

The Transitional Instructional Program: Teaching Independence and Promoting Competence

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Introduction

The Transitional Instructional Program (TIP) at the Center On Deafness, established in 1986, focused upon the intent to provide multiple coordinated services to enhance opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing students to become eligible to enroll and successfully participate in post-secondary training opportunities which will lead to program completion and gainful employment. Subsumed within this broad goal is the intent to

...strengthen and reinforce the literacy foundation, so that it can underlie, rather than undermine, the whole bridge to self-sufficiency. Second is the need to enrich and expand the cluster of psychosocial, interactive, and informational experiences which lead to development of employability, independent living, and personal/social skills (Craig & Garrity, 1994).

The Problem

Information gathered from rehabilitation counselors for the deaf (RCDs) who work for the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation indicated a significant number of deaf and hard of hearing students exit secondary school programs ill-prepared academically, socially, emotionally, and behaviorally to manage the challenges and rigors of post-secondary training. Reports from counselors emphasized the fact that many students entering college or technical training programs after graduation from high school often fail to maintain standards of performance. Responses to an RCD survey showed consistency in identifying the following problems with deaf persons seeking rehabilitation support for training: passive program participation; lack of ability to establish realistic goals; problem-solving difficulties to include difficulty planning and selecting strategies for effective problem solution; impulsivity and age inappropriate response to internal or external stress; interpersonal relationship problems; and problems with representational thinking, including lack of ability to conduct 'if-then' thinking essential to problem solving (Loera, 1994). This frequently results in academic suspension or students 'dropping out' because they did not have the internal resources nor the knowledge to use existing external resources to manage post-secondary challenges and expectancies. Often students did not initiate productive and adaptive steps to resolve problems effectively to remain in a program.

Loera and Meichenbaum (1994) emphasize the importance to offer opportunities for deaf students to develop the metacognitive and self-regulatory skills needed to become more capable with adaptive self-directed problem management in school and at work. The students referred to the TIP frequently do not have the minimal acceptable reading comprehension and math computation/application skills to be accepted into a program. Additionally, students do not demonstrate the self-management skills (such as time management, study, planning, and organization skills) essential for competitive work in a post-secondary program.

This problem is not unique to deaf and hard of hearing students. A recent editorial article by George F. Will (1998) in Newsweek points to the inadequate preparation of minority and other students who apply for entrance to post-secondary training. The article criticizes secondary education but also condemns post-secondary training programs for lowering standards to maintain needed enrollment figures. Will (1998) states

...the basic problem is that there are too many students who have neither the aptitudes nor the attitudes that should be prerequisites for going to college. More than 6 million students attend the 2,819 four-year institutions full time, and 2.6 million more part time. One in four freshmen does not return as a sophomore. Half who matriculate do not graduate even in five years. Still colleges are churning out more graduates than the job market really requires.... The vast majority of colleges and universities are so hungry for students, they are lowering admissions requirements, discounting tuitions and advertising sushi and waffle bars in student unions and prime cable service in dorms (p. 84).

The issue of dropout and non-matriculation is also addressed in the literature related to deaf and hard of hearing students as indicated by Allen, Lam, Rawlings, Rose, and Schildroth (1994). The problem can be viewed from a number of perspectives to include the method(s) of training and instruction used by secondary programs to promote learning, academic competence, as well as the personal, interpersonal, and social skills key to success in school, work, and society in general; the academic readiness of graduating high school students to effectively use appropriate problem-solving, decision-making, and self-management skills in the pursuit of academic excellence to complete college, technical, or vocational training; student motivation and attitude problems which limit a student's potential to face the rigors of learning and stress management for independent functioning; the ability of post-secondary institutions to effectively provide support and, in many cases, remedial programs which can decrease the post-secondary dropout rate in a cost-effective but efficient manner.

Meichenbaum and Biemiller (1998) point out that "...taxpayers spend 2.3 times more money (over \$12,000 per year) to educate a student with an academic disability than they do for a student without a disability (\$5260), contributing to an annual cost of approximately 300 billion dollars to educate children in the U.S." (p. 6). The authors go on to reinforce the quote by Will (1998) by pointing out that colleges and universities have had a 400% increase in providing remedial mathematics courses to incoming students, with an approximate 29% of all students who attend a two- or four-year program needing at least one remedial course while in post-secondary training.

The 'cost factor' often takes a primary focus as plans are made to develop programs which will attract specific student groups who, in turn, will attract special attention to raise the credibility and reputation of the learning institution to effectively serve a 'special needs' population. Added to the issue of 'cost' is the support services which must be in place to produce needed results and success stories which will, hopefully, attract more students – thus better assuring a continuing program of services.

