



Language-Specific Approaches in Interactive Writing Instruction for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

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Topic & Purpose

Specific approaches used during interactive writing to support deaf students' language and literacy development are not well captured nor well defined. The purpose of this study was to document the ways teachers navigate language strategies with students who have diverse language and writing strengths. Researchers observed writing instruction provided by grade 3-5 teachers in ASL/English Bilingual, Listening and Spoken Language, and Total Communication programs (defined by their schools).

Researchers received a 3-year grant from the Institute of Education Sciences to develop a writing framework for deaf elementary students. Fourteen teachers in grades 3-5 were videotaped using interactive writing instruction. Teachers across classrooms exhibited patterns in their instructional decision-making processes that built students' expressive language and connected it to text. The strategies varied depending on each student's expressive language and writing strengths. The researchers identified the space where these strategies occurred as the *Language Zone* and developed a decision-making flowchart.

Study Outline

Findings

There are three sets of language strategies teachers use for interactive writing that hinge on whether the student is limited in their expression, or whether they are expressing ideas fluently in ASL and/or English. When a student expresses something that is not comprehensible, the teacher uses a variety of strategies to get to a point of shared understanding. The strategies may include gesturing, role-playing, drawing, showing pictures or videos, and asking students' peers or families for more information. Once there is shared understanding between the teacher and student, the teacher connects their expression to developed language in sign language or spoken language. When a student expresses a concept clearly in sign language but does not know how to express it in English yet, the teacher heightens the student's metalinguistic awareness through bilingual strategies and explicit instruction in both languages. When a student expresses a concept clearly in English, the teacher enriches their skill by attending to word choice, figurative language, and genre specific language patterns.

Since students come to the classroom with diverse experiences with language access, teachers need to make decisions about language strategies used to build students' language during interactive writing. Language strategies must be individualized and differentiated across students. The *Language Zone* enables teachers to make conscious, minute-to-minute decisions about language and writing instruction during interactive writing.

Ideas to Consider

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