Analysis of Position of Itinerant Teachers in Service Delivery Model of Education

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INTRODUCTION

Many research studies have investigated the position of an itinerant teacher of students who are deaf or hard of hearing in which analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the service delivery model of itinerant teaching have been considered. Because there has been a "shift in placement for students who are deaf or hard of hearing into more mainstream settings, there has been a specific increase in the number of itinerant teachers and a comparable decrease in the number of self-contained classroom teachers" (Miller, 2000).

Studies concerning the changing field of deaf education have explored why many job opportunities for future deaf educators include the itinerant teaching position. In research done by Luckner and Muir in 2001, they concluded that "several factors suggest that, in the future, the majority of students who are deaf or hard of hearing will continue to receive educational services in general education settings with the support of an itinerant teacher of the deaf. These factors include: (a) FDA regulated newborn hearing screening, (b) the closing of several state schools for the deaf, (c) the increase in the number of children receiving cochlear implants, and (d) federal legislation containing provisions directed at providing granted access to the general education curriculum to students with disabilities" (Luckner & Muir, 2001). For this reason, many researchers are interested in learning more about the triumphs and challenges itinerant teachers face and how their role to support deaf or hard of hearing students in the general education setting increases the success rate in grade-level assessments.

In each of the articles reviewed, similar themes were noted throughout the results of the studies conducted. Most of the research studies included details about the itinerant 4Knoll experience through interviews and shadowing experiences in an effort to examine the position with great precision. The following outlines the combined contributions of itinerant teachers' thoughts and beliefs about their responsibilities in the itinerant position. Advantages of the Itinerant Position Several itinerant teachers conveyed that they liked the variety, autonomy and independence in scheduling their position offered. They felt that the broad spectrum of schools, the diverse group of students, the changes in their daily schedules and the wide range of student ages was a positive attribute of the itinerant position (Yarger & Luckner, 1999). Another component that some itinerants view is the traveling involved in their position. Many of the itinerants interviewed, however, said that the driving time between schools allowed them to take a break, to regroup their thoughts and to work on "relaxing and mentally preparing for the students at the next location" (Luckner & Miller, 1994).

Service Delivery Models Provided by an Itinerant TeacherThe majority of the itinerant teachers expressed that they believed providing direct service, in which they worked with a student one-on-one, was their most important role in this position (Luckner & Miller, 1994). There are two main methods itinerants use to carry out the service delivery model of itinerant teaching: the "pull-out approach" or the "push-in approach", which is also referred to as "collaborative teaching". The "pull-out approach" occurs when the itinerant teacher removes the student from the general education classroom and provides services to the student one-to-one in a separate 5Knoll setting (Luckner & Miller, 1994). This service delivery model is widely used by itinerants because it allows time in a quieter setting to talk with the student about what is going on in the regular education setting and support them with what they need. Others believe that most of the one-on-one work done outside of the classroom could be done by the teacher of the deaf in the general education classroom with the student and a few of the student's peers, who also would benefit from the additional attention and assistance. Those who advocate this "collaborative teaching" approach consider that it offers more opportunities for the student who needs services from an itinerant to stay in the classroom and be able to interact with peers while being a part of what is being done in the

curriculum of the regular education classroom (Luckner & Miller, 1994). Most of the time, the service delivery model used is one that is based on the individual needs of the students served. Regardless of the model used, there are more important topics of discussion about the responsibilities of an itinerant.

Communication, Consultation, and Collaboration Itinerant teaching involves a great deal of time commitment and communication with not only the student who is receiving services, but also the student's families and educational team. Most of the itinerants conveyed that consultation and collaboration with the general education staff and families was a vital part of their job responsibilities.

When itinerant teachers are not providing direct service for students, they "devote a large percentage of their time serving as a resource to the general education staff and parents, obtaining and adapting materials, consulting about each student on their caseload and conducting in-service workshops in order to prepare professionals working with the 6Knoll students for the necessary accommodations and hearing device training" (Yarger & Luckner, 1999).

The in-services, consultation and collaboration itinerants provide ensure that "general education teachers will understand and develop skills to meet the needs of the students who are deaf or hard of hearing in their classrooms" (Luckner & Miller, 1994).

An itinerant's goal is to monitor the student's "function in the general education classroom" and also to write and track progress on the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP)" (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004).

