Fall 2014

Negotiation of Deaf Culture: Alternative Realities in the Classroom

Drew A. Hoffman
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship

Part of the Accessibility Commons, Educational Methods Commons, Gifted Education Commons, and the Special Education and Teaching Commons

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.


This is the author's version of the work. This publication appears in Gettysburg College's institutional repository by permission of the copyright owner for personal use, not for redistribution. Cupola permanent link: https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship/281

This open access poster is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.
Negotiation of Deaf Culture: Alternative Realities in the Classroom

Abstract
In a 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
This paper was written for EDUC 340: Teaching Students with Diverse Needs, Fall 2014.

This poster is available at The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College: https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship/281
Negotiation of Deaf Culture: Alternative Realities in the Classroom

Drew Alan Hoffman
Department of Education, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA

The Issue

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 the public schooling, deaf students are often advised to opt for medical implants that allow for artificial 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.

Historical Timeline

• 1817: First permanent Deaf School in the United States; the development of a Deaf community first found in American historical record
• 1843: Milan Conference: successful campaign of oralist Alexander Graham Bell marks dominance of oral instruction for remainder of century
• 1970’s: Civil Rights Movement imparts revival of Deaf Culture, re-speaking debate for remainder of 20th Century. By 1890’s, Deaf Culture gains widespread acceptance
• 2001: No Child Left Behind passed. Oral instruction gains popularity as high states standardized testing becomes the norm and advances in cochlear implants increased its practicality

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 this 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 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
• Deaf community views itself as a cultural minority, rather than a classification of the disabled or associated with being handicapped

Deafness in Numerical Context

• In 1.00 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

• “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

• 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.
• “Deafness is not a Disability”

Deaf 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 apostates, family, friends, and value their differences from hearing society.” ~Richardson (2014)
• Deaf community views itself as a cultural minority, rather than a classification of the hearing world
• Deaf culture offers deaf students access to a community and self-worth that implants cannot provide.

Hearing vs. Deaf Worlds

• “This [paradigm 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 encompass the difficulty in function ‘deafness’ the difficulty.” ~Pullen (1988)
• Deaf community faces discrimination from hearing society (Audism)

• Discussion: Bilingual society in English and ASL for deaf and hearing students

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. 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 (2000)
• Deaf community is the preferred language of the Deaf community

References