However, the 'monkey wrench' in planning to provide appropriate and essential services to deaf and hard of hearing students comes when higher institutions of learning realize that this 'low incidence population' may require not only costly interpreting or other communication services but also remedial learning opportunities and services to enhance success and program completion. The need for remedial services often is not due to a lack of competence to successfully pursue and complete post-secondary training. The problem can originate in and be due to a number of factors which may include poor academic preparation at the elementary and secondary level of training; language restrictions resulting from the impact of hearing loss upon language development; a lack of appropriate communication options being made available to the deaf or hard of hearing student at an early age during the formative learning years; the student's lack of exposure to or experience with managing problems in a way to enhance learning, decrease dependency while increasing independent and assertive functioning in a wide variety of settings; the institution's lack of knowledge and sensitivity to the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students in post-secondary settings, and so on. This has been noted by Allen, Rawlings and Schildroth (1989) and Nowell and Marshak (1994).

The educational challenge comes when an institution makes a decision to provide needed services to deaf and hard of hearing students who wish/hope to attend school locally within their community or state. The establishment of services will require a process of planning which includes the incorporation of known means and strategies which are successful with this population. It also means that steps are taken early in the strategic planning process to provide essential support services to students while also allowing for a model of service delivery which recognizes and incorporates the training of staff who play a critical role in developing a program of practical, student sensitive, and cost-effective services for program participation success. Deaf and hard of hearing students have a legal right, as established by the Americans with Disabilities Act, to have access to the training opportunities guaranteed to all individuals who enroll in local and state post-secondary programs.

The TIP Experience: Empowerment through Collaboration and Active Involvement

The Transitional Instructional Program (TIP) opened its doors in 1986. Since its inception over 225 students enrolled in the TIP, coming from diverse educational programs to include mainstream school programs (46%), residential programs (38%), or a combination of mainstream and residential school experiences (16%). The program has served students whose hearing losses range from mild to profound, with the majority having severe to profound hearing losses. The majority use sign language (PSE, ASL) as their primary mode of communication. Intelligence test scores and academic achievement scores vary widely. A small percentage of the students were referred to the TIP after an unsuccessful attempt to complete a college or technical training program. We have served students who failed in programs which do provide comprehensive services for deaf and hard of hearing students. Often these students fail or drop out because of personal problems and poor study or work habits which are not related to demonstrated academic potential. Students have been referred from Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, New York, Minnesota, Massachusetts, and Illinois.

All referrals must first participate in a three-week comprehensive psychological, vocational, communication, academic achievement, and independent living skills evaluation. This establishes the services needed to begin a process of instruction, remediation, and self-management training to promote learning and independent functioning. The evaluation process focuses upon individual student needs for academic work, cognitive and metacognitive training, counseling services (individual and group), sign language, speech, career counseling and exploration, post-secondary survival skills training (such as independent study habits, note-taking, time management), mainstream college experiences where appropriate, and work-study experiences.

All students share a common need for academic remediation, social/interpersonal skills development, self-management training, communication skills training, career planning, and independent living skills training to more adaptively cope with the demands and challenges of post-secondary training. During the past 12 years over two-thirds of the referrals have shown not only academic deficiencies but also significant problems with social and/or interpersonal relationships, impulsivity, difficulties with planning and organization, problem-solving and decision-making, self-management, and self-regulatory deficits.

Students participate in a variety of academic classes which focus upon direct teacher-student communication and interaction, peer learning and interaction, and the development of thinking strategies which foster strategic learning, information processing and knowledge acquisition, awareness of personal characteristics that can impact the difficulty or ease of learning, use of prior knowledge, and self-directed learning to enhance achievement. A study by Craig and Garrity (1994) indicate that achievement gains on the Stanford Achievement Test, from TIP program entry to completion, "...have been significant beyond the 0.001 level in both reading and mathematics, with an average 0.7 GE gain in Reading Comprehension and a 1.2 GE gain in Mathematics Computation" (p. 106).

