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Public Library Services to Deaf Families and Deaf Children

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Deaf and hard of hearing individuals comprise a significant population in Oregon; 100,616 Oregonians report hearing impairment of some kind (U.S. Census Bureau). Last year I had the opportunity to take two semesters of American Sign Language (ASL), and as part of the course I was encouraged to research how I could apply my knowledge to my career. For that reason, I researched library services to deaf children. Deaf children come from varying cultures. Ninety percent of deaf children are born into a hearing family, while others are raised in a Deaf family (Noland, 2003). Lower case "deaf" refers to people with severe hearing loss while upper case "Deaf" denotes the cultural group that shares a language, experiences, and means of interaction. While Deaf children with parents fluent in ASL tend to be more literate than deaf children in hearing families, strong language skills and reading practice seem to predict literacy regardless of a child's primary language (Morere, 2011). My review of the literature suggests that the way to serve deaf children is to create a plan that encompasses collection development, targeted library programming, and marketing. In this article I first examine some of the reasons that libraries need to pay particular attention to the Deaf population and then describe theory and resources for each aspect of library services. Along the way, I point out helpful Oregon-based resources.

The Need for Development

As always, the challenge in library programming is finding underserved populations in our community and connecting with their needs. On one hand, deafness can be an "invisible" characteristic of our patrons (Riley, 2009). Could this invisibility mean that we have overlooked needs? On the other hand, traditionally, Deaf people relied on the Deaf community for their information needs but more parents are now mainstreaming deaf children and may consider public libraries for programs and support (Noland, 2003; Playforth, 2004).

While this article addresses a plan for serving this population that focuses on collection development, programs, and marketing, two more components are also important: clear goals in the library's strategic plan, and commitment and support by library management (Riley, 2009; Playforth 2004; Rodriguez & Reed 2003; Noland, 2003).

Collection Development

Deaf children may be particularly interested in American Sign Language (ASL) and Deaf culture materials. MacMillan (2006) describes seven standard criteria for the evaluation of sign language materials: date, format, language, variety of target ages, cultural information, credentials of authors and producers, and visual quality (p. 45–46). In general these aspects are evaluated for sign language materials as for any other materials, with the exception of date, language, and cultural information.

The criteria "date" applies most directly to materials about the science of hearing, which require frequent revision. In 2003, McKenna wrote that materials dating before the mid-1990s should be considered out of date and removed from the collection. Update this rule of thumb to 2014, and libraries should review the currency of their collection about the science of deafness and replace materials where appropriate. Books withdrawn for this reason may also qualify for replacement because of the criteria of language. Older materials are more likely to erroneously present Signed Exact English (SEE) or Contact Sign as ASL (MacMillan, 2006). Such factual errors are not the only problems materials may have; many works of fiction don't celebrate Deaf culture as fully as they should.

Special care should be taken with regards to the content of children's books about deaf characters. Golos and Moses (2011) studied the representation of deaf characters in children's picture books. For deaf and hearing children, the representation of deaf characters can either provide a positive example or perpetuate harmful stereotypes. The two primary models of deafness are the pathological model of deafness and the cultural perspective of deafness (Golos & Moses, 2011, 271). The first presents deafness as medical condition to be fixed, while the second celebrates the culture that the Deaf community shares. In the picture books of the study, Golos & Moses (2011) identified the pathological model most frequently. Fortunately, resources exist to help libraries make the best purchases possible. Lists of publishers, titles, and books with Deaf characters are available through the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA) Library Service to People Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing Forum. (Please note that the ASCLA is, at the time of this writing, updating its Guidelines for Library & Information Services for the American Deaf Community.) While children's books that emphasize the pathological model yield limited insight into Deaf culture, print is also limited because ASL is a three dimensional, animated, and expressive language.

A strong library collection includes video materials to address the visual component of ASL and Deaf culture. In Cleveland, Abigail Noland (2003) of the Coventry Heights branch primarily relied on video to serve the Deaf community because Deaf culture is visual. The nonprofit ASL Access was established to help libraries with similar goals to Noland's to purchase a collection of ASL videos (MacMillan, 2003). While ASL Access discontinued

Collection Development Recommendations

- ASCLA LSPDHHF Collection Recommendations
  www.ala.org/ascla/asclaourassoc/asclasections/lssps/lspdhhf/lspdhhf

- ASL Access
  www.aslaccess.org

VHS sales with the rise of DVDs, the website remains a repository of reviews on materials that now may be available in other formats. Of particular interest to collection development librarians is the fact that ASL Access reviews materials that do not generally appear in review journals (MacMillan, 2006). The ASCLA has a list of vendors, including ADCO Hearing Products, Inc., that supply DVDs.

Children's Programming

Library programs for deaf children should reflect the wide variety of existing children's programs: storytelling, crafts, guest performers, and more.

Kathy MacMillan's book T*ry Your Hand At This: Easy Ways to Incorporate Sign Language into Your Programs* is a treasure trove of books and games that incorporate ASL into programs. She identified three categories of children's programs that serve this population: programs that teach introductory sign language and Deaf culture; programs created with creative input from the Deaf community; and regular programs that include an interpreter to make them accessible.

