

# Chapter 12

## Itinerant Teaching

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### What is itinerant teaching?

**I**tinerant teachers are specially trained professionals who provide direct instruction to students with a hearing loss, consult and collaborate with professionals and families, and generally travel from school to school (Antia & Rivera, 2016). Where, how, and how often itinerant teachers travel varies—often depending on how many students they have on their caseload, how many different schools the students attend, and the distance between the schools.

In some school districts, itinerant teachers travel to three or four schools in one day—all in the same city. In rural areas, itinerant teachers may travel to three schools to work with three different students in a day. In remote areas, such as Alaska, itinerant teachers may fly to an island and stay there for a few days, fly back to the mainland, and then work with the student weekly using synchronous technology (e.g., Skype, Zoom) for the remainder of the month.

**Itinerant teachers are specially trained professionals who provide direct instruction to students with a hearing loss . . .**



Photo courtesy of Sound Beginnings/Utah State University

### Why do we have itinerant teachers?

A variety of factors, which are discussed in greater detail in other chapters in this eBook, have significantly changed where students who are deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH) receive educational services, what the specific focus of

those services are, and who provides the services, such as:

Universal newborn hearing screening (UNHS).

Early intervention.

Cochlear implants.

Improvement in the quantity and quality of hearing assistive technology that can be used to provide meaningful auditory input.

Legislative mandates.

Since the early 1970s, the enrollment of students who are D/HH in schools for the deaf has been decreasing (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2006). Currently, approximately 88% of all students who are D/HH attend general

education classes with typical hearing peers for some portion of their school day (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). As noted above, the students are supported by itinerant teachers who provide educational services to students and consultation services to the general education teachers, administrators, school staff, the students' parents, and sometimes members of the community.

## What do itinerant teachers do?

We live in a sound-oriented society. Extensive amounts of information are exchanged via speech. Most of our interactions in the community (e.g., consumer, healthcare, work, nutrition, recreation, and socializing) occur through talking and listening. News and entertainment are transmitted on televisions, radios, smartphones, and sometimes computers through sound. Most conversations with families, friends, acquaintances, and strangers occur through spoken language.

Speech is the preferred mode of communication for most people, because the majority of individuals are hearing and have grown up in households where family members discuss the events of the day, work through problems, and talk about upcoming activities using spoken language. It is through daily routines and interactions with skilled speakers that the majority of children acquire and refine their communication skills, learn concepts, and develop social skills (White & Voss, 2015). In contrast, many individuals who are D/HH often are cut off from such direct and incidental language development experiences. This not only affects their ability to develop communication and language skills, but it also negatively affects their experiential background as well as their knowledge of the world.

A hearing loss is considered a low-incidence disability. It affects approximately 1.5 in 1,000 school-age children. As a result, most families, educators, and members of the community don't have either direct or vicarious experience with what life is like when you are D/HH. Specifically, they don't know what it is like to hear speech that is unintelligible, distorted, too soft, or not heard at all. In addition, most people acquired their language skills effortlessly and naturally at an early

age through interacting with others. Students who use hearing aids or cochlear implants do not "overhear" language in the same way as their typical hearing peers and as a result often miss out on incidental learning. While amplification is helpful, it typically works within limited distances. Also, amplification makes everything louder—not just the student's conversation partners but also the background noise, such as clanking chairs, heating and cooling units, and hall traffic. This often makes discrimination between what a student wants to hear and does not want to hear particularly difficult.

As a result, students who are D/HH usually receive less language input, affecting their acquisition of receptive and expressive language skills, which in turn negatively affects the development of other key areas, such as reading, writing, behavior, emotional regulation, and career awareness.

Working directly with students to address areas of need caused by a hearing loss and helping adults who have limited knowledge and skills in teaching and interacting with students who are D/HH are the primary responsibilities

of itinerant teachers. More specifically, they provide direct instruction by addressing individualized education program (IEP) objectives in academic areas, such as reading, writing, and math, as well as nonacademic areas, such as self-advocacy, study skills, assistive technology, auditory skills, social skills, and learning strategies.

In addition, itinerant teachers often provide academic support to help students succeed in the general education classroom. Examples include preteaching and reteaching vocabulary and concepts and reviewing for upcoming tests. Itinerant teachers also collaborate and consult with general education professionals, families, and sometimes community agencies. They usually focus their collaboration and consultation on:

- Helping others understand the potential impact of a hearing loss.
- Appropriate accommodations and/or modifications.
- Gathering and sharing data about students' performance.
- Improvement in the quantity and quality of hearing assistive technology that can be used to provide meaningful auditory input.
- Shared problem solving and decision making.

