Negotiation of Deaf Culture: Alternative Realities in the Classroom

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Negotiation of Deaf Culture: Alternative Realities in the Classroom

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Keywords
Deaf culture, classroom accommodation, cultural identity

Abstract
In an increasingly globalized world, family members of deaf individuals increasingly are faced with a dilemma between identification with Deaf culture or pursuing biomedical intervention in order help deaf children hear sounds artificially. The importance of this dilemma is critical at the earliest age of deaf individuals' lives, not only in early childhood, but in their school career as well. This poster attempts to not only inform about this issue, but argues for the expansion of programs at the school district level to offer equal resources and information about both options for families with deaf individuals. In so doing, it utilizes Deaf cultural media, historical and anthropological perspectives, and new research to challenge how educators view deafness and Deaf individuals.

Comments
This paper was written for EDUC 340: Teaching Students with Diverse Needs, Fall 2014.
Negotiation of Deaf Culture: Alternative Realities in the Classroom
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The Issue

**Cochlear Implants: A Dilemma**

“To someone who has been deaf their entire lives the impact of this device is unimaginable. Just imagine not being able to hear all the sounds that we hear every day like the rustling of leaves and distant cars.” –Anonymous

**Defeat Cultural Pride**

“The deaf do not believe themselves to be disabled and do not perceive their existence as disabled persons do... The deaf welcome deaf acquaintances, family, friends, and value their differences from hearing society.” –Richardson (2014)

**ASL as a Cultural Phenomenon**

“If French is the language of lovers and German the language of commerce, then perhaps sign [ASL] is the language of humane connection. You can’t sign to someone if you’re standing next to that person... so that you can take in the entirety of the person.” –Walker (2006)

**Classroom Accommodations**

- **Culturally Deaf Methods**
  - Expansion of Deaf school system and Deaf cultural organizations
  - Personal Cultural Frameworks: negotiation of educator, deaf student, and cultural broker who can bridge deaf and national cultures 
  - A goal of these negotiations is to map out clashing values and cultural issues that a Deaf student encounters in a general education classroom and design accommodations for them. (Fletcher-Carter, 2010)
  - Provide information, resources, and support to parents of deaf students to help families make informed decisions about whether or not to implant their child with medical intervention or embrace Deaf culture.
  - Include opportunities for deaf students to express themselves with ASL in the classroom, including technological support.

- **Social Methods**
  - Increased learning for professional interpreters for Deaf students in general education schools
  - Mandate ASL classes in all general education classes, in order to foster a social bilingualism (See: “Stereotyping the Deaf”)
  - Cochlear Implants remain a valid method of accommodating total hearing loss for deaf individuals

**Implications**

- **Dilemma of Deaf Culture vs. Medical Intervention is omnipresent, including in public schooling environment**
- **Critical** that families with deaf students be provided with the ability to make informed decision about how to proceed with the development of their child’s communication skills

- **Both ASL based Deaf culture and cochlear implants need to be viewed as equally valid options for accommodating deaf students in the classroom.**
- **Deaf culture offers deaf students access to a community and self-worth that implants cannot provide through self-identification and networking with a larger community.**

**References**

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Why is Deafness a ‘Culture’?

- Common experience of being deaf and sharing a common language of American Sign Language (ASL) is considered by many to be a formal “ethnicity.” (Richardson, 2014)
- To be clear, only deaf individuals who communicate in ASL are considered to be culturally Deaf. It is that distinction that separates the proper noun from the adjective
- Hearing minority experiences an identity (of disability) onto Deaf community, much like a migrant minority might be labeled automatically by white majority
- Term “Audism” much like racism or sexism has been used by the Deaf community to describe discrimination and hearing people’s superiority complex

Deafness in Numerical Context

- 1 in 1,000 babies are born deaf in the United States (Walker, 2008)
- 95% of deaf children are born to hearing parents (Richardson, 2014)
- 40% of deaf and hard of hearing students are from diverse ethnic cultures (Fletcher-Carter, 2010)
- This means that such transcultural students bring two diverse cultures to the classroom: Deaf and an additional national culture.
- The last Federal Census that accounted for the Deaf community was in 1930. Current figures of 10 million in the United States are only estimates (Richardson, 2014)

Deaf Culture has at times been repressed by an Oralist school of thought since the inception of modern public schooling in the United States. For educators, a dilemma exists whether or not to support deaf students identification with Deaf culture and sign language or medical implants that allow for artificial hearing. In public schooling, deaf students are often advised to opt for medical implants that allow for artificial stimulation of hearing rather than learning American Sign Language (ASL). This way, they can be mainstreamed into the general education population.

Those who embrace deaf culture fear that this pattern threatens the integrity of the cultural Deaf Community. They argue that Deafness must be viewed in schools as a cultural minority worth protecting, rather than a disorder in need of a cure.

Carter, 2010)

- 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents (Richardson, 2014)
- 1 in 1,000 babies are born deaf in the United States (Walker, 2008)
- Growing corpus of shared literature, symbology, and media forms a cultural forum of expression

Deaf community faces discrimination from hearing community (Audism)

- Many organizations that advocate for the Deaf community are run by hearing people
- Deaf community relies on interpreters for interacting with hearing world not fluent in American Sign Language (ASL)
- English proficiency historically less than average hearing population

Hearing vs. Deaf Worlds

“...this paradox of the Deaf is rather contradictory because since we have established a notion that difference exists, by definition, those who are different are disqualified from passing comment on what is normal – they have not experienced it... However, at the same time it is possible to overcome the difficulty in function ‘deaf’ the difficulty.” –Pullen (1988)

- "Faculties or infrastructure for supporting American Sign Language (ASL) must compete with pressure from hearing World for moving towards cochlear implants (See above).
- Fundamentally different realities about the condition of deafness exist between the Hearing and Deaf cultural worlds on whether or not deafness is a disability, part of deaf education for as long as 180% is (See Historical Timeline)
- "Historical precedent: distribution of Martha’s Vineyard once had large deaf community during 1870’s. Deaf individuals were integrated into the local economy by use of ASL by general (transvestite). Fall out of use during rise of oral school of thought (Pullen, 1988)"