BIS 3850 Internship Summary Report

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BIS Areas of emphasis: American Sign Language/Art/Child and Family Studies
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Woodstock is a town of 8,000 residents in 61 square miles in a rural area in the Northeastern corner of Connecticut.

There are two schools in the Woodstock Public School System, these include the elementary school (PreK-4) and the middle school (5-8). The high school, Woodstock Academy, is a private school to which the town pays tuition per student.

Once a farming community, Woodstock has become a bedroom community to larger cities and towns in the surrounding area which include Hartford, Providence R.I., Worcester and Boston, MA.

There are two full time speech pathologists employed by the school district. One deaf student within the school district commutes to the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut. No school personnel know sign language other than the alphabet and a few rudimentary signs.
The needs of the internship site

One 6 year old student in Jenna Barrows' kindergarten classroom is non verbal. He has normal hearing but is unable to speak.

He attended Pre-K for the prior two years and had Speech and Language and Special Education services for three years.

The student has a full-time 1:1 paraprofessional aid.

School staff have established a communication system for the student to use on an iPad. The student presses a photo representing a word or phrase which then activates a voice speaking the corresponding phrase. The student's teacher and paraprofessional report that this system is cumbersome, lacks spontaneity and is difficult for the student to use independently. School staff working with the student and special education personnel would like the student to learn functional sign language skills in order to communicate his needs and desires to his peers, teachers and family. As well as to be able to interact in a more socially conventional way with those in his home and school environment. For instance, they would like him to have the ability to ask for help, state if he feels hot, thirsty, or cold and say “Hello” and “Good-Bye” to others.
Initiation of the Internship

- A contact of mine had worked with the non-verbal student during his Pre-K years and also knew that I was an Educational Interpreter. She had consulted with me about his state of communication and whether learning sign language would be a viable option for a child with his type of handicaps. We discussed that sign language is a very viable option for individuals who cannot speak yet have the ability to hear.

- The communication process is made up of two equal parts, that with which we receive messages and with which we express messages. For most of us, this process is via receiving messages through our hearing and expressing messages through speaking. However, these methods can be successfully altered as is the case in using sign language when an individual uses their vision to receive messages and their hands and facial expression to send messages. The vital point is, in order for communication and language to be fully utilized for self expression and to be engaged in comprehensive learning process, an individual MUST be able to both receive and express communication messages. If they are not able to perform one of these two process, either receptive or expressive, their communication and development is significantly impacted. They are unable to fully interact with their family, peers or teachers. Social interactions will become more complicated and limited as an individual ages. Young elementary school age children engage in play based activities and language barriers are easily overlooked. However, as children age, relationships become more dependent on communication as they build friendship bonds by sharing information, ideas, humor, and create a shared history.

- I told my contact that I would be willing to volunteer with the student and his teacher and/or family to teach him sign language if his educational team and family determined that was a goal for him (or just wanted to give it a try.)
Initiation of the Internship

- In mid September my contact affirmed with the kindergarten teacher and the Special Ed. Personnel that they would like to pursue sign language tutoring for their student. She then gave me the contact information for Jenna Barrows the kindergarten teacher.

- I sent Jenna Barrows an email introducing myself and offering my services to volunteer with her student and/or her entire class teaching sign language. With the email I also included a copy of my resume so that she would be fully aware of my credentials and background.

- Ms. Barrows enthusiastically responded to my offer and we send up a meeting for September 18.
Structure and Goals of the Internship

- We decided that the needs of the student would best be served by teaching him sign language alongside of his peers. According to Ms. Barrows the classmates have been very supportive and helpful to him. They are also very receptive to learning sign language. (Ms. Barrows had been trying to teach herself some signs from the internet and pass these on to the class.) Structuring the lessons to include the entire class also had the added benefit of the student being able to remain in the classroom and participate in a structured activity. Because of other therapies services that he receives such as OT, PT and Speech as well as his other health and learning challenges, he is already pulled out of the classroom frequently and misses many of the classroom activities.

- With my current job position I am able to flex my hours so this allowed Ms. Barrows and I to choose the optimal day of the week and time for her and her students scheduling. We established that I would teach the entire class every Tuesday afternoon from 2:30 until school is dismissed at 3:15.
Structure and Goals of the Internship

- Ms. Barrows described her student as a child who has multiple challenges that are not fully understood by the educational team. He can make some “screeching” sounds, also seems to have learning delays and motor-movement difficulties. This means that he seems to not be able to imitate movements as easily or quickly as usual. He seems to require a significant amount of “planning time” in order to execute an action or to copy an action he sees someone else do. This motor coordination delay has recently been observed and assessed by the Sped Team. This particular learning disability would be an additional challenge in learning sign language. However, I have an extensive background in working with individuals with multiple handicaps so I did not find this daunting. In teaching whether it be academics or skills, we need to meet the child “where they are” and increase their abilities with support from there. In this case we may need to revisit the same place several times and that is okay, because that level of comprehension is “where the child is”.
I asked Ms. Barrows if there were any vocabulary goals in particular that she had either for the student or for his peers.

