CONVERTING SKEPTICS INTO SUPPORTERS WITH LISTENING SIMULATIONS

HOW TO EDUCATE AND ADVOCATE FOR AN "INVISIBLE DISABILITY"

Hearing loss is one of those 'invisible disabilities.' It's easy for people to be natural skeptics around the accommodations that they need to make for those with hearing loss. Typically, it's not a malicious type of skepticism, rather it's just old-fashioned rational ignorance. If someone doesn't know a person with hearing loss, why would they take the time to understand the barriers found in noisy situations?

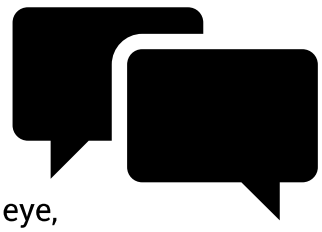
But when it comes to providing free and appropriate auditory access in the classroom, we work tirelessly to drive that understanding. It is our job to quickly convert the rationally unaware into the passionate ally.

Of course, we could start by educating the cynics around the SNR (single number rating) in a modern classroom. "The average classroom can be as loud as 65 – 76 db." You could follow up and say that the right hearing technology improves the SNR. But likely, we can't use terms like SNR and decibels (dB) to convert someone who knows nothing about audiology.

Perhaps our talk track should pivot and instead we say, "Classrooms can be as loud as a running vacuum. Your tired voice at the end of the day probably proves this point. This technology lets you speak normally and actually be heard." And with a gleam in your eye, you cheerfully say, "Goodbye vocal fatigue! Also, this technology can tell when the background noise in the class changes. DM (digitally modulated) mics automatically

increase or decrease the volume of the speaker's voice based on classroom noise. Think about the ways this may improve the student's educational achievement."

Now we're getting somewhere! Tailoring our narrative for mainstream teachers or administrators lays a better foundation for understanding. But we still have one other hurdle to cross: Letting them hear the difference their support makes in the daily life of a student with hearing loss.



In a new listening simulation by Phonak, you now have a way to advocate through listening simulations. These simulations show how classroom noise can affect a student's ability to hear the teacher, classroom peers, or multimedia lessons and testing.

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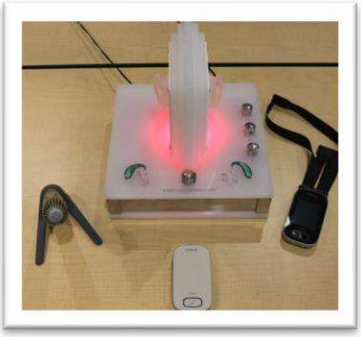
NEW LISTENING SIMULATION VIDEO AVAILABLE TO CREATE UNDERSTANDING OF HEARING LOSS SOLUTIONS



Watch the simulation here:
https://www.phonak.com/us/en/hearing-aids/hearing-aids-for-children/classroom-resources.html
In this 8-minute video, you see different scenes played out:

a) Phonak Sky M70-M hearing aids alone
b) Hearing aids + Roger Touchscreen mic
c) Hearing aids, Touchscreen mic + Pass-around mic
d) Hearing aids, Touchscreen mic + Multimedia hub

While the last two Roger transmitters are less commonly known tools, many people know about the Touchscreen Mic. This teacher microphone has multiple mic modes. In the listening simulation, you get to hear what a lesson sounds like with hearing aids alone and then the difference the teacher mic makes (worn in lanyard mode). This is an incredible moment of hearing is believing. While you could repeat the evidence that "Roger leads to significant improvements in speech recognition" until you're blue in the face, just having someone listen to this once can shift the entire conversation.

Are some of your older students in classrooms with frequent class discussions? These students will need to hear the teacher and their peers. Ask your students' teachers, "What role does classroom discussion play in your lessons?" If you find that they're relying heavily on discussion as an instructional strategy, then the next step would be for you to evaluate whether the Pass-around mic, found in the simulation, would improve your student's access to the lessons.

Lastly, we see a Multimedia Hub being integrated. This transmitter can connect to edtech devices, including smart boards and TVs for classroom lessons as well as computers and tablets for state testing or individual learning. To determine if your students need this, you may refer to Common Sense Media, which shares that in all core subjects educational apps, websites and multimedia are regularly relied on. Or you could ask your students' teachers, "What media sources do you use in group lessons or state testing?" This knowledge will help you tailor the solutions crafted to that student's needs and that teacher's style.

NEXT STEPS:

After you watch the simulation, grab a pen and paper and jot down the names of your students who are succeeding with their current set up. Then consider if there are some students who need a little extra bump to help them fully engage in their learning environments.

Perhaps sharing this video with the student or their parents would make sense. Or you may already know the skeptics in certain schools/districts you support that you want to share this with. Are there other questions about auditory access this video causes you to reflect on? Perhaps you can use this video to inspire conversations with your colleagues to uncover the unique needs of each student. Or maybe you have older students you want to share this with to help determine if they need additional support.

CONCLUSION:

Until someone needs to learn about hearing loss, it's common to not understand the significance of the learning barriers that come along with it. Hopefully the simulation in this article will help you support the students on your case load. Please share this with your student's parents so they too can create champions where there once were cynics.