

By Diantha Zibman McFadden



We have all heard of "Total Communication," but what is it? In my almost 30 years of teaching deaf and hard-of-hearing students in both the classroom and pull-out programs, I have determined that real Total Communication (TC) is an integrated system of listening, speechreading, speech, body language, Signed English, and print. TC is a process whose goal is to develop for each student a comprehensive communication system that will allow him or her to participate fully in all academic and social areas and endeavors.

TC is much more than the simultaneous use of speech and sign. It is teaching children to use their residual hearing to acquire language and information from the environment as well as from the teacher. It means teaching children to make logical choices about what they think they heard by using visual information from speechreading and sign to fill in the blanks. That means daily, specific auditory training lessons, and auditory attention cues and techniques during every academic and social interaction in the classroom.

Total Communication also means providing consistent, functioning, state-of-the-art amplification for every child. As soon as a new student enters my room, the educational audiologist contracted by our school district comes in, and within 2 weeks has fitted the child with an FM auditory trainer. In order for her to do that, I must have a valid audiogram from the child's clinic showing both unaided and aided hearing profiles, as well as discrimination scores.

In my TC classroom, the first lesson in auditory training is often recognizing the presence or absence of sound. For many of my students, I must begin by teaching them to recognize whether their hearing aids are

turned on, the battery is in place, and their earmolds are clean. Next, the child must learn to pay attention to the continuous stream of language around him. He must learn to connect the sounds he hears with the motions of my hands. He must also learn to connect that with print, reading. When the child can do that, we have Total Communication.

THE ROLE OF SIGNING

Since I am currently teaching a Diagnostic/Oral class, the amount of Sign Language that I use will vary from child to child, and from year to year, depending on their needs as demonstrated by their progress in a strictly oral mode. This past year, I signed almost everything for a child who was ultimately placed in a full-time TC class in our program.

Most years, however, I use sign as a tool for diagnosis or for instruction. Diagnostically, it allows me to see if the addition of sign will increase a child's comprehension, or if some other learning disability is involved. Instructionally, sign is helpful in

a phonics-based reading program. It helps to eliminate the confusion of similar sounding phonemes in general, and for those children with discrimination problems in particular.

When a child makes the transition from my class to a full-time TC class with a full academic program, "auditory training" usually stops, but oral communication, and the need for good amplification, does not. Many people believe that once you begin using Sign Language, deaf children will stop using their aural/oral skills and therefore no longer need amplification. My experience has been the opposite. When a child is given an integrated *system* of communication (TC), he or she will in fact use *all* its components, including amplification and voice.

In this context, then, the role of the audiologist becomes crucial. The audiologist must not only provide the school with a comprehensive report in order to fit the FM system appropriately, but also must know the type of FM system being used in the classroom, how it is being used, and the nature of the auditory environment of the school or classroom. My room is carpeted, and I have only eight children at a time, but this is not necessarily true in all classrooms for hearing-impaired students.

It is also important for the audiologist to develop a good working relationship with the child's parents, to educate them not only in the care and handling of the hearing aids, but also in the importance of their consistent use outside of school. Finally, it is important to remember that a good program of TC in the classroom begins with and is enhanced by total communication between audiologist and teacher.

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