She would like him to have the ability to say “Hello”. She described that when she greets the students each morning, he tries to respond using the iPad but by the time he and his aid select the correct file, folder and phase, it feels like an unnatural response.

She would also like him to be able to respond to choices and let his desires and needs be known more concretely, i.e. “yes”, “no”, “I like that”, “I want that”, “I’m hungry”, “I’m hurt”, “I need help”, “I feel sick” etc...
The student’s family is intimidated by the idea of learning sign language. The student is being reared by his great-grandparents who are in their 70’s. His parents and grandparents are unable to care for him. This is apparently due to their own lifestyle challenges i.e. substance addictions and lack of self support.

The student’s personality is reported to be very sweet and charming. It appears to be the belief of school personnel that the family treats the student as if he is a much younger child, perhaps because of the lack of communication, perhaps because it is just easier to cope. For instance, although he is capable of knowing when to use the toilet, he arrived for the first day of school wearing diapers.
Internship implementation

- For each weekly sign language lesson, I created a lesson plan centered around a theme.

- This plan included vocabulary objectives, a PowerPoint presentation with each vocabulary word represented on a single slide. Each slide had a graphic of the vocabulary word which I found on various ASL dictionaries online. I chose graphics that were appealing to children whenever possible. (Some ASL dictionary’s graphics can be difficult to understand.) Also included were photos of realistic objects/concepts for the children to link to the vocabulary.

- I also wrote descriptions for the graphics to explain how to execute each sign.

- I created two sets of handouts from each lesson. One set was intended to remain in the classroom for reference and the other was intended to be given to the family for reference. Ms. Barrows posted each set of handouts on a wall of the classroom surrounding the “circle time area”. (By the end of the year, this wall was completely full of ASL vocabulary!)

- Each lesson plan also included an activity for the children such as games or songs.

- Each lesson plan included concrete sentences/phrases that incorporated the lesson’s target vocabulary.
Example of one slide in Powerpoint Presentation Lesson 1:

School (clap your hands twice)
Examples of weekly lesson plan themes:

- **Lesson 1** – Alphabet, fingerspelling names, greetings, home, school, simple verbs.
- **Lesson 4** – Feelings, how to ask and answer questions.
- **Lesson 5** – Food, simple verbs, days of the week.
- **Lesson 8** – Verbs, nouns: places and objects found at school, “Wh” questions.
- **Lesson 10** – Matching signs to the sight words the children have learned in the classroom, using these in sentences.
- **Lesson 13** – The pledge of Allegiance (performed by the class on Flag Day).
- **Lesson 15** – Seasons of the year, outside objects and activities.
Additional Internship projects

- In order to promote language consistency and integrate the student’s Ipad technology, the school staff and I created videos of myself signing words and phrases for the student to access. These videos also had English voicing included. An example of a phrase is “Do you want to play ball?”. These videos were then included in the student’s Ipad files for him to utilize for practicing, sharing with family and also for him to utilize when he wanted to “speak” the phrase to someone else. He could select a phrase to see or show someone the signed version and also to hear the spoken English simultaneously.

- Throughout the year, I also included lessons of review utilizing games or activities that I had created. For instance, I created game boards, flashcards of vocabulary words and simple phrases. The children were divided into smaller groups of 4-6 players and played a game in which they needed to sign to their peers what was on a card as well as guess what their fellow players were signing to them.
Conclusion of Internship -

I concluded my lessons at the end of the school year in June 2015. On the last day of my scheduled classroom visits, Ms. Barrows asked me not to plan a lesson but to visit the classroom for a “special gift” to be presented to me by the children. The children gave me rose plant and beautiful large card signed by all the children in the classroom.
Internship Paperwork – Application and Approval Form
Ms. Barrows, the teacher of the kindergarten classroom in which I interned, has now become the interim principle of Woodstock Elementary School.

She can be reached at WES by calling 860-928-0471 or via Email - barrowsj@woodstockschools.net.

She is willing to answer any questions that you may have about my internship.

Thank you for this opportunity, if there is anything else that I can supply about my internship experience, please let me know!