In terms of psychological assessment and the provision of counseling services it is important to note that over two-thirds of the students referred have experienced clinically significant signs of mental health adjustment problems which have clearly had a negative impact upon performance and student program persistence. All students complete a personal goal/problem worksheet which is intended to establish goals for treatment and skill development in counseling and therapy. During 12 years of operation, six students began the program showing active symptoms of psychosis. A large percentage have affective disorders, and many demonstrate personality disorders. While all students will receive individual or group counseling services, approximately 20-25% of students received more intensive individual psychotherapy, and another 10-12% were referred for medication supervised by a psychiatrist. Well over half these students made significant progress and were able to transfer to post-secondary programs. It is very important to recognize and attend to the fact that counseling services must be available and accessible in terms of time, location, and communication in order to reduce unnecessary student dropout. Five of the six students who presented serious mental health problems were able to complete the TIP program and transfer on to other post-secondary institutions after intensive psychological and psychiatric services were made available. These students were provided intensive support and they were evaluated as not being a danger to others. The TIP comprehensive evaluation process provides an in-depth evaluation to determine the readiness and 'workability' of students to function in our program. Those who may present a danger are referred out for more intensive treatment with the option to reapply after receiving more intensive help with documentation of change.

Ongoing formal and informal feedback is given to students to keep them apprised of what they must do in order to adapt and progress toward their goal to enroll in a post-secondary program. Informal feedback occurs on a daily basis through direct communication with teacher, counselor, speech and/or sign language instructor, career counselor, dormitory resident advisor, and program director. Every six weeks a formal evaluation is completed using a rating scale (see *Appendix A*) which covers primary work objectives and a rating of performance. Students then will participate in a formal meeting with staff and the Vocational Rehabilitation counselor (in person or through phone conference) to review progress, discuss problems and to establish goals for continued training support. This process is highly effective as a catalyst for change as students recognize accountability and responsibility factors they must pursue. The active involvement of the Vocational Rehabilitation counselors who sponsor/fund training has strengthened a team approach to promote student active program participation and follow through as they realize the consequences for non-compliance.

All students will receive communication skills (sign language, speech, lip reading) training based upon evaluation results, communication needs for learning, and as related to career goals. Students are challenged to make adjustments in communication to meet environmental needs. They are provided with a rationale for developing competence in diverse communication modalities to enhance independence. When a student needs to make a doctor's appointment or arrange for transportation, he or she is given instruction on the use of the telephone relay system, and an opportunity is made available for the student to role play questions to ask and arrangements to make with the appropriate person.

Students are also given instructional assistance with independent living skills, to include areas such as budgeting and money management, grooming and hygiene, mobility training, room upkeep, basic cooking, or conflict resolution with a roommate. Student's are evaluated formally and informally with constructive feedback given with regard to strengths, weaknesses, and expectations for change. A separate rating scale evaluation form is used for the dormitory.

The combination of services made available to students focus upon self-empowerment and the development of independence through challenging work with a dedicated staff who teach students how to do for themselves rather

than having someone do for them. When students leave the program, they have undergone dramatic changes which point to a greater capacity to manage and regulate their lives and responsibilities more effectively. The students recognize that they are in this program for a limited time and they must achieve at a higher level in order to continue receiving the support needed to complete post-secondary training.

While the national attrition rate from post-secondary programs is reported to be 70%, the attrition rate for students who have completed training with the Transitional Instructional Program is 21% (Garrity & Craig, 1991). The success is attributed in part to the fact that students are given feedback on their weaknesses found during evaluation and they are provided with a rationale for training to remediate problems. Students are taught skills and strategies to function with greater independence and accountability. They are given ongoing feedback and are expected to produce change, not excuses. The students also are given intensive and coordinated support by staff who take into consideration the personal problems which students present. All staff work to provide support that enhances coping, adaptation, and persistence by promoting competence, responsibility, self-management, and regulatory skills for independent functioning.

Conclusion

The solution to increasing the success of deaf and hard of hearing students in post-secondary training settings, and for providing effective support services is multi-dimensional. Clearly it is important for administrators and service organizers in post-secondary settings to recognize that they must diversify and expand the options available to this population if the goal is to enhance success and program completion. The provision of diverse communication services to deaf and hard of hearing by persons who have the training, skill, experience, and recognized expertise/credentials is definitely a critical key to enhancing learning and success.

Deaf and hard of hearing students are all unique and each will have different needs to function in a post-secondary program. As the saying goes, *when the only tool you have in your toolbox is a hammer, then everything begins to look like a nail* applies to the program and service needs of this population. Post-secondary facilities must not have a narrow view of services needed by deaf and hard of hearing students (e.g. hire an interpreter). A narrow view, like only having a hammer in one's tool box, will ultimately limit the success of students and reduce the credibility and commitment of an institution to appropriately serve deaf and hard of hearing persons.

