Strategies for Learning and Teaching

Teachers should note that the Visiting Teacher Service for children and young people with a hearing impairment supports parents/guardians, teachers and other professionals involved with the student.
http://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Visiting-Teacher-Service

Accessing the curriculum involves modifying the acoustic/physical environment and the linguistic/communication environment.

Modifying the acoustic/physical environment

- Ensure appropriate and consistent use of hearing aids and assistive technology.
- Where necessary, utilise technological aides such as closed caption decoders, FM systems, sound field systems and silent overhead projectors.
- Check the best seating position. Seat the student close to the teacher in order that he/she may lip-read effectively. However, be aware of background noise, especially in relation to the child’s seating arrangements. Noisy overhead projectors and constantly running electrical items at the front of the class may prove distracting and annoying for the student.
- Seat the student away from the hum of projectors or computers.
- Do not stand with your back to the window as the light will affect the ability of the student to interpret facial cues and gestures. Standing in front of any light source will create shadows on the face, making speech reading difficult.
- Do not stand with your back to the student.
- During class discussions allow only one student to speak at a time and indicate where the speaker is. Pass around the classroom microphones to make class discussions more accessible for a deaf/hard of hearing child.
- If students are to be asked to work together, arrange the seating so that the students can see everyone by putting chairs in a circle or horseshoe shape.
- When other students answer, repeat their answers.
- Do not walk around the room when giving instructions.
Classrooms are noisy environments that create listening difficulties for all students, especially those with hearing loss. Look for minor changes or additions to a classroom that can reduce ambient noise and improve acoustics (e.g. acoustic ceiling tiles, carpeting, curtains for windows, double-glazed windows, elimination of background music, rubber tips on chair, table and desk legs, and avoidance of open-plan classrooms). Be aware that while soft furnishings will reduce background noise, heavy materials such as velvet will absorb high frequency sounds and so, can be counter-productive to the child with hearing loss.

Modifying the linguistic/communication environment

- Prepare students for the introduction of a new topic, perhaps by writing the title on the board. Pre-teaching of key vocabulary can be useful in preparing the child for new topics.
- Place a deliberate emphasis on the important instructions or keywords.
- Write on the whiteboard/blackboard/flipchart to support verbal instruction. Ensure your face is visible when talking; try not to talk when turned around to write on the board as the child may miss important information.
- Utilise visual cues to clarify what is said.
- Employ visual resources such as computer programmes/video tapes/DVDs/PowerPoint.
- Rephrase and repeat difficult words. Explain new or difficult words, then use them in another context before repeating again in the original sentence to support learning and new language acquisition.
- Pace oral lessons appropriately. Be aware that the child may tire more quickly than his/her peers and may benefit from short breaks.
- Speak clearly but naturally and at a moderate pace.
- Be aware that the student will find dictation difficult – supply photocopied notes where possible.
- Avoid over-pronunciation or exaggeration as this makes understanding more challenging.
- Modify text and simplify language where necessary.
- Use lively gestures and facial expressions when teaching.
- Short phrases are easier to understand than single words. Chunk information to assist memory and for revision purposes.
- Phrase questions to the student carefully and always get the student’s attention by saying his/her name beforehand.
- Avoid blocking visual access to face by hand movements/books.
- It is harder for a student to communicate with a bearded or bespectacled teacher as these can mask facial expressions.
- Give homework instructions only when class is quiet.
- Allow a friend to check that instructions and information are clear.
- Obtain feedback from the student at regular intervals without drawing too much attention to him/her.
- Consider providing notes prior to a lesson.
A ‘Buddy system’ can work well, especially in terms of note taking and peer support.
The student may find it difficult to communicate orally with classmates and it may be useful to explore the possibility of providing signing lessons for hearing peers.
Encourage social communication with classmates during curricular and extra-curricular activities.
Remember that students have to concentrate more in class than their peers with normal hearing, thus they may become tired more easily. Frequent breaks are essential.
Encourage students with hearing loss to identify their own strengths and needs. Students who can ask for assistance when necessary and proactively seek reasonable accommodations will serve themselves well in school and in their futures.
Teachers need to be sensitive to a student’s level of comfort with regard to self-advocacy and may need to give some children phrases or strategies to use during stressful times. (E.g. ‘Please repeat the last part of the directions.’; ‘There’s a lot of noise in the hallway, could you close the door please?’; and, ‘I missed what Mary just said. Could you repeat it please?’)
Encourage the child to repeat and/or explain the task that has been explained to ensure understanding before completion.

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