Programs that teach introductory sign language and Deaf culture are of more interest to mixed families, with either children of deaf adults (CODAs) or hearing parents and deaf children (MacMillan, 2006). As many deaf children have hearing parents, these are a valuable service that libraries can provide to help connect children to Deaf culture. In addition, MacMillan (2006) argued that this basic incorporation may "open a door" to a more welcoming environment and further relationship with the Deaf community (p. 6–7). Guest speakers can provide workshops or story times.

In Oregon, a couple of authors and educators who provide basic sign language and Deaf culture programming are Dawn Prochovnic and Shirley Sieczkowski. Dawn Prochovnic is the author of the series Story Time with Signs & Rhymes, which introduces ASL vocabulary along with a story in English. Prochovnic has presented story times at schools and libraries in Oregon and Southwest Washington. Another option is to bring in a sign language instructor. Shirley Sieczkowski taught a two-day teen program on ASL and Deaf culture at the Springfield Public Library in both 2012 and 2013 (C. Schindele-Cupples, personal communication, December 18, 2013). Online resources can complement ASL programs. The Corvallis-Benton County Public Library maintains a LibGuide on resources for learning ASL ("ASL," 2013). This type of resource can help point interested patrons to more free, online resources for learning the language.

Photo Courtesy of Dawn Babb Prochovnic, www.dawnprochovnic.com

Vancouver Community Library, November 2013

Garden Home Community Library, January 2012

Introductory ASL and deaf culture events, like those offered by Prochovnic and Sieczkowski, might just stimulate more robust programming. Some libraries have chosen to develop in-depth sign language classes based on community response. At the Coventry Village branch of the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library (CHUHPL), staff have begun offering total communication classes to help families with both Deaf and hearing members connect (Noland, 2003). This type of targeted program falls into MacMillan's (2006) second category, programs created with creative input from the Deaf community. Libraries should ask the Deaf community what types of programs they want or if the library could facilitate an

Programming Resources

General Resources

- *Try Your Hand At This* by Kathy MacMillan
- Friends of Libraries for Deaf Action
   www.folda.net

Oregon Resources

- **Dawn Prochovnic** (Portland) writes a series of children's books that introduces ASL vocabulary. Find story time ideas, event resources, and author visit information online.
   www.dawnprochovnic.com
   www.abdopub.com/shop/pc/viewcontent.asp?idpage=73
- **Shirley Sieczkowski** is an ASL educator from Lane county who offers classes and workshops.
   www.speakinghands.com/shirley.php

event led by someone from the community (MacMillan, 2006). The topics that result are interesting to both Deaf families and hearing families (MacMillan, 2006). One starting point is the Friends of Libraries for Deaf Action (FOLDA), which includes resources for National Deaf History Month among other programming suggestions ("Communication," 2007).

The third family of programs provides the least benefit to deaf children; they are standard programs with an interpreter present (MacMillan, 2006). The different ways that narrators and interpreters interact create a variety of possible outcomes for hearing children and for deaf children (Poveda et al., 2008). In general, when stories are told in both English and sign language, there are more elements that create meaning for both deaf and hearing children because they find meaning from the interpreter, the storyteller, and the interaction between the two (Poveda et al., 2008). Poveda et al. (2008) concluded that there are more positive outcomes for hearing children than deaf children because hearing children receive the whole story from the narrator and can then enrich their experience by attending to the interpreter. In contrast, deaf children often lose cues or elements of the story through interpretation. Poveda et al. (2008) suggested that interpreters could be considered literary mediators, and with this departure from traditional definition of interpreting, could develop their own styles or even collaborate with the traditional storytellers to create a joint experience. Another suggestion to rebalance the storytelling scene is to have the principal storytelling in sign language, with interpretation to the oral language. Both suggestions are a win-win! Poveda et al. (2008) found that the literary experience improves as more layers of meaning are added, and it can be an exciting, novel opportunity for participants.

Overall, there are a variety of approaches to developing programs for deaf children. The best programs take input from the Deaf community and create excellent, rather than satisfactory, experiences for both hearing and deaf children.

Marketing

Personally contacting the Deaf community is invaluable. Playforth's (2004) ideal library advertises through print and video, and also has personal contact with the Deaf community. Noland (2003) defined that personal contact further, suggesting that librarians should act as liaisons to the Deaf community through information centers like bulletin boards or websites. The Oregon School for the Deaf (www.osd.k12.or.us), Oregon Association of the Deaf (www.facebook.com/deaforegon), and Deaf Services of Southern Oregon (www.dsso.org) are just three possible avenues for marketing. If advertising a program directly to the Deaf community, libraries should anticipate the need for an ASL interpreter and then write or say that one will be provided (Rodriguez & Reed, 2003; MacMillan, 2006). In addition, libraries should still include the library's contact information for other types of ADA accommodation (MacMillan, 2006).

Conclusions

To better serve deaf children, libraries can improve their collections by paying attention to cultural representation, can develop great programs through collaboration with Deaf community, and can effectively market their services through a personal and proactive approach. With these suggestions, hopefully we will each be able to make a compelling case for providing more expansive and thoughtful services to deaf children.

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