An equally important step is to provide deaf and hard of hearing students with the opportunity to receive training and/or support experiences which will help them achieve through equal access to learning and the services which promote learning – services provide to all students regardless of disability.

Administrative decisions need to be made to provide necessary services which promote learning. Plans should be developed to provide teaching staff with the necessary skills to integrate and involve deaf, hard of hearing and other disability groups into the academic arena as equal participants. Deaf and hard of hearing students need to be given guidance, direction, and opportunities to learn and practice essential skills which will promote academic success through a variety of means such as self-management skills (such as time management, goal planning) to be better problem solvers and decision makers; maintain motivation under times of stress and academic challenge; persistence; impulse control to attain goals; skills to translate thought into action by using internal as well as external resources; assistance with identifying self-defeating thoughts and behaviors which result in failure, such as failure to initiate, complete, and follow through with assigned tasks; providing support which is withdrawn slowly as students develop competence and reduce dependency upon others as well as blame upon others for failure; and insuring that the student is given the responsibility to follow through with work while understanding consequences for non-participation and non-compliance.

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Project Deaf Prep

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Overview of the College

Pikes Peak Community College is a comprehensive community college located in Colorado Springs, Colorado. With an enrollment of over 7,000 students, it is the second-largest community college in the state. The college offers courses and degrees at four major sites in the Colorado Springs area, three local military bases, more than 100 out-of-state and out-of-country military sites, and numerous international sites. Pikes Peak emphasizes international education, multi-media instruction, and programs supporting Deaf and hard of hearing individuals. As a HUB of the Western Region Outreach Center and Consortia, it serves as the *Peak Regional Resource Center on Deafness* for Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico.

The Pressing Issue

Our Problem

Pikes Peak Community College is an open-door college – by philosophy as well as by legislative mandate. We strive to be a student's first, as well as last, chance at higher education. This is a mixed blessing. It allows students to enter who might not be ready for postsecondary education. This has been the case with numerous Deaf and hard of hearing students during the college's 30-year history.

Community colleges are the only entities in Colorado authorized to deliver postsecondary developmental (remedial) instruction. These classes were often the classes of choice for Deaf and hard of hearing students who entered Pikes Peak under-prepared for postsecondary-level work.

We noticed that Deaf students would enter developmental classes such as ENG 030, be provided with excellent interpreters, work very hard, get ample tutoring, and still fail. This failure happened not once, but repeatedly, until it finally seemed that Deaf students were choosing developmental studies as their major course of study! We had assumed that $1 + 1 = 2$: one motivated Deaf student plus one qualified interpreter equaled successful access to education. We were faced with the fact that this was not the case.

The Need

Pikes Peak Community College simply did not have an appropriate instructional methodology for Deaf students who lacked basic competence in English, mathematics, critical thinking, resource management and life skills. Further investigation revealed that the problem we were facing was also being experienced by other colleges, Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind. Deaf students were graduating from high school and leaving for Gallaudet or NTID, only to return in 6 to 12 months because they were under-prepared. Vocational Rehabilitation counselors were having difficulty placing and keeping Deaf individuals in productive jobs because of their lack of basic skills.

¹ Pikes Peak Community College is a hub of the Western Region Outreach Center & Consortia (WROCC).

The Response

Project *Deaf Prep*

The college and the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind (CSDB) gathered a variety of agencies to form a partnership that would address this problem. Those involved in this effort were: Pikes Peak Community College, the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind, Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Pikes Peak Center on Deafness, and the Pikes Peak Mental Health Center.

A task force made up of members of each of these organizations, conducted planning meetings for approximately six months. The task force determined the parameters for this project and designed a rough outline for curriculum. They wanted the project to be:

- A cooperative, multi-agency effort;
- In an adult environment, rather than high school; and
- Held in a Deaf-friendly agency.

They wanted the curriculum to be:

- Flexible and individualized based on authentic assessment of the Deaf student's needs;
- Applied to the Deaf student's chosen occupation;
- One which places behavioral as well as academic demands on the student(s); and
- Taught by Deaf instructors in sign language.

The curriculum consists of:

- American Sign Language Levels I – IV;
- Remedial English Levels I – IV;
- Remedial Mathematics Levels I – IV;
- Study Skills;
- Critical Thinking; and
- Resource Management.

At the end of the task force's work, the college held an open forum for the Deaf community to evaluate the progress to date. Feedback from the community was positive and encouraging. As a result, a four-semester program called *Deaf Prep* was adopted and advertised around the community. This program accepts (1) Deaf high school students who are in their junior or senior year; (2) Deaf high school students who have completed their credits for graduation but are not ready to terminate their connection with their high school; and (3) adults who need remediation in basic skills. Students receive thorough and comprehensive testing to determine their appropriate placement in the curriculum, discuss career options and expectations with an advisor, and prepare an individualized instructional plan.

