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The month of May is sliding past at light speed, and it's past time to get this newsletter out, despite the lack of information about some activities still in the planning stages, so check our website and Facebook page for updates. Also, May 15 is your last day to register for our September 13-15 Family Camp near McCall at the "early bird" discount rates! Go to our website and click on "events" to find more details, registration form, etc.

We continue a series of articles we started in the January issue about advocating for educational services, based on input from various parents and professionals who've learned things through experience they'd like to pass on to younger parents. This time around we focus on assistive listening devices. The series is still in development, so feel free to send in your comments, suggestions, questions and stories!

The Fourth R: 'Riting the IEP Part 3: Assistive Listening Devices Lorna Irwin (with lots of help)

The typical classroom is a difficult listening environment for any child. For the child who has a hearing loss, it's much worse. Background noise is not the only problem; there may also be sound echoing off walls and other surfaces (reverberation) and the distance between the teacher and child is greater than in other conversational situations. Being able to fully access what is being said becomes critical when new concepts and vocabulary are being introduced, directions and assignments given, and announcements made. Missing out on any of these can have a negative impact on the child's ability to learn and function in the school setting.

There are several choices for "boosting" the teacher's voice above background noise and reverberations. All begin with a microphone and transmitter worn by the teacher; some systems include a "pass-around" microphone for student presentations, classroom discussions and small group work (where it can also enforce turn-taking, making it easier for the student to follow the discussion.) The choices get very technical, very fast, and you will want to be sure to have professional help (an educational audiologist employed by your school district or through the Idaho Educational Services for the Deaf and the Blind outreach program) to set up an appropriate system and provide on-going technical support.

There are basically four different kinds of set-up: 1) Newer schools often have a built-in sound field system for each classroom, with speakers in the ceiling or wall. It's been found that ALL students benefit from being able to better hear the teacher, and the teacher benefits from not having to raise his or her voice to be heard. The advantage of this system is that it does not "single out" the student with the hearing loss; the disadvantage is that it is the least effective at boosting the teacher's voice over background noise. Where the student sits in relation to the classroom speaker(s) may be critical, as well as his or her type of hearing loss. 2) A "tower" is a moveable speaker that can be positioned closer to the student. 3) A small speaker on the student's desk. More than one parent reports that the teacher soon discovers which other students benefit most from the speaker and adjusts the classroom seating chart accordingly; however, those may be the classmates the child who is hard of hearing finds the most disruptive to his own ability to concentrate.... 4) A personal FM system feeds the teacher's voice directly into the child's hearing aid or cochlear implant processor. The input can be adjusted to allow varying amounts of sound from other sources, depending on the child's needs. It is possible to use a personal FM system in conjunction with a classroom sound field system.

Recently, hearing aids and some cochlear implant processors have been outfitted with Bluetooth technology, and accessories which have the same purpose as a personal FM unit, at a much lower cost. These should be used as an FM substitute only by older children who are able to give meaningful feedback as to their effectiveness. However, they may be useful in the cafeteria or other situations too "risky" for the more expensive FM system.

Which system to choose? Older children can often tell what works best for them. Younger children may not know what they are missing, and are still developing listening and language skills. They do best in places where the words spoken are at least 20 dB louder than the other noise around them. Other factors may enter into the decision. One parent had trouble getting her child's school to use a tower speaker FM system because the walls were thin enough that the class next door could hear the speaker. Needless to say, the thin walls were the big reason the FM system was needed in the first place.

So much for the technical considerations. The real challenges for most parents lie in the human domain. Successful use requires a team--school, teacher, parents, audiologist and student working together. A personal FM system can be written into the child's IEP but gathering dust in a corner of the classroom for a number of reasons:

The FM unit isn't working properly: Like any electronic equipment, assistive listening devices need maintenance and periodic checking. They also need charging; a busy teacher may forget. Work with the school, teacher and educational audiologist to find solutions that work for your situation.

The teacher doesn't understand what the child's hearing loss means in the classroom environment, finds the FM inconvenient, and doesn't see how it helps: Education about hearing loss and training in the use of the FM are a must. The teacher needs to know how to check to see that it's working properly, and be conscious of when he needs to mute or un-mute the microphone. Your educational audiologist should be helping with this. Parents I talked to had several suggestions for possible aids for convincing school administrators and teachers of the need to acquire and use an assistive listening device. Let them hear what your child hears; there are files of simulated hearing loss on-line with and without background noise on line. A hand-held decibel meter can be used to record the level of background noise in a classroom. A Functional Listening Evaluation can provide support for the use of an FM system by assessing how well a child can understand speech under classroom conditions; another good tool is the Listening Inventory for Education (IESDB regional teachers have these.)

The child doesn't want to use the FM system: Many children get self-conscious about their hearing loss around middle-school age, the age when everyone feels self-conscious about just about everything! They now have multiple teachers, and it makes sense to all the adults involved to have the child transport the FM equipment from one class to another, which makes it even worse from the child's point of view. This self-consciousness may extend to interpreter use and hearing aids. Would that there were some easy answers! (Two possibilities from parents I interviewed are "start using it early" and "get your own and use it outside school."--see below.) Time and maturity and suffering the natural consequences of missing information may lead your child to find what works best for him. Leave the unused accommodations in your child's IEP for the day when he (may) change his mind.

