

Biocultural Deaf Aesthetics: A Critique for a New 21st Century Deaf Education Model

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Introduction

- ◆ This study critically explores the film by Dr. Rachelle Harris entitled, “Seizing Academic Power: Creating Deaf Counternarratives” (2015).

- ◆ Our analysis viewed this film as a teaching artifact using different theoretical lenses:
 - ◆ culturally relevant pedagogy
 - ◆ deaf gain theory
 - ◆ multimodal communication

Seizing Academic Power: Creating Deaf Counternarratives

- ◆ Approximately 20 minute film, about the need for individuals in the Deaf community to gain academic power in the hearing community.
- ◆ Dr. Rachelle Harris uses sign language, accompanied with subtitles, and graphic/design elements to present the information.
- ◆ The film is broken into 3 major sections: a preface, an introduction to narratives, and a list of tools to help Deaf individuals contribute to or actively resist a predominantly hearing, academic community

Film Clip

Time:
7:08-9:15



Skyer's Theoretical Lenses

Deaf Gain -- (Bauman & Murray, 2013; Bauman & Murray, 2014)

Deaf gain essentially inverts the ideology of "pathological/medicalized" deafness and asserts that new, eclectic, and interdisciplinary theories are needed to reimagine deaf education in wholly different terms in postmodern societies. They argue that deafness and deaf education are facets of "biocultural diversity" and that deaf pedagogy in the 21st century is rapidly evolving, demanding new research methodologies and new approaches for teaching and learning.

Bauman and Murray write, "the significance of academic discourse in ASL may be most prominent if the visual, spatial, and kinetic dimensions of the language are explored for their greatest rhetorical power" (2013, p. 249).

Skyer's Theoretical Lenses Pt. 2

Multimodality & Aesthetics -- (Cherryholmes, 1999; Kress, 2010; Ranciere, 2013)

To address the questions posed by Bauman and Murray, an array of theoretical orientations are assembled that demonstrate that teaching can be understood as an act of artistry and that learning is an aesthetic experience governed by multimodal ensembles reified in pedagogical practice.

Following his declaration that: "makers of representations are shapers of knowledge" (p. 27), Kress explains that postmodern communication requires multimodal ensembles, representative layers of affect, as well as the use of artistic or design principles, all of which factor into social interactions, particularly the interactions between the rhetor, the representation, and those participating in its co-construction.

Cochell's Theoretical Lens

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) , as purported by Gloria Ladson-Billings, is a theoretical framework focused on teachers' conception of self and others, social relations, and knowledge that support the notions that students are capable of academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness within the classroom.

◆ Conceptions of Self and Others

- ◆ Teachers must believe that all students are capable of academic success.
- ◆ Teachers have to be aware of their own positionalities and constantly reflect on them and how they affect their teaching practices and students.
- ◆ Teachers should see themselves as members of the community and also be able to give back to that community
- ◆ Teachers are responsible for using their students' knowledge and backgrounds and integrate it within their own pedagogical and teaching practices

Cochell's Theoretical Lens Pt. 2

◆ Conceptions of Knowledge

- ◆ Knowledge is not static, and should be shared, reused, and constructed based on the interactions among students and the teacher
- ◆ Teachers critically analyze curriculum based on how marginalized groups are represented within the constructs of what they are teaching. They help students with this process as well
- ◆ Teachers should have a passion for knowledge and learning due to the intensity of all the various factors that go into being a culturally relevant teachers

Findings: Deaf Gain and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Teaching as Culturally Relevant and Sustaining

Viewing Harris' work as a teaching artifact, Harris' way of teaching aligns with many of the tenets put forth by CRP.

- ◆ She uses her position, as a Deaf researcher in an academic community, dominated by a hearing majority, to provide other Deaf individuals with the skills they need to keep their culture intact while also learning how to achieve within the predominantly hearing academic community.
- ◆ Through the use of master narratives and counternarratives, Harris shows how she believes everyone is capable of achievement and success and that the views and ideologies of the dominant groups should be critically analyzed and even challenged.
- ◆ Harris' view of knowledge is depicted in her discussion of the importance of using authentic experiences of individuals within the Deaf community as a basis of knowledge. This illustrates her belief that knowledge is constructed and should be shared and reused within and beyond the Deaf community

Findings: Deaf Gain & Multimodality

Learning as Aesthetic, Teaching as Multimodal

Harris' film is a powerful example of how 21st century deaf people communicate, teach, and learn. Her work also indicates that teachers of deaf students can clarify their work through multimodal ensembles. Findings in this category suggest that new technological communication modalities have different aesthetic 'rules' that are still being formed and tested.

Power, Equipotentiality, and Ethics

Harris' work demonstrates that deaf students learn through horizontal participation with the taught material. By reframing deaf education in terms of equipotentiality, new dimensions of power and ethics pursuant to education are revealed. Harris' bold critique of historical trends in deaf education indicate that outdated educational discourses need radical reworking. We echo her call to "Teach, Disseminate, and Change!"

Harris explains this in ASL as “TEACH, DISSEMINATE, [and] CHANGE” [10:19-20], in English the transcript reads: “I am educating [outsiders] about how I want to be described. This resistance will multiply and help contribute to positive change” (Transcript, p. 3).

Figure 2.



Implications and Application

1. **Ontological Flaws** -- The 20th Century model of deaf pedagogy is based on an erroneous view of deaf people and how they learn and how teachers respond to their needs. Deaf education is in need of a critical disaggregation of old pathological standpoints. Radical democratic concepts such as equipotentiality can assist in this critical work.
2. **Deaf education and the new bioethics of the 21st Century** -- As with ontology, the epistemological foundations of deaf education need to be redrawn and reimagined for the 21st century. Digital communications, multimodal representation, and heterarchical distributions of power are evoked as tools to disaggregate and reimagine its future.

Conclusion:

Viewing Harris (2015) work on deaf educational phenomena reveals that a new century of deaf education demands new ethical, communicative, and pedagogical principles. Deaf Pedagogy should be reframed theoretically and materially to include new tools, concepts, and approaches to teaching and learning that update our work and position deaf students as legitimate participants in their education.

Progressive work from the 20th century, including the need for sign languages and visual pedagogies for deaf students remains relevant today; however, they exist alongside new demands including the need for a critical unpacking of the ethics of communication using multimodality and digital discourses as well as sign language and deaf spaces. Deaf education can and should be understood as a phenomena of aesthetics in which beauty, power, and truth are intertwined.

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