**Itinerant teachers often have the opportunity to work with students and their families over the course of several years. Being able to support as well as observe students' development for several years can be very fulfilling.**

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Another pleasing aspect of itinerant teaching often mentioned is the independence the teachers have. Not being tied to a classroom or one school, they get breaks as they transition to the next school and student. If a lesson or consultation did not go well, they have time to reflect on what they could have done differently, collect themselves, and start fresh in the new building. In contrast, if the lesson or consultation was successful, they can congratulate themselves and optimistically prepare for the next situation. In addition, they don't have many of the additional responsibilities

## What are the joys of itinerant teaching?

Itinerant teaching is significantly different from being a classroom teacher or an early interventionist working in the home. Similar to all jobs, there are aspects of the position that are rewarding as well as demanding. One of the most enjoyable facets of the work mentioned by itinerant teachers includes being able to focus on one student or a couple of students at a time rather than an entire class. Similarly, itinerant teachers often have the opportunity to work with students and their families over the course of several years. Being

that many classroom teachers have, such as taking attendance, bus and playground duty, and fundraising.

Additionally, the caseload of students that itinerant teachers serve is often very diverse and stimulating (Yarger & Luckner, 1999). Itinerant teachers frequently have caseloads composed of students who differ across a variety of factors, including age, functioning ability, primary mode of communication, interests, IEP goals and objectives, family involvement, and school climate.

Given the caseload diversity, itinerant teachers are usually cognitively stimulated. They are required consistently to increase their knowledge and skills in a variety of areas, including academic content, appropriate resources, adaptation of classroom materials, hearing assistive technology, additional disabilities, cultural diversity, and how to work collaboratively with a variety of individuals with distinct personalities, which includes participating in IEP and transition planning meetings where they are expected to work in partnership to problem-solve as well as advocate for the needs of the students they serve.

As noted above, an important component of itinerant teaching is collaborating and consulting with the adults—education professionals, parents, and community members—who interact with students who are D/HH. The relationships itinerant teachers develop with these adults are often almost as enjoyable as the relationships they have with the students they serve. They have consistent opportunities to observe and interact with skilled professionals and caring family members who all work together to create environments where students with a hearing loss can succeed.

## What are the challenges of itinerant teaching?

Like all jobs, itinerant teaching has some accompanying challenges. The most frequently identified struggles all relate to time constraints. Specific areas of difficulty include (Luckner & Ayantoye, 2013):

Not having enough time to work with students or collaborate with educators or families.

The complications of working around student and general education teacher schedules.

The time it takes to get from one school to the next.

The lack of planning time built into their schedule.



Photo courtesy of Sound Beginnings/Utah State University

Another complication relates to the requirement of having to travel from school to school, not having a home base, and being a guest in each school. Each school has a different climate, different rules and procedures, and a different administrative structure. Consequently, there is a need to be perceptive of those differences, considerate of what is expected, and able to adjust one's attitude accordingly, while simultaneously being professional and personable. Aligned with this challenge is the style differences of the general education teachers that itinerant teachers work with. Some are open to suggestions and are highly motivated to do whatever is needed to help students who are D/HH succeed. Others feel as though they already have their hands full and would rather the student with a hearing loss not be in their classroom. And of course, there are some who function at a point between those two extremes.

Working with families can also be difficult at times. While families who have a child with a hearing loss experience many of the same successes and challenges as other families, the hearing loss tends to change family dynamics and the home environment (Meadow-Orlans, Mertens, & Sass-Lehrer, 2003). Three issues that frequently surface that itinerant teachers deal with include the following.

#### First Issue

Ninety-five percent of children with a hearing loss are born to hearing parents (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004). They don't know what to expect, what to do, and how to deal with the uncertain feelings they have regarding having a child who is D/HH.

#### Second Issue

The parents have to acquire an understanding of the potential impact of a hearing loss on development, learn about and decide on communication options, as well as find appropriate services and support—often trying to sort through opposing views and bias resources.

#### Third Issue

Some parents become over-reliant on itinerant teachers, especially if the itinerant teacher has worked with the student for a few years. When problems at school arise or at times of crisis or transition, the parents feel more comfortable contacting itinerant teachers about issues, even when the itinerant teachers have no authority to deal with the issue.

### How can I effectively consult & collaborate?

In order to effectively consult and collaborate, itinerant teachers have to have a positive attitude about working with adults and helping them to effectively interact and teach children and youth who are D/HH. This is a bit trickier than it initially seems, because most individuals went into education to work with students not adults. However, effective itinerant teachers are aware of the total time that students spend in general education classrooms and at home in comparison to how much time teachers have to provide direct instruction. That is why it is important to have a good attitude about consulting and collaborating and to work diligently to develop the knowledge and skills to be successful.