Successes to Date

We anticipated an enrollment of eight to ten students. However, on the first day of class, 17 students showed up. The enrollment greatly surpassed expectations. The faculty support has been amazing. Deaf instructors from the community were willing to step in and participate in the development of this program.

The community support has been no less amazing. The Pikes Peak Sertoma Club provided a scholarship fund for students attending *Deaf Prep*, and the college stepped up and allowed us to use the indirect cost allocation from a grant to support students. The local school districts and the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind were quick to send students to the program and provide any additional support we needed.

Perhaps the greatest support, however, came from the students themselves. They threw themselves into what they knew was a pilot program. They participated with enthusiasm and soaked up the instruction like sponges. They provided a rewarding, yet challenging, student population.

The 17 students represented a cross-section of the Deaf community in Colorado. There were recent high school graduates, single mothers who had been in the workforce at one time, high school dropouts, and successful Deaf adults who had “made it” despite mastery of basic skills.

The Nitty Gritty

Students who enroll in *Deaf Prep* become full-time students at Pikes Peak Community College. A full course load is 17 semester hours of non-transferable credit with tuition of approximately \$1,000 per semester.

This tuition is paid in a variety of ways: (1) students pay themselves, or get federal financial aid; (2) parents pay; (3) CSDB funds its students through their IDEA grant; (4) Vocational Rehabilitation pays through case services dollars; and, finally, (5) local school districts pay for this as part of their transition programming. Some districts encourage students who are eligible for *Deaf Prep* to “walk” with their graduating class, but the school districts hold the students’ diplomas. They continue to receive state special education money as well as their per-pupil-operating-revenue until the students complete *Deaf Prep* or become 21 years old. This allows them to pay the college tuition and have money left to provide additional transition or school-to-career services to the students.

Who Came to *Deaf Prep*?

Meet Jeanette

Jeanette is a single mother of two children in her mid-thirties. She came to college right out of high school and did not have a successful experience. She was overwhelmed by the academic requirements at the college and felt out of place. When she heard of *Deaf Prep* she was excited, but was fearful of *another* failure.

After three or four weeks in *Deaf Prep*, Jeanette blossomed like a flower. She became much more self-confident and began to excel in the academic components of the program. She also became the class “mother,” providing inspiration, encouragement and an occasional scolding to the other, younger students. She has also become a liaison for the students with the Deaf community. She sees to it that the students are aware of and involved with community events. Her natural leadership qualities have emerged, and *Deaf Prep* has provided an opportunity for her to exercise them.

Meet Tanya

Tanya is a 21-year-old woman with a cochlear implant. She has had some serious emotional dysfunction regarding her identity as a person and as a member of the Deaf community. Lacking mastery of basic academic and life skills, she had a less-than-stellar high school career and has remained under-employed since graduating.

After one year in the program, Tanya is doing well. The program referred her to a counselor who is fluent in sign language and has had years of experience with Deaf clients. Tanya has thrived in this environment, developing a real sense of self. She has mastered some basic skills in sign language, English and math.

Last, But Not Least, Meet Ken

Ken was a senior at the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind. He had tried a vocational program at the college and met with utter failure. Counselors at the school had low expectations for Ken. He was viewed as a “wild

child.” Ken’s own goals were unclear. He was certain of what he did not want to do, but had no idea what he desired in life.

He, too, has succeeded in *Deaf Prep*. While not one of the academic “stars,” Ken holds his own. He is considering a degree in physical education and will take his first “mainstreamed” class at the college next fall.

What Does the Future Hold?

What’s Next?

The next step for *Deaf Prep* includes a curriculum refinement process. Based on the successes and failures of the 1997-98 school year, this curriculum will be revised and prepared for approval by the college curriculum committee. The college continues to seek additional qualified instructors. An instructor must not only be Deaf, but have a passion for working with students at the developmental level. That is a formidable task.

We are also looking for more partners, additional living arrangements and, of course, more students. Our desire is to open this to the region, grow, and make the curriculum and a guidebook available to other schools desiring to serve this population.

The program has been successful. The faculty are in the process of compiling quantifiable data regarding student improvement. We are pleased to be involved with a program, which will have such a lasting impact on the lives of students and, eventually, on the delivery of postsecondary education to Deaf and hard of hearing students.