaired students learn and synthesize through visual experience. Textbook descriptions of internal office interactions may be difficult to see in a classroom where the primary association is student to instructor. During co-op experience the hearing-impaired student is in the center of the multiple relationships that exist within an office or business. Interactions between and among employees and supervisors are seen on

a daily basis by the co-op student and the opportunity is afforded for the hearing-impaired student to develop his/her own personal and employment relationships. This allows many opportunities for personal growth and confidence building in the hearing-impaired co-op student.

Special Cooperative Education advantages for hearing impaired students are that it:

1. Allows the student an opportunity to "learn by doing" and to transfer classroom theory to practical work experience.
2. Teaches time management, accountability, punctuality, and performance goal setting.
3. Helps the individual gain self-confidence and develop a positive attitude toward work.
4. Increases self recognition of work potential and positive employment habits.
5. Provides career direction through first-hand knowledge of employer expectations.
6. Makes more apparent the values of financial remuneration.
7. Leads to increased contact with the predominant hearing population, while increasing social adjustment skills and interpersonal relationships.
8. Provides the opportunity to improve communication and interaction skills with fellow employees and employers.
9. Reduces the isolation of hearing-impaired persons within an organizational setting.
10. Helps to eliminate misunderstandings and misconceptions about the abilities of handicapped persons by the general public and the business community.
11. Expands the opportunities for handicapped persons to fill employment positions for which they have previously not been considered.

Cooperative Education provides the opportunity for post-secondary deaf students to gain interpersonal skills and self-confidence through actual work experience. Successful placements in industry, government, and

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business may provide a means to reverse the history of underemployment of the hearing-impaired and dispel general misconceptions about employment of handicapped persons.

In February, 1979, the two largest post-secondary institutions for the deaf, Gallaudet College and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, were instrumental in developing a nationwide consortium of institutions which have cooperative education programs for the hearing impaired. The purpose of the consortium is to coordinate co-op job development and placement efforts for post-secondary deaf students. Now in its beginning stages, a centralized job bank service is aiding participating institutions by pooling job information and other services which accommodate hearing-impaired students. By identifying employers who have had excellent rapport with handicapped employees, positive role models are readily available. These human interactions and employment experiences greatly aid in the maturation of the hearing impaired students and in achievement of their personal goals.

In a nationwide survey of fifty-one post-secondary institutions with hearing impaired programs conducted by Nissen and Elliott (1978), only four four-year colleges among the thirty-five respondents had active co-op programs for deaf students. These schools were East Carolina University, Gallaudet College, Madonna College, and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf. East Carolina University was the lone state supported institution in this group. It was reported that thirteen two-year schools had active programs. Five four-year state supported colleges (East Central State University, Northern Illinois University, University of Arizona, University of Maryland, and Utah State University) are developing or anticipate developing a work experience program for deaf students in the near future.

The directory compiled by Nissen and Elliott listed twelve two-year schools and one preparatory college in Canada in the active planning stages of setting up work experience programs for hearing impaired students.

Conclusion

Although cooperative education should not be viewed as the panacea for meeting all the special and unique work needs of handicapped students, the following practical suggestions are recommended for those co-op programs that are interested in expanding their scope of operations to include placing hearing impaired students:

1. Empirical research should be undertaken by each institution with regard to utilizing handicapped students on cooperative education work assignments.
2. It is recommended that training seminars, in interviewing techniques of relating to hearing impaired students, for employers and coordinators be conducted and that the use of ancillary personnel and support services for hearing impaired students be discussed.
3. It is suggested that coordinators as well as deaf students be involved in developing and modifying goals and objectives in their specific areas of work assignments.
4. A cooperative education club where all hearing impaired students can share experiences through an interpreter is imperative.
5. Further research in cooperative education is recommended for exploring the role of off-campus work experience in improvement of handicapped student retention and morale.

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BOOK REVIEW

Review Editor, Frank R. Zieziula, Ph.D.

LIVING WITH DEAF-BLINDNESS: NINE PROFILES

Carol Yoken

Washington, D.C.: The National Academy of Gallaudet College, 1979.

175 pp., \$9.50 (clothbound), \$6.50 (paperback).

This book is the product of extensive research and a series of interviews with each of the book's subjects ranging in length from 12 to nearly 40 hours. The result is an in-depth portrayal of nine lives of individuals with highly varied backgrounds as well as of persons who are deaf and blind as the result of different causes. At the outset, I recommend this book to anyone who is interested in people, period.

Carol Yoken has chosen a remarkably effective approach toward providing a basis for helping the reader to gain some insight into what it means to be deaf and then to lose vision; to have a severe visual impairment and

then to lose hearing; to have normal vision and hearing and then to lose vision and, subsequently, hearing; to have normal vision and hearing and then to suddenly lose both.

Each of the profiles in the book is personal. The feelings, the personalities of the individuals come through clearly. This reviewer cannot help but compliment the degree of perspicacity Carol Yoken's work demonstrates her to have. The book would serve well as a casebook for students or practitioners in the field, but more than that, it is a book for all people who are interested in people.

Glenn T. Lloyd, Ed.D.
Lenoir-Rhyne College