The consultation and collaboration itinerants have with the general education staff involves valuing the contributions of others and building a network of mutual support to reinforce the success of the student. Some examples of the large number of people itinerants are in contact with include, but are not limited to: families, general education teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, audiologists, educational interpreters, occupational and physical therapists, agencies and others involved in delivering service to the student. When an itinerant encourages a team approach, "each member is able to contribute expertise in some facet of the student's education" (Yarger & Luckner, 1999).

Many itinerants shared that they were able to establish support and camaraderie with members of the team by employing active listening skills to elicit the perspectives of parents and educators (Luckner & Miller, 1994).

One itinerant explained that she and the general education teacher had a dialogue journal in addition to talking for a few minutes before the student was pulled for direct service in an attempt to achieve open communication (Yarger & Luckner, 1999).

Clearly, most of the itinerants interviewed conveyed that a good, working relationship 7Knoll with the student's educational team members is vital to keeping the student successful in a general education setting. One itinerant summed it up nicely when she said that "the more you connect with the teachers and support them, the more the students can have an easier time in the classroom and having the skills to do a really good consultation can have a powerful impact on the students" (Luckner & Howell, 2002).

The notion of good communication and collaboration is also extended to the families and one teacher noted, "I think one of the most important aspects of my job is to keep my 'customers' happy. That is, my students, the parents, the teachers and the staff that work with the students" (Luckner & Miller, 1994). Many itinerants explained that they called parents and caregivers on their "personal time during evening and weekends and encouraged parents to call them during those times, as needed," in order to keep up to speed about any concerns they may have or issues that are going on at home (Luckner & Miller, 1994).

Flexibility Another significant characteristic of the itinerant teaching position is the need for flexibility. One teacher went as far to say that, "flexibility in all things is the hallmark of the itinerant and the effective itinerant has to have more than one way to accomplish everything" (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004). Because itinerants are a support for the student in the regular education setting, they usually "have little influence over what will be taught; daily lesson plans are determined by the general education curriculum and teachers" and an itinerant must be flexible with a changing schedule she does not have much control over (Smith, 1997). Itinerants, as mentioned before, must also plan on 8Knoll

working with a variety of people with diverse personalities and professional responsibilities. As one itinerant teacher said, "You need to be prepared for a lot of different situations with a lot of different people" and in that, flexibility is vital (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004).

Adapting to Individual School Politics and Rules Along with being flexible, an itinerant teacher must be able to successfully immerse herself in each school or school district's world. Itinerants serve students in many schools and they are most likely all unique in both structure and organization.

Every school has its own set of rules and ways of doing things. According to one itinerant, "navigating the politics in so many settings in order to effectively advocate for students' needs is like walking on egg shells at times" (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004). An itinerant must be able to adapt to each school she sets foot in and "make sure that she politically handles situations in a very specific way according to the school policies" for the best possible outcome (Yarger & Luckner, 1999).

CHANGES IN MODES OF COMMUNICATION

An additional valid concern of the traveling itinerant teacher is that she must be
able to communicate in many modes to facilitate the accommodations necessary for each deaf or hard of hearing student in need of her support. It would be ideal if every deaf educator was trained in all modes of communication that are available to deaf and hard of hearing individuals, but that is not usually the case. Many of the itinerants interviewed were in rural areas in which they had seen many students come through their 9Knoll geographical area using various manual and oral communication modes. Sometimes, the limitations of language and mode of communication became a barrier for the itinerant teachers in the studies. One itinerant expressed her own constraint in the use of sign language, for example, when it was needed for communication and her lack of experience working with a diverse range of students across all modes of communication became a major obstacle. She said, "It is difficult for me because I am not proficient in American Sign Language (ASL) but I am an English syntax signer". It would be a professional goal for her to become comfortable with both so that she would be able to offer whatever communication system is needed for the family and the student" (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004).

Time Constraints and Scheduling The time constraints and scheduling issues itinerants experience are considerable points of interest unique to their position. They must adhere to a strict time schedule when traveling among schools in order to meet with as many students as possible.

Scheduling difficulties generally arise as a result of unplanned travel situations. Many respondents said that they often struggled finding time to meet with parents and other professionals because "they traveled between countless buildings and districts on tight schedules, and often were unable to connect with many teachers during their preparation times" (Luckner & Miller, 1994). One itinerant interviewed said, "It's frustrating because you might not have enough time to talk to teachers if there's a concern because you're watching the clock to get to the next school and feeling the crunch of the time limits" (Luckner & Miller, 1994). The demands on an itinerant's time are very real and 10 Knoll one itinerant agreed, reporting that she felt there is "not enough time to coordinate with the regular education teacher" in regard to planning lessons and all of the modifications necessary to accommodate the deaf or hard of hearing student (Guteng, 2005).

