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An Intervention Program for Promoting Deaf Pupils' Achievement in Mathematics

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Our past research identified two aspects of deaf children's functioning that places them at risk for underachievement in mathematics. The first is their reduced opportunities for incidental learning, and the second is their difficulty in making inferences involving time sequences. This article examines the effectiveness of an intervention program to promote deaf children's numeracy that was designed to deal with these two factors. The design involved a comparison of 23 deaf pupils participating in the project with a baseline group formed by 63 deaf pupils attending the same schools in the previous year. The project pupils were tested before and after the intervention on the NFER-Nelson Age Appropriate Mathematics Achievement Test. The intervention was delivered by the teachers during the time normally scheduled for mathematics lessons. The project pupils did not differ from the baseline group at pretest but performed significantly better at posttest. They also performed at posttest better than expected on the basis of their pretest scores, according to norms provided by the NFER-Nelson Age Appropriate Mathematics Test for assessing the progress of hearing pupils. We conclude that the program was effective in promoting deaf pupils' achievement in numeracy.

We describe in this article an intervention project designed to raise the achievement of deaf pupils in mathematics. It is well established that deaf pupils lag behind hearing pupils in mathematics. The National Council of Teachers of the Deaf (1937) in England carried out a study with a large sample of deaf pupils and reported that deaf pupils were on average 2.5 years behind in mathematics achievement tests. About a decade later, Wollman (1965) reported similar results in a survey that included a third of the pupils from 13 schools for the deaf in the United Kingdom. Wood, Wood, and Howarth (1983) found that no improvement in this situation could be documented two decades later: in their study deaf pupils were approximately 1.4 years behind in mathematics achievement when compared to their hearing counterparts. In the first section of this article, we argue that it is possible to raise the mathematics achievement of deaf pupils. In the second section, we describe the intervention program we carried out and the results of its assessment. In the last section, we discuss the implications for future research.

Is It Possible to Raise the Mathematics Achievement of Deaf Pupils?

We (Nunes & Moreno, 1998) have argued that hearing loss cannot be treated as a cause of difficulties in mathematics but as a risk factor. Several findings in the literature suggest that hearing loss is not a direct cause of difficulties in mathematics. First, not all deaf pupils are weaker in math than their hearing counterparts: approximately 15% of the profoundly deaf pupils perform at average or above average levels in standardized tests (Wood et al., 1983). If hearing loss were a direct cause of difficulties in mathematics, there should be no

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