Not Just for School

While interviewing parents about their experiences with assistive listening devices in school, I talked to one who invested (with help from her insurance and a children's hospital) in a personal FM system to use both in and out of school. She felt this was well worthwhile for several reasons. Because she and her husband (and later, her child) learned how to use and maintain the FM unit, they didn't have to rely on school staff. It was available for communication under other difficult listening circumstances (trips by car, outdoor picnics, bike rides, television programs that were not closed-captioned, etc.) Because they used it outside school, it was less of a big deal for their child, and therefore less a source of embarrassment later. She feels that using an interpreter along with the FM, getting both visual and auditory input, helped her child learn to recognize visual clues to missing auditory information and vice-versa, and helped develop self-advocacy skills.

Is There a Book About That?

The Idaho Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has recently expanded its lending library. There's no way we can fit the list into this newsletter, but we can give you this number: 188. That's how many items there are, and they cover the entire range of issues related to hearing loss. Go to their web page, www.cdhh.idaho.gov, and follow the "Resources" link to "Lending Library." There are DVDs as well as books, and an on-line request form. As a parent, you can never learn enough!

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Upcoming Events

(Be sure to check our webpage or "like" our Facebook page to receive up-to-date information. If you'd like to have an interpreter present for an Idaho Hands & Voices activity, please let us know by email as far in advance as possible.)

Treasure Valley Summer Play Group

Contact: Jill Muir 914-3728/ jill.muir@iesdb.org or Esther Brune 284-2912(text) / ruthbrune05@gmail.com.

Wednesday, June 5- Zoo Boise - 9:45am-12:00pm. Meet at the front entrance at 9:45. School discount is \$2.50, ages 4 and up. (3 and under- free) If you want the discount please be there by 9:45 and bring exact change. We must pay and enter as a group!

Wednesday, June 19- MK Nature Center & Municipal Park – 10:00 am-12:00pm 600 S. Walnut, Boise 83712 Meet at the entrance to the Nature Center building at 10:00. We'll see the animals inside, then do the nature walk outside. After we're done we can picnic and play in Municipal Park.

Wednesday, July 10- Kleiner Park- 10:00am-12:00pm, 1900 Records Ave. Meridian 83642 Splash park, playground and bring your own picnic!

Wednesday, July 24- Discovery Center – 9:45am-12:00pm, 131 Myrtle. St. Boise, 83702. We will receive the group discount- \$3.00 for ages 4-17, adults and kids under 4 free. If you want the discount please be there by 9:45 and bring exact change. We must pay and enter as a group!

Wednesday, Aug. 7- Jabbers-10:00am-12:00pm, 1210 N. Galleria Dr. Nampa, 83687. Play center at Nampa Gateway shopping center. Owner Linda Rutledge worked at ISDB. We can get a group discount of \$5.00 for ages 4 and up, \$4.00 ages 3 and under, adults free.

Elks Hearing & Balance Center Parent Education Series

All workshops 6:30-7:30 pm, St. Luke's Meridian Medical Center, 520 S Eagle Rd--Paiute Room, Lower Level, on the following Tuesdays. Please RSVP 489-4999. Interpreters available upon request.

May 14 Understanding Your Child's Hearing Loss: If you suspect that your child has a hearing loss or if your child has been diagnosed with a hearing loss, you will want to attend this seminar. Learn more about the types of hearing tests, how to read an audiogram, and how hearing works. Presented by Jessica Evenstad, Au.D.

June 25 Hearing Aids and Cochlear Implants for Children: Feeling confused about what's best for your child with hearing loss: Learn more about the difference between hearing aids and cochlear implants, and which one might be right for your child. Troubleshooting, doing a listening check, and tips and tricks for keeping the equipment on your child will be covered. Presented by Jessica Stich-Hennen, Au.D, PASC and Karrie Pargman, Au.D.

June 9 Speech Therapy: What is it and does my child need it? Speech therapy is not just about speech. For children with hearing loss it is also about language, listening and literacy. Learn what it's all about and why you and your child may need the support of a speech-language pathologist on your journey with hearing loss. Presented by Susie Jones, M.S. CCC-SLP/L.

Magic Valley ESCAPADE

Wednesday, June 12 -- Centennial Waterfront Park, Canyon Springs Rd, Twin Falls, 1:00-4:00 pm. There is a playground, benches, picnic tables and shady trees. Bring your own beach chairs, outdoor toys and picnic.

Wednesday, July 17, and Wednesday, August 7 -- Twin Falls YMCA/City Pool, 756 Locust St, Twin Falls, 1:00-4:00 pm. Adults \$3.50, Ages 4-17 \$2.50, ages 0-3 \$1.50 (bring your membership card if you are already a YMCA member.)

North Idaho

July 6 Camping and Whitewater Rafting Trip -- North Idaho Deaf Club and Boise Sport Club of the Deaf, \$80 per person, payment due before June 4; camp site on Salmon River Rd. near Riggins is free, if you want to just come and camp. For more information, contact Rachael Portenier, Librarose68@hotmail.com.

Save the dates: June 22, NIDC picnic in Post Falls; July 28 camping/biking the Route of the Hiawatha. To stay in the loop for these and other NIDC activities, contact Darcy Sinsley, nidcplanner@gmail.com.

Signing Shakespeare! This summer's interpreted Idaho Shakespeare Festival dates are:

Blithe Spirit	June 26
Much Ado About Nothing	July 17
Sweeney Todd	July 31
King Richard III	August 20
The Foreigner	September 11

There is more information at www.idahoshakespeare.org; signed synopses of the plays are available at this location. Major ticket discounts can be requested by deaf people/family members/ASL students for these performances.

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We welcome submissions from our readers! Send in articles, stories, ideas for stories, book and product reviews, anything you have to share to niwri2@msn.com, or call (208)324-7544. "Wavelengths" is published every two months, give or take a bit.