Effective consultants and collaborators know that they are in the relationship business. When they initially work with educators, parents, or members of the community, they focus on developing rapport by finding out what they have in common, being empathetic, trying to see things from their perspective, and using good communication skills (e.g., active listening, asking open-ended questions, appropriately responding nonverbally and verbally). The objective is to be perceived as an ally, a resource, not someone who is going to judge them or make their life more difficult. Once rapport has begun to develop, then the focus turns to helping others increase their understanding of the potential impact of a hearing loss and the actions they can undertake to assist students who are D/HH to access the social and learning opportunities that exist in school, home, and the community.

Another important skill is shared problem solving. It is best to engage in a dialogue to make sure the issue and context in which the problem has occurred is understood rather than jumping in with advice. A five-step problem-solving process (Friend & Cook, 2017) is a framework that many itinerant teachers use—although it is not always necessary to adhere rigidly to the steps.

**While families who have a child with a hearing loss experience many of the same successes and challenges as other families, the hearing loss tends to change family dynamics and the home environment.**

The sequence includes:

1	Define the problem.
2	Gather facts and data.
3	Generate possible solutions.
4	Analyze and judge each proposed solution.
5	Select the solution to the problem, assign responsibility for carrying out the solution, and set up a timeline for evaluating the results.

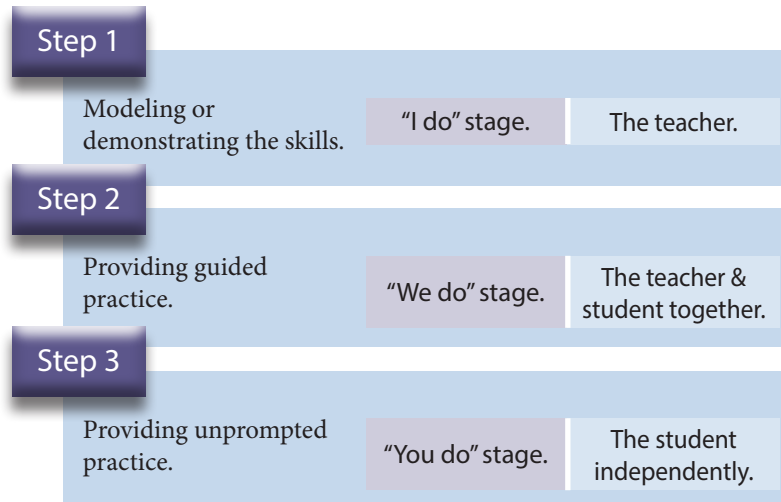
Finally, given the nomadic requirement of the itinerant position, it is important to establish a communication system that allows professionals to exchange information about students on a regular basis. Because everyone in schools is busy, and often schedules do not match-up, it is vital to have a quick way to gather information about how students are functioning, as well as to find out what concepts, vocabulary, and/or strategies may benefit from additional attention. Checklists and short-answer forms can be used to supplement the communication process. Email, voicemail, and video conferencing are additional tools that can be used on a regular basis to monitor students' progress and maintain rapport.

## How can I effectively provide instruction to students?

As noted above, itinerant teachers often provide instruction to students who are D/HH focusing on academic and nonacademic IEP objectives. They also use their time to address some of the gaps students have in their background knowledge, vocabulary, and concept knowledge that they miss out on as a result of not being able to overhear conversations or access the dialogue included in mass media.

Whether teaching academic or nonacademic content, effective itinerant teachers try to adhere to the principles of explicit instruction (e.g., Archer & Hughes, 2011; Goetze, 2009). Explicit instruction addresses three processes to show students what they are expected to learn, give them opportunities to practice the skill under conditions that promote high levels of success, and provide opportunities to demonstrate that they can perform the skill independently at a high level of success.

The three steps of the process are:



A more in-depth sequence is shown in *Table 1*.

## Table 1 Process Sequence of Explicit Instruction

<b>Review (when applicable)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review homework and relevant previous learning.</li> <li>Review prerequisite skills and knowledge.</li> </ul>
<b>Presentation ("I do" phase of lesson)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State lesson goals.</li> <li>Present new material in small steps.</li> <li>Model procedures.</li> <li>Provide examples and non-examples.</li> <li>Use clear language</li> </ul>
<b>Guided Practice ("We do" phase of lesson)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Require high frequency of responses.</li> <li>Ensure high rates of success.</li> <li>Provide timely feedback, clues, and prompts.</li> <li>Have students continue practice until they are fluent.</li> <li>Reteach when necessary.</li> </ul>
<b>Independent Practice ("You do" phase of lesson)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor initial practice attempts.</li> <li>Have students continue practice until skills are automatic.</li> </ul>
<b>Provide Occasional Reviews</b>	

## What strategies do successful itinerant teacher use?

Strategies are plans of action. To be successful, itinerant teachers need to have the right attitude; good interpersonal communication skills; and as noted above knowledge and skills in providing direct instruction to students, as well as in consulting and collaborating. Additional characteristics and strategies that are important to highlight are flexibility, organization, time management, and managing stress proactively.

Flexibility refers to being able to positively respond to change. Change is something that happens to itinerant teachers all the time. Examples of situations that occur that require flexibility at the functional as well as emotional levels are:

- A student is absent.
- A field trip is scheduled.
- The standard travel route to the school is under construction.
- An assembly is planned.
- The principal wants to talk about a student.
- The classroom listening system is not working.
- The room you work in is being used.
- A student is upset about what is happening at home.
- A cochlear implant has been flushed down the toilet.

Accepting change as a constant, not allowing oneself to get irritated, and seeking to be a collaborative problem solver are essential behaviors.

In order to be organized, individuals must have well thought-out systems, as well as the motivation and ability to implement the systems. In addition to planning lessons for each student on their caseload, itinerant teachers need be able to access materials, such as equipment, books, supplies, toys, magazines, teaching tools, assessments, and other items for students, and files, such as students' IEPs and schedules. In addition, they need to plan and participate in meetings with general education teachers, parents, and other service providers. They need to have reliable transportation and be knowledgeable of primary and secondary routes for getting from school to school. They are required to keep detailed intervention notes related to students'

progress, as well as document how they use their time. Also they are expected to maintain an updated list of resources, such as agencies, service clubs, volunteers, and organizations in the community, that can be shared with families and other educators.

Given the need to be organized, it is essential that itinerant teachers are able to manage time effectively. However, as noted above, not having enough time is the number one complaint of itinerant teachers. Coordinating schedules—theirs, students', and professionals'—as well as orchestrating travel from working with one student in one school to another student in another school requires that itinerant teachers use their time effectively and productively. Creating workable schedules, using travel time well, and skillfully using technology to communicate with others in addition to taking care of paperwork are strategic.

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Stress is an active ingredient in 21st-century life. Many of the characteristics of itinerant teaching have the potential to increase the amount of distress that one experiences on a daily basis, as well as cumulatively over time. Consequently, to be effective, itinerant teachers need to be proactive and make on-the-job and personal life adjustments. One activity that has both professional and personal benefit is planning social interactions with other itinerant teachers and friends. Another practical action is to make self-care a priority. Examples include, exercise, eating well, sleeping well, and getting help from family, friends, or a professional counselor when feeling out of balance.

## What resources should I be aware of?

Following are some valuable text and Internet resources:

- Bullard, C., & Luckner, J. L. (2013). *The itinerant teacher handbook (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. Hillsboro, OR: Butte Publications, Inc.
- Central Institute for the Deaf, <https://cid.edu/professionals>
- Clarke Schools for Hearing and Speech, <http://www.clarkeschools.org/for-professionals>

- Dorn, B. (2019). The changing role of teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing: Consultation as an increasing part of the job. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 29(2), 237-254, DOI: 10.1080/10474412.2018.1502087
- Friend, M., & Cook, L. S. (2017). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Gallaudet University Regional Centers, <http://www.gallaudet.edu/outreach-programs/regional-centers.html>
- Hands & Voices, <http://www.handsandvoices.org>
- Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, <http://www.gallaudet.edu/clerc-center.html>
- Luckner, J. L., Slike, S., & Johnson, H. (2012). Helping students who are deaf or hard of hearing succeed. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 44(4), 58-67.
- National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes, <http://www.meadowscenter.org/projects/detail/national-deaf-center-on-postsecondary-outcomes>
- Supporting Success for Children with Hearing Loss, <https://successforkidswithhearingloss.com/teacher-tools-2/>
- The Iris Center, <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu>

## Summary

Itinerant teaching is significantly different from teaching in a self-contained classroom or resource room.

Itinerant teachers travel from school to school—their cars serving as their portable offices.

They provide direct service to students to help them succeed in the general education setting, at home, and in the community. Simultaneously, they collaborate and consult with families, education professionals, and community members to help them develop the attitude, knowledge, and skills that enable children and youth who are D/HH to have access to the social and learning opportunities that will enable them to become successful adults who participate in and contribute to society.

Given current trends, it is very likely that increasing numbers of individuals with a hearing loss will be provided with home intervention, education, and transition services by itinerant teachers. Having experiences while enrolled in a teacher preparation program, such as job shadowing an itinerant teacher or student teaching with a seasoned itinerant teacher, will help develop the knowledge and skills needed to become effective. Yet because the job varies from school to school, district to district, and student to student, being on the job is the optimum way to develop the skills and wisdom needed to be effective and make a difference in the lives of students, their families, and the educators who serve them.

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