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Negotiation of Deaf Culture: Alternative Realities in the Classroom

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Negotiation of Deaf Culture: Alternative Realities in the Classroom

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.

Keywords
Deaf culture, classroom accommodation, cultural identity

Disciplines
Accessibility | Disability and Equity in Education | Educational Methods | Gifted Education | Special Education and Teaching

Comments
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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)

Cochlear Implants: A Dilemma

**“Deafness is not a Disability”**

- Cochlear implant is any device that circumvents damaged parts of the ear and stimulates the auditory nerve directly, thus making it possible for sound to be processed by the brain.
- *Is NOT a cure for deafness, not guarantee of English comprehension*
- *Increasingly preferred as substitute for American Sign Language* (ASL) for children born deaf.

Parent/ Educator/ Diagnoser: Inventing a cochlear implant at birth robs deaf individuals of the opportunity to choose to identify with deaf culture, which is experienced through ASL.

- *On the other hand, cochlear implants remove the need for ASL interpreters in deaf individuals daily routines, and allows deaf students to remain in general education classrooms.*
- *Increase in affordability makes implant a realistic possibility for more families with deaf individuals.*

Deaf cultural pride

- *Deafness must be viewed in schools as a culturally Deaf community.*
- They argue that Deafness must be viewed in schools as a cultural minority, rather than a classification of the deaf community first found in American historical record.

- **1817:** First Permanent Deaf School in United States; the development of a Deaf culture community first found in American historical record.
- **1843:** Yonkers Manual introduces Prussian school systems as part of reform. Includes advocating for a European ‘oral’ method for teaching deaf students.
- **1880:** Milan Conference, successful campaign of oralist Alexander Graham Bell marks dominance of oral instruction for remainder of century.
- **2001:** No Child Left Behind passed. Oral instruction gains popularity as high stakes testing becomes the norm and advancements in cochlear implants increased their practicality.

Why is Deafness a ‘Culture’?

- **Common experience of being deaf and sharing a common language of American Sign Language (ASL) considered to be culturally Deaf.** It is that distinction that separates the proper noun from the adjective.
- Hearing minority projects an identity (of disability) onto Deaf community, much like a migrant minority might be labelled automatically by white majority.
- **“Audism”** much like racism or sexism has been used by the Deaf community to describe discrimination and hearing people’s superiority complex.
- **Deaf culture** views itself as a cultural minority, rather than a classification of the deaf. Deaf culture refers to organization of deaf individuals into communities
- **Deaf cultural pride** relates a story in non-linear and theatric manner

Hearing vs. Deaf Worlds

- **This paradox of the Deaf** is rather contradictory because since we have established a notion that difference exists and defined, 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 despite the difficulty—*Pulman (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 around the condition of deafness exist between the Hearing and Deaf cultural worlds on whether or not deafness is a disability, part of debate in education for as long as 1800’s (See Historical Timeline).

ASL as a Cultural Phenomenon

- “French is the language of lovers and German the language of commerce, then perhaps sign [ASL] is the language of human connection. Can you sign to someone if you’re standing next to that person... so that you can take in the entirety of the person.” —Walker (2010)
- *American Sign Language (ASL) is the preferred language of the Deaf community*.
- Visual spatial signing language using both facial expressions and hand signing, rather than tying symbols in English phonics
- *Relates a story in non-linear and theatric manner*
- *ASL represents different understanding of world, in images rather than words*

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. The goal of these negotiations is to map out clashes 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 hearing for professional interpreters for Deaf students in general education schools
  - Adaptate 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 individual**

Implications

- **Deafness vs. Medical Intervention is omnipresent, including in public schooling environment**
- **Critical that families with deaf students be provided with the ability to make informed decisions 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

- Pullen, D. (1988). American Sign Language is a disability, part of debate in education for as long as 1800’s (See Historical Timeline).
- “Deafness is not a Disability”
- Pulman, E. (1988). "The deaf do not believe themselves to be disabled and do not perceive their existence as disabled persons do... The deaf welcome deaf agencies, family, friends, and value their differences from hearing society..." —Richardson (2014)
- “To someone who has been deaf his entire life 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
- American Sign Language (ASL) is the preferred language of the Deaf community.