Young Children’s Attitudes Toward Their Peers Who Wear Hearing Aids

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INTRODUCTION
Negative attitudes or perceptions of a disability can prevent the full social inclusion of a child with disability in the classroom, affecting their peer interactions and their psycho-social development (Nabors, 1996). Several decades ago, adult and older child observers (ages 10 to 18 years) revealed negative attitudes toward children wearing hearing aids, a phenomenon that has been coined the “hearing aid effect” (Blood, Blood & Danhauer, 1977). Pictures of children wearing hearing aids were rated more negatively than children not wearing hearing aids and the larger the size of the aid, the greater the negative perception (Blood et al., 1977; Dengenke & Porter, 1984; Haley & Hood, 1986).

It is reasonable to suspect that such attitudes about hearing aids and the children who wear them might have changed since those early studies. With the invasion of legislation requiring least restrictive environment, today’s school children have more exposure to children with hearing loss than those who were surveyed 30 years ago.

METHODS
Participants: Thirty-four typically developing children with normal hearing from the Nashville area were recruited for this study.
Group 1: Younger Children (1st graders) n = 14
Group 2: Older Children (3rd and 4th graders) n = 20

Materials:
20 Picture Plates: 20 Caucasian Boys (10 between 6 and 7 years and 10 between 9 and 11 years) were photographed. Half of the photos in each age group featured a child wearing a hearing aid.

Photo Dyads: One photo of a child with a hearing aid and one photo of a child without a hearing aid (Example: See Photo 1 and Photo 2).

Procedures:
Questions based on the Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children (Smith & Williams, 2001) in each area of Peer Acceptance and Cognitive and Physical Competence were used for each photo dyad. See examples of questions in Table 1.

2 Alternative Forced Choice Task (2AFC): Photo dyads were presented and participants were asked to choose which child was better at cognitive and physical tasks or more accepted by others?
Example: Which child is better at reading alone?

Individual Ratings (IR): Photos were viewed individually and participants were asked to rate the child in areas of cognitive competence and physical competence, and peer acceptance. As seen in Figure 2, when rating individual photos of children with and without hearing aids in areas of cognitive competence, physical competence and peer acceptance, there were no significant differences between how photos of children with and without hearing aids were rated. There were also no significant differences in how the two age groups rated individual photos.

Sociometric Popularity Rating Scale: All 20 photos were viewed. Participants were instructed to “Find a photograph of someone you especially like.” (3 times) and then to “Find a child you don’t like very much.” (3 times) These choices were recorded to create a composite score.

RESULTS

Photo Dyads:
As seen in Figure 1, when forced to choose between the two photos in the photo dyad, children of both age groups were more likely to choose the photo of a child without a hearing aid as having more physical competence and to have greater peer acceptance. Children chose the photo of a child without a hearing aid 66% of the time as having greater physical competence as compared to their peers with a hearing aid (34%). Children chose the photo of a child without a hearing aid as having greater peer acceptance 65% of the time as compared to their peers with a hearing aid (35%).

However, when forced to choose a photo of a child with or without a hearing aid as having greater cognitive competence, no preference was indicated. When assessed by age group, older children were more like to choose the child wearing a hearing aid as having more cognitive competence, whereas younger children were more likely to choose the child without the hearing aid.

Individual Rating:
Photos were viewed individually and participants were asked to rate the child in areas of cognitive competence and physical competence, and peer acceptance. As seen in Figure 2, when rating individual photos of children with and without hearing aids in areas of cognitive competence, physical competence and peer acceptance, there were no significant differences between how photos of children with and without hearing aids were rated. There were also no significant differences in how the two age groups rated individual photos.

Sociometric Popularity Rating Scale:
A sociometric popularity composite score was compiled for both photo groups. A positive score indicated that more photos were “liked” than “dis-liked.” A negative score indicated that more photos were “dis-liked” than “liked.” Participants in this study were more likely to “like” photos of children without a hearing aid and to “dis-like” photos of children with a hearing aid (see Figure 3).

SUMMARY
This study has demonstrated that when forced to make a choice between a peer with a hearing aid versus a peer without a hearing aid, children were more likely to choose a peer with a hearing aid as being poorer at physical tasks and as having less acceptance from their peers. In addition to findings, children who wore a hearing aid were considered to be not as well liked as their peers without a hearing aid.

In contrast with the findings from the forced choice ratings and popularity ratings, when children rated each photo individually, there were no differences in how children with and without a hearing aid were rated.

These findings suggest that when directly compared to their peers without hearing aids, children who wear hearing aids are more likely to be viewed as being less capable physically and may be less socially accepted by their peers.

KEY REFERENCES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Supported by the NIH National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) Short Term Research Traineeship (T35)