The amount of students on an itinerant's caseload varies year to year, but there are often many schools to visit within a short amount of time and itinerants need to find time to physically sit down with a student and get work done. In that regard, the more visits the itinerants had during the week, the more they reported a higher incidence of interacting with the adults in the system but less time with the student. In many cases, the students with the least amount of interaction with the itinerant tended to be those with less severe hearing losses and the "role of the itinerant moved toward the monitor/consult responsibility to see that the student was receiving services as specified in their IEP goals and that there were no problems" (Guteng, 2005).

There are also other noteworthy issues related to time constraints that many itinerant teachers experience. One itinerant talked about how helpless she felt when a critical situation arose with one of her students in which she needed to stay at the site until it was resolved.

This took time away from her other scheduled students at different sites and she felt stuck (Yarger & Luckner, 1999). Also, other itinerants mentioned that time had a "major impact on putting practices into action because they often missed sessions with students due to special events and schedule changes they did not know about" (Reed, 2003). This often becomes a problem because itinerant teachers serve students in a wide variety of settings including: home, elementary, middle, and high school sites, as well as special education centers and their time is valuable to physically meet with all of the students on their caseloads. 11Knoll

The scheduling difficulties itinerant teachers encounter are also directly linked to time. As one would imagine, when itinerants construct their schedules, they try their best to create realistic time and driving arrangements according to the geography of the schools they visit. It comes down to which sites they can be at and when, but "itinerant teachers with high school students tend to schedule them first since those students often have the most restricted individual schedules" (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004).

Otherwise, they try to make it work as best as they can with the intention to serve the most students possible in a reasonable manner.

Availability of Meeting Places In conjunction with itinerant teachers' apprehension about time constraints, they face a lack of appropriate and private places to meet with their students from time to time and also stumble upon difficulties obtaining resources and materials to support them. One respondent said that "being an itinerant does not automatically guarantee that a teacher has the necessary resources at each location and the burden of acquiring the space to meet with the students falls on the shoulders of the itinerant" (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004). Some examples of spaces itinerants have met with students range from "a conference room in the renovated

school library that is well-equipped with computer terminals" to "overcrowded and loud libraries where many students gather and there is no privacy" (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004). This is unfortunate because many itinerants described the "challenge" of finding a place to meet and how the lack of space provided by the school usually results in less instructional time with the student (Guteng, 2005).

12Knoll Availability of Materials and Organizational Skills
 The issue of poor access to resources and materials is a hefty one for itinerants.

One itinerant expressed that resources were scarce in one building and that she was "expected to share a box of materials with other itinerants giving various services to the students at her school" (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004). Across sites, many itinerants devise their own organizational plans for having as many resources as they can for working with each of the students on their caseload, such as "having a binder for each student that held all of the students' personal information as well as the records for the past year." These binders were also "divided into sections including audiograms, IEP information, copies of e-mails regarding specific decisions about a student and the most recent notes or papers the itinerant had been working on with the student" (Kluwin, Morris, & Clifford, 2004).

 Due to the lack of resources available to most itinerants, good organizational skills are a necessity in this position. One itinerant offered her viewpoint about how to manage all of the materials if they must be carried from school to school. "Successful itinerants are highly organized in terms of materials and activities, using bags and folders for each student, group, or school" (Reed, 2003).

Isolation A different topic of concern that many itinerants felt was important to mention was about experiencing isolation in their position. Many of them described that they suffered feeling "disconnected from any school or group of faculty members because of the many schools visited" (Yarger & Luckner, 1999). A lot of itinerants described a sense of feeling completely on their own, without a home base or home school for support. Unless an itinerant is very outgoing and sociable, one mentioned that it can "take a long time to be a part of a school when you're not there every day" and many of these traveling teachers believe "if you are only there once a week or even once a month, it takes a really long time for everyone to know what you do and for you to know what everyone else does" (Yarger and Luckner, 1999).

 The majority of respondents recommended being aware of the isolation factor in this position and maintaining human contact to avoid isolation at all costs. The researchers found that well-adjusted itinerants were those who had frequent contact with the people in the buildings they visited, regardless of the individual's status. An itinerant who engaged in social contact with the staff at the schools at which they worked kept "the wheels turning for the students they served" (Yarger